

Who Are They and Where Are They Going?

Examining the Emerging Norms of the International “Climate Refugee” in New Zealand

by

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Abstract

Climate change induced migration is the displacement of people due to the effects of anthropogenic climate change, and it is predicted that there will be between hundreds of thousands to millions affected worldwide. Yet, it is not yet known whom these people “are.” Are they “climate migrants,” “climate refugees,” or something else? Does it matter what we call them, legally and normatively? Using a constructivist approach, New Zealand’s recent experiences with two of the first climate change related immigration cases are examined. The findings indicate that legally, “climate refugees” do not exist in domestic or international law, and that a protection gap exists. Additionally, using discourse analysis, it was found that the “climate refugee” is an accepted frame by the New Zealand public, likely due to shared normative understandings grounded in human rights. The results point to the need for a standardized language and normative international framework in order to move forward with protection measures.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

“I’m nobody! Who are you?”

- Emily Dickinson

Climate change induced migration has begun. Despite the challenge of measuring how many migrants there will be due to the uncertainty and complexity of the “chaotic systems” of weather and climate, widely accepted figures from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) point to an astounding figure of 200-250 million migrants by the year 2050 (Scheffran et al., 2012: 810; UNHCR, 2012). Such estimates are seen by others to be “exaggerated” and “pessimistic,” but all of these estimates rest on varying definitions of who qualifies as a climate migrant or refugee, and what we as academics expect them to do. The UNHCR defines a refugee as someone who must cross a border in seeking refuge, and an internally displaced person (IDP) as someone who has not crossed a border but is still seeking protection within their home state. The climate migrant or refugee does not fit either of these definitions as stands, as what constitutes a “climate migrant” or “refugee” is highly contested. In simple terms, the logic follows that climate migrants or refugees are those whom, due to short or long term changes in the environment, may have leave their homes to relocate within their own state or move abroad (IOM, 2007). It is anticipated that the affected populations will move within their state if possible; however, if it is not possible, these populations will cross international borders seeking new homes. Are these people “migrants” or “refugees” and why does it matter what we call them?

New Zealand has recently received two of the first official climate change induced immigration claims by residents of Kiribati and Tuvalu, respectively. These and other citizens of low-lying Pacific states have been the well-documented victims of some of the most noticeable adverse effects of climate change to date (IPCC, 2014; Barnett and Adger, 2003). As these states are often only metres above sea level, rising tides and a warming sea-surface temperature associated with climate change are making these areas increasingly inhospitable for those who live there. Indeed, the current challenges these vulnerable states face are not easily adapted to, as the high tides contaminate the fresh water supply and destroy essential crops, and rising sea temperatures kill the coral reefs the atoll-states are built on (*AF (Kiribati) v. IPTNZ*, 2013: 8). To make matters worse, many of these low-lying Pacific states have been projected to be swallowed by rising sea levels before the end of the century, if not sooner (IPCC, 2014; Barnett and Adger, 2003: 322). The outlook is bleak, and it is therefore not at all surprising that citizens of states like Kiribati and Tuvalu are seeking to relocate before the situation deteriorates further; either through slow or sudden-onset events. As such, two immigration claims have come before New Zealand courts.

In 2013, Ioane Teitiota, a man from Kiribati, filed a refugee claim on the grounds that the adverse effects of climate change had driven him and his young family from their home on the Tarawa atoll, Kiribati (*AF (Kiribati)*, 2013: 7). Teitiota and his wife left Kiribati when they decided to have a family of their own, whom they wanted to protect from the increasingly volatile environment involving “both sudden onset environmental events (storms) and slow-onset processes (sea level rise)” (*AF (Kiribati)*, 2013: 7-10). Further, the family could not relocate to another Kiribati atoll and avoid the same

problems plaguing the Tarawa atoll, so they voluntarily migrated to New Zealand where Teitiota would work until his visa expired. To fight deportation, Teitiota claimed to be a climate change refugee, but was refused multiple times by New Zealand courts - first by the Immigration and Protection Tribunal of New Zealand, then by The High Court of New Zealand and most recently by The Court of Appeal. The courts called the case “misconceived,” but admitted that:

No one should read this judgement as downplaying the importance of climate change. It is a major and growing concern for the international community. The point this judgement makes is that climate change and its effect on countries like Kiribati is not appropriately addressed under the Refugee Convention (*Teitiota v. MBIE*, 2014).

After an appeal of the ruling failed on the grounds that they were not technically refugees, Teitiota and his family were to be deported from New Zealand (Blakkarly, 2014).

A similar case followed when a young Tuvaluan family of four requested residency, first as refugees, and then on humanitarian grounds. The family cited the adverse effects of climate change, the difficulty of finding employment, and the lack of land as reasons for not wanting to return to Tuvalu (*AC (Tuvalu)*, 2014: 10; *AD (Tuvalu)* 2014: 1). The family was also particularly concerned for their children’s well being. The New Zealand Immigration and Protection Tribunal first refused the claim that the family were refugees, as “whatever harm they faced in Tuvalu due to the anticipated adverse effects of climate change, it did not arise by reason of their race, religion, nationality, membership of any particular social group or political opinion” (*AC (Tuvalu)*, 2014: 16). Nevertheless, the family appealed the decision on humanitarian grounds, and were subsequently granted residency on June 4, 2014. The immigration lawyer representing the

family noted that they would be able to contribute meaningfully to New Zealand and that they have a strong existing connection to the state, as most of the husband's family currently resides there (Maas, 2014; McAdam, 2014a). The New Zealand Immigration and Protection Tribunal made a point of saying that the effects of climate change were not the reason for granting residency to the family, but the decision, coupled with the failed refugee claim before it, has sparked an outpour of concern from the New Zealand public, which demands policy is created to govern this new type of migration (Rive, 2014; *Radio New Zealand*, 2014; McAdam, 2014a).

Creating policy on climate change induced migration is not simple. As mentioned, those impacted by climate change seem to find themselves in a legal void with protection gaps. They have been repeatedly told they are not actual refugees as determined by the *United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*, or even migrants, as they may not be moving voluntarily (McAdam, 2014b: 17). At present, parties in New Zealand are attempting to find a solution to the issue, with the Green Party suggesting relocation happen now to avoid “en masse migration,” and the Labour Party planning to reach out to the United Nations (UN) in hope that it would change existing refugee criteria to include climate refugees (*Radio New Zealand*, 2014). Nevertheless, with the absence of clear domestic or international norms governing climate change induced migration, little can be done to develop and implement policy that assists or protects those affected.

My research question asks whether the language we use to speak of climate change induced migration “matters” in properly planning for this migration, ideally minimizing humanitarian crises and in encouraging the successful adaptation of both those affected

by climate change and those in host regions. In addition to examining the legal connotations of the language of this migration, my research will also investigate the normative implications of such terminology by exploring what norms are emerging. Furthermore, my research will speculate on which norms might be successfully adopted by the New Zealand public, and in the future, by other states experiencing similar climate change induced migration.

To answer these questions, it is vital to analyze the discourse in regions that are already experiencing climate change induced migration. While there are many regions in the Pacific that are being impacted negatively by climate change, such as Tuvalu, the Marshall Islands, Kiribati, and more, New Zealand is recognized as the first state to “officially” receive an immigration claim due to the adverse effects of climate change. As can be expected, this issue is receiving much attention from academics in New Zealand, as well as a slew of related media attention. Therefore, there are ample grounds for examining the discourse developing around this migration, how it is being talked about, and how norms are developing around it in New Zealand. Understanding (1) the language and (2) the norms of this issue in New Zealand is useful to study, as the repercussions of New Zealand’s initial experiences with climate migrants will help in developing governing policy or frameworks going forward, becoming precedent setting. Climate change induced migration is a critical global issue in need of an urgent response in how to speak of it, of knowing who will receive protection, and of learning how to deal with it domestically and internationally. This thesis puts forth that labels such as “refugee” or “migrant” are loaded concepts, both legally and normatively, and that in order to govern

climate change induced migration in an effective way, we must understand the meanings attached and to be sure that they reflect the present realities faced by climate migrants.

1.1 Rationale

The study of environmental politics is still relatively new to political science. The study of climate change has been embraced by the discipline, yet still remains on the periphery, perhaps due to the uncertainty of our own abilities to make a meaningful contribution to an issue largely dominated by the natural sciences. Nevertheless, there must be a place in the discipline for climate change related research programs, as doing so is a matter of vital importance. In “The Most Important Topic Political Scientists Are Not Studying,” Javeline (2014) makes clear the need for more work on climate change adaptation research. Javeline (2014) suggests, “many of the most pressing questions about adaptation are less about science and more about political, social, and economic behaviour and the institutions that facilitate or obstruct that behaviour” (2). These are the questions that political scientists are trained to answer.

One area of this research program that stands out as particularly underdeveloped is climate change and migration, what many refer to as an issue of national and international security as climate change does not respect state borders (Barnett, 2003; Becklumb, 2013; Biermann and Boas, 2010; Brauch, 2008; Elliott, 2004; Dalby, 2013; Reuveny, 2007; Scheffran et al., 2012; Warner, 2010). While often acknowledged as an increasingly significant area of research, climate change induced migration has been largely general in scope and lacking in comprehensive analysis. Yet, this migration is well underway (*Associated Press*, 2013). States will require assistance in the creation of

policy, and political scientists must contribute in understanding what is currently happening and what will occur as these related immigration claims increase.

While the entire field of study remains at best, limited, a comprehensive analysis of the language and norms of climate change induced migration is pivotal in clarifying who qualifies as a climate migrant or refugee, how many migrants there could be, and what policies should be in place in planning for these migrants.¹ For instance, many view this migration as a potential source of conflict (Brauch, 2008; Reuveny, 2007), while others focus on having specific rights for those affected, as they are often already vulnerable (Elliott, 2004). By closely analyzing the language and emerging norms, it is possible to understand the legal and normative significance of policy and how these factors will impact those affected, host regions, and International Relations (IR) in general.

The work of this thesis is essential in commencing the research on climate change induced migration. Understanding New Zealand's experiences with the first climate migrants will provide a basis for establishing key concepts associated with the migration, offering a foundation for interpreting what will happen in other regions affected by the adverse effects of climate change. Nevertheless, future research will be necessary to continue to monitor how such migration will develop, and how these migrants and host regions adapt to their new realities. It is expected that this thesis will encourage thorough and proactive policy development, which provides guidance on climate change induced migration and aids in closing the "protection gaps" that climate migrants now face (McAdam, 2014b).

¹ For the purposes of this thesis, I will refer to people who migrate due to climate change as "climate migrants." A comprehensive analysis of such terminology will follow.

Furthermore, this thesis aims to confirm the importance of the constructivist approach in IR theory, and how constructivism's focus on "culture, norms, institutions, procedures, rules, and social practices" is crucial in our understanding of states (Hopf, 1998: 173). To prove this, the case study will analyze the "identity" of New Zealand and explore what may be the state's interest in protecting climate migrants. Moreover, discourse on the issue of climate change induced migration will be studied, with an emphasis on emerging norms and language. This thesis will add to the constructivist literature that suggests more focus should be paid to the study of domestic norm development, like what is occurring in New Zealand (Checkel, 1999; Acharya, 2004; Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998). Constructivism has been criticized for lacking domestic theory, often disregarding the importance of domestic actors and domestic venues in the norm lifecycle. As such, the findings of this thesis confirm the importance of domestic actors and norms, reviving agency into the domestic sphere in attempting to explain the origins of international norms.

1.2 Literature Review

One major caveat of the climate change induced migration literature is that there is no consensus as to what a "climate migrant" is, with scholars usually preferring to leave the term undefined (Biermann and Boas, 2010: 63). Bettini and Andersson (2014) explain that the need for a clearer definition of what a climate migrant is will help in clarifying methodological issues, as there will be a clear indication as to who qualifies and who does not (170). So, what is a climate migrant or refugee?

A straightforward and simple definition refers to climate migrants as those, whom due to short or long term changes in the environment, may have to, or may choose to, leave their homes to relocate within their own state or move abroad (IOM, 2007). Elliott (2004), an advocate for climate migrants, explains that these people are often already vulnerable, and that “the consequences of environmental decline, such as increasingly limited access to food or potable water, will exacerbate the misery and despair which already exist in the poorer parts of the world” (208). Elliott continues by noting “environmental stresses have often been discounted as a cause of enforced movements of peoples” (209).

In one of the most extensive reviews of the contested term, Biermann and Boas (2010) first eliminate whom a climate migrant *is not* in order to create a definition as to who they are. They recommend three issues that must be addressed: one, what is the cause of migration (climate change?); two, what type of migration is it (forced or voluntary, temporary or permanent, or internal or external); and three, should migrants be classified as refugees? (Biermann and Boas, 2010: 63).

To begin, Biermann and Boas (2010) explore what causes a migrant to migrate, conceding that only “undisputed climate change impacts” such as sea-level rise, extreme weather events, drought and water scarcity should serve as sufficient reasons for migrating (64). They then tackle the challenging issue of determining whether it should matter if the migration is forced or voluntary. Biermann and Boas (2010) concede that almost all relocation could be argued to be voluntary and thus place people outside any “(future) global governance mechanism that regulates the recognition, protection, resettlement and compensation of people who have to make way to climate change” (65).

Thus, it should not be important to determine whether the migration is forced or voluntary. Furthermore, they note that it is irrelevant whether migrants are moving inside or outside their state, as well as whether they move temporarily or permanently as short-term moves will eventually turn into long-term relocations because of continued and repeated environmental degradation (Biermann and Boas, 2010: 66). While they choose not to make the distinction of the differences between moving inside or outside the state, it is an important one legally, which will be examined in chapter four. Lastly, Biermann and Boas review the use of “refugee.” Like others, they question if refugee status (which is already a part of the international human rights regime) applies to climate migrants, as the traditional definition requires political, religious, or ethnic persecution to be the cause for seeking refuge (Becklumb, 2013; Dalby, 2013: 34; UNHCR, 2012; Biermann and Boas, 2010: 66). While the UNHCR disapproves of the use of “refugee” in this context, Biermann and Boas (2010) conclude, “By using this term, the protection of climate refugees will receive the legitimacy and urgency it deserves” (67); thus there is a level of self admission from an advocacy perspective that seeing climate migrants as “refugees” is partially about taking advantage of the existing institutional and normative protection that refugees receive under international and domestic law.

Consensus on terminology in this regard is of crucial importance in political and legal institutional forums; for example, in New Zealand there is no current immigration stream or policy that can accommodate climate migrants, with policymakers considering how to govern it (Rive, 2014; *Radio New Zealand*, 2014). It is clear that differentiating between a “climate migrant” and a “climate refugee” could mean a host of things, from easier immigration processes to increased rights in the receiving state for these climate

migrants or refugees. Thus, it is critical to operationalize the concept soon, as measuring and planning for such people will depend on these categories. As it stands, New Zealand has refused a climate refugee claim, but has granted an immigration claim that provided climate change as one of the central reasons for migrating to the state (McAdam, 2014a; Rive, 2014).

While not unproblematic, I have chosen to use “climate migrant” in referring to those who will become displaced by climate change. As will be discussed throughout the thesis, using the language of the “climate refugee” is complicated, and not recognized at this point in time by most bodies of domestic and international law, as well as influential international organizations. Other terms, including “environmentally displaced persons” or “environmental migrants” are used by some international organizations, including the International Organization for Migration (IOM). These labels are too general, as climate change and the environment are not synonymous. The UNHCR, on the other hand, prefers not to delve into the debate at all; instead they focus on the issue by developing strategies on “planned relocations” for those in need (UNHCR, 2014: 8). The UNHCR removes itself from the “pesky issue of definitions” (UNHCR, 2014: 8) and in doing so lets go of the possibility of them leading as “norm entrepreneurs” on the issue. More so, the organization, perhaps intentionally, chose not to get involved with the debate, further exacerbating the cloudy perception of the climate migrant or refugee. This is troublesome as the language and norms of climate change induced migration *matter* in forming a coherent framework on governing the issue.

Thus, by eliminating “refugee” and “environmental” from being included in the term or label, I am left with using the language of the “climate migrant.” This term is

imperfect, but it is the most applicable *to my understandings* of climate change induced migration. It is the aim of this thesis to learn about *why* the language and emerging norms matter and why it is so important to obtain some consensus on the definition(s) in order to move forward with governing the issue. We cannot implement strategies until we know whom they are for.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

The research of this thesis rests first and foremost on the assumption that climate change is imminent. As Dalby (2013) explains, “[it is] increasingly unlikely that the growth of greenhouse gases will be curtailed in time to prevent major disruptions to the climate system with all the unknowable long-term consequences for human life” (36). Thus, while mitigation of the affects of climate change is possible, people adapting to an inhospitable region will most likely migrate to survive or maintain some quality of life. With this assumption, I hold that the adaptation of those who must leave their homes due to climate change can be made more manageable with proactive decision-making and planning on the part of those affected, host regions, and international organizations. Therefore, my work ultimately rests on the notion that climate migrants have inherent rights as global citizens, and that all states have a stake, and responsibility, to assist with climate change induced migration going forward, protecting the migrant’s rights and freedoms.

Aside from these basic assumptions, my research will be grounded in a constructivist IR approach. Constructivism is the most useful lens to use in answering the research questions as the approach helps researchers understand how social constructions

work in the “near-term here and now” (Checkel, 1998: 107). Using a constructivist approach to the case study helps in examining when, how and why norms are created; which actors are driving them, and finally, how these results may vary transnationally. Further, constructivist scholars have started to shift their focus from the international arena to the domestic politics of norm generation, putting agency back into the domestic sphere in explaining the emergence of new norms (Checkel, 1999; Acharya, 2004; Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998). With the absence of any clear international norms dictating how New Zealand should proceed with climate change induced migration policy, the state is experiencing what Finnemore and Sikkink (1998) regard as the first stage of the norm lifecycle, where policy is being made and where domestic norms and influences are strongest (893). At this point, norm entrepreneurs are creating issues by using language which names and dramatize the norms (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998: 897). The situation in New Zealand, therefore, offers rich grounds for understanding what norms if any are emerging, what they entail legally and normatively, and what they could mean if they gain traction outside of the state.²

1.4 Methodology

To answer my research questions, I will first employ an extensive literature review to determine:

1. What is a “climate migrant” or “refugee” and what is the current terminology being used in New Zealand?
2. What are the legal and normative implications of the language used and consequently, which norms may be adopted in New Zealand.

² The decision to use a constructivist approach to answer the research questions is elaborated in the following chapter.

3. Why does the language being used matter in the planning for such migration in host regions.

To begin to answer these questions, historical institutionalism will be used in order to “capture the temporal dimension” of New Zealand in regards to its treatment of immigration (Checkel, 1999: 92). Understanding the context of New Zealand is vital to studying existing norms the states might hold. Likewise, it is helpful to study New Zealand in relation to the affected regions; for instance, New Zealand, Kiribati and Tuvalu are current members of the Pacific Islands Forum and may therefore be more open to facilitating this type of migration.

Utilizing this information, I will then perform a textual analysis on the discourse developing in New Zealand surrounding climate change and migration. As Finnemore and Sikkink (1998) note, norms “prompt justifications for action and leave an extensive trail of communication among actors that we can study” (892). To supplement the textual analysis, quantitative data will be used to track what the general public in New Zealand are calling this migration in the mainstream media (e.g. migrants or refugees). Coding for these “buzz words” will be done, and later, a more in-depth qualitative analysis will be undertaken to see if the language and norms of climate change induced migration have any impact on what is happening in the state, for example, what policy is being proposed by academics and policymakers.

Qualitative analysis is the best method currently available to perform this research, as climate change induced migration is impossible to measure accurately due to differing definitions of what it means to be a climate migrant or refugee, and due to the uncertainty of what classifies as climate change migration “drivers.” Despite these conceptual and

methodological shortcomings, the research will provide a strong foundation for understanding the emerging norms of climate change induced migration, if there are any at all. Accordingly, this initial work will provide a basis for future research on the issue and is one that can be revisited and built upon with the inclusion of more advanced research methods to measure this migration, or to refer back to for “domestic analogies” on the emerging norms present at the time (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998: 893).

1.5 Conclusion

Research on climate change induced migration is still in its earliest stages, with academics calling for more examination of everything including: the causes, outcomes, and policies related to the issue. Scheffran et al., (2012) in one of the most comprehensive examinations of climate change-related migration to date, note that because climate change affects and is affected by the societal and political environment, creating a circular interaction, the field is increasingly challenged to address the issue as it lacks the tools to do so; existing tools are “disciplinary, linear, and monocausal” (810). While there is some truth to this assertion, it cannot stop the creation of a new research program that overcomes such limitations. Climate change induced migration must be viewed as a global commons problem that can be adequately addressed in preparing individuals, institutions and states for what is to come (Barnett, 2003: 14). With proper preparation, including the operationalizing of language and the awareness of norm development encompassing this language, institutions can withstand much pressure from a changing climate. The findings of this thesis will add to this increasingly important area of research.

1.6 Outline

This thesis begins with an overview of the methodology and methods. Chapter 2 reviews the constructivist approach, situating the research in IR scholarly literature, and explains the methods used in answering the research questions. Chapter 3 provides an outline of the effects of climate change on Kiribati and Tuvalu, providing necessary context of what may be forcing “climate migrants” or “refugees” to migrate. The following two chapters, Chapters 4 and 5, focus on the legal and normative implications of the “climate refugee,” respectively. The thesis concludes in Chapter 6 by offering a summary analysis of the research questions and suggests areas of future research on climate change induced migration.

Chapter 2: Research Design and Methods: Understanding Climate Change Induced Migration

*Neither identity nor interests can be detached
from a world of social meaning* (Fierke, 2013: 191).

To answer my research questions, I require dynamic, complementary methodology and methods that can assist me in understanding the emerging field of climate change induced migration. Many IR theories are insufficient for what is required, and indeed, alter the scope of the problem altogether. I am interested in researching the *social construction* of climate change related migration; exploring how the way we talk of those affected matters; discovering related norms; and in gaining insight into how a state and its population are coping with these changes. Will New Zealand adopt norms to govern the issue? As the number of climate migrants increase, how will people understand the issue in host communities? Moreover, do these labels and norms even matter, or will the state simply choose to ignore the issue as it is not in their interest to do so, as some theories would suggest? Choosing an approach is therefore important in both raising and answering my questions. Theories with a focus on norms, like constructivism, offers opportunity to tackle new international issues like climate change, as it argues that “moral norms -thus ethics- matter in world politics” (Erskine, 2007; Price, 2008: 317).

This chapter proceeds first by situating the constructivist approach in IR scholarly literature and provides an explanation for why it is the best lens through which to view my study. Next, the research design is explained. The chapter concludes by noting that climate change induced migration is challenging to comprehend, let alone to analyze and

draw conclusions. However, there is an immense gap to fill in the literature, and doing so has significant implications in IR and beyond.

2.1 Constructivism and Norm Generation

Constructivism developed as some theories of IR were found to be coming up short in explaining major world events, like the end of the Cold War (Fierke, 2013: 188). Those concerned pointed out three of the main assumptions which were considered to be problematic, including that the international sphere was static, that material interests and power were the only focus of states, and that structure determined a state's choices. Many scholars adopting a constructivist approach of IR challenged these assumptions, arguing that the international can and does change, that discursive power and normative understandings matter, and that a range of actors, not just states, have agency which can alter structure and vice versa. At the core of these understandings was the notion that reality is socially constructed: we create institutions, identities and norms and that in order to interpret the meaning of these constructions, we must situate them within the social environment in which they are present (Hopf, 1998: 182). Over time, the approach has gained in popularity, resulting in a "constructivist turn" in IR theory (Checkel, 1998). An elaboration of constructivism's three assumptions follows, and next, a justification for using constructivism as the lens for viewing the case study through.

2.1.1 Change

As has been noted, some IR theories, like neo-realism, have been criticized for being better at explaining stability than change (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998: 888). Constructivism is not entirely safe from these criticisms. However, recent work has attempted to understand “how social construction works in the near-term here and now” (Checkel, 1999: 108). This is an important concern to bring into focus, as studying change is important in our abilities to predict periods of normative change and what possible outcomes may result. For example, Finnemore and Sikkink (1998) note that world historical events have often “led to a search for new ideas and norms” (909). Constructivism lends itself to the study of norms, helping to infer why some norms are adopted, while others are not (Hopf, 1998: 176). As change is inherent in the international, by only studying periods of stability we weaken our capacity as researchers to make sense of the world. Acknowledging the “here and now” is an advantage of employing a constructivist approach, and this ability should not be undervalued.

2.1.2 Norms

Much of the study of IR has tended to focus on material interests and power, oftentimes neglecting the social, things like norms, rules and language (Fierke, 2013: 189). Those following a constructivist approach tend to focus more on norms, rules, language, suggesting that these social constructions matter and shape state’s choices. Norms are of great interest to constructivist scholars, and are seen as carrying with them a quality of “oughtness,” which uses language to name and interpret issues (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998: 891-897). Norms wield power in the international then (or can if they are widely shared), as they tell states and actors what they ought to do. In order to realize

this power, norm entrepreneurs enter the picture. A norm entrepreneur is an actor who creates, frames, or grafts norms or collections of norms in order to have them succeed in shaping action (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998; Orchard, 2010; Acharya, 2004). In theory, norm entrepreneurs work tirelessly to campaign on a norm's behalf. Not all norms will be accepted, even with a norm entrepreneur's help. A number of scholars using constructivism have noted that norms with moral concerns or moral necessity are likely to be adopted (Orchard, 2014). For example, Keck and Sikkink (1998) suggest that norms involving the prevention of harm for vulnerable populations or the pursuit of equal opportunity are typically accepted internationally. Likewise, norms that can graft onto existing international law, providing "ready-made standards" are also more likely to be adopted (Orchard, 2010: 287).

Using a constructivist approach to norms, such as Finnemore and Sikkink's model of norm generation (1998), helps in answering questions such as where norms come from, what a norm looks like, and how norms affect change (888).

2.1.3 Actors and Identity

Another advantage of using a constructivist approach is that it allows the researcher to study a number of actors involved in IR. Constructivists argue that there are many actors in the international with agency to change things, and that states are not the only powerful actor. For example, norm entrepreneurs have a demonstrated power, and individuals, domestic institutions, and international organizations also have agency (Orchard, 2014: 43). States, consequently, are only one of a number of actors constructivists study. Constructivism has limitations; however. The approach is often

seen to lack a domestic theory, and in turn, insufficiently acknowledges the role of domestic actors during periods of normative change. The oversight of domestic actors can lead to the exaggeration of the international influence of norms, disempowering the work of domestic actors at this point in the norm lifecycle where domestic norms and influences are often strongest (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998; Checkel, 1999; Acharya, 2004). Nonetheless, there has been a recent revival of the domestic sphere in constructivism, restoring agency to domestic actors.

Finally, some constructivist scholars examine the identity of actors, and regard this process as an essential task in understanding social construction. “Understanding how identities are constructed, what norms and practices accompany their reproduction, and how they construct each other is a major part of the constructivist research program” (Hopf, 1998: 192). It is the responsibility of constructivists to reveal how what we take as “given,” like the static world, the one actor, and the clear choices to be made, are actually “the product of human agency, of social construction” (Hopf, 1998: 182). As such, there are several advantages to using a constructivist approach, including: that it helps identify periods of normative change, that it provides tools to understand how norms emerge, and lastly, that it includes a greater scope of actors and assists in discovering their identities.

2.1.4 The Case Study Through a Constructivist Lens

It is essential to explore whether the states included in the case study (New Zealand, Tuvalu and Kiribati) are experiencing periods of normative change. Climate change induced migration is one of the spin-off issues that a changing climate entails, and New Zealand has become the first state to deal with whether or not to accept those

adversely effected by climate change. Thus, the state is seeking answers to govern climate migration. Viewing this issue through the lens of constructivism helps identify what answers, and relatedly, norms, are being constructed and why. As Farbotko and Lazrus (2012) note, “While the outcome of projected sea level rise is likely migration, the consequences are socially constructed and managed by powerful forces of discourses and subsequent policy” (11). Studying New Zealand’s period of normative change through constructivism allows for a deconstruction of current events, providing a basis for understanding the distinctive challenges of climate change and which ways we may overcome them at present, as well as in the future.

Likewise, constructivism can help provide a starting point for understanding what norms are emerging in New Zealand, and in predicting what norms, if any, are likely to diffuse transnationally or internationally. In one of the few studies to date on the emerging norms of climate change induced migration, Mayer (2014) argues that there are presently four main normative enterprises being used in global discourse and that all of them use a “language of fear” to discuss the issue (27). In this case study, the language being provoked in public discourse in New Zealand is of particular interest. Is the “climate refugee crisis” the most accurate or useful frame to use, both legally and normatively, in governing the issue? Frames guide discourse and subsequent policy development; as such they are essential to explore in understanding the normative context of the language of climate change induced migration. Moreover, the markers for norm emergence and diffusion that constructivists provide are helpful in seeing what norms may be dominating public discourse in New Zealand and what consequences this entails both within the state’s borders and beyond. Thus, constructivism enables a thorough

investigation of any emerging norms in New Zealand, which is imperative to study in answering the research questions.

One of the most significant reasons for pairing the case study with a constructivist approach is that I can acknowledge a wider base of actors, specifically those active in the domestic sphere, and can explore the identities and interests that these actors may have in promoting new norms on climate change migration. Formulating New Zealand's identity in relation to itself, the global community, and most meaningfully, to those affected by climate change is essential in examining the current discourse on such migration and on whether or not New Zealand will work towards helping these migrants. Understanding New Zealand's past and present, with a focus on its local culture, beliefs and normative understandings helps to anticipate the suitability of certain political norms in the domestic (Checkel, 1999: 86; Acharya, 2004: 241).

This case offers an excellent opportunity to explore the role of domestic discourse and agency in steering emerging global norms on climate change induced migration. Since New Zealand is the first known state to encounter climate migrants, we are looking at an inside-out event – as there are no prior international norms instructing the state on how to respond to the unique challenges of this issue. While climate change is international in its scope, as are the migrants, this is a domestic case study, which explores how the state has acted and may act towards this migration. It is New Zealand's issue to address and it can be argued that if and when the state does act to govern climate change induced migration, it will be precedent setting.

2.2 Research Design

To help in answering this project's research questions, a variety of methods are used in order to explore and analyze the discourse on climate change induced migration in New Zealand. A review of texts is needed to begin to clear up conceptual and measurement issues, such as (1) what is a climate migrant or refugee and (2) how many of these climate migrants or refugees there may be. These two points are vital to address in moving forward, as it would be near impossible to determine whether current policies are adequate in addressing climate change induced migration, what types of policies or methods may be better suited to address the issue, and in understanding the legal and normative importance of the language we use in doing so, without this clarification.

Alongside this review, historical institutionalism is used to “capture the temporal dimension” of the case (Checkel, 1999: 92). The states included in the case study have existing relations, including being members of the Pacific Islands Forum, which could therefore affect subsequent policy development. Furthermore, it is essential to explore the historical context of New Zealand's identity, which can assist in discerning the state's interests, preferences and actions (Hopf, 1998: 175). By discovering these interests, it provides a background of New Zealand's existing norms. These norms greatly affect the likelihood of new ones related to climate change induced migration being accepted, as norms that may be congruent with prior domestic ones, and the “social and cultural characteristics of the population” will be more easily institutionalized in the state (Checkel, 1999: 86; Acharya, 2004: 243; Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998: 893; Orchard, 2010: 286).

A second technique, content analysis, is used to study the emerging norms on the “climate refugee” discourse occurring in New Zealand. Constructivists examine both

material and discursive power, with discourse being understood as being made up of knowledge, culture, ideology and language (Hopf, 1998: 177). Therefore, it is necessary to partake in a content analysis of major media sources to allow for an interpretation of state discourse on climate change and migration. While not plentiful, media content exists in New Zealand on the topic. This may be because the low-lying Pacific states are often part of the “canary in the coal-mine metaphor,” like polar bears and melting glaciers, which serve as visual narratives to represent the negative effects of climate change (Farbotko and Lazrus, 2012: 8-9). As media attention shapes public discourse, it can form the basis for policy development. Therefore, content analysis of New Zealand media is key to undertake in determining what the public has been saying, and likewise, what policy may be developing based on this discourse, answering key research questions.

For the content analysis, a database will be created comprised of any English-language news articles from five main state newspapers (owned by three publishers) that explicitly referenced the cases, or the “crisis” of climate change induced migration more generally. The sample size is small (43 sources), but substantive when considering the issue’s emerging status. While there has been growing international attention of the issue (Randall, 2015), it is imperative to look at what is being said domestically and therefore, what may be shaping discourse and policy in New Zealand as it encounters the first climate migrants.

The five newspapers are chosen based on their circulation size (all with a circulation between approximately 40,000 and 170,000), which reasonably should provide an overview of popular state discourse. The newspapers included are: *The New Zealand Herald*, *The Dominion Post*, *The Press*, *The Otago Daily Times*, and the *Waikato*

Times. *The New Zealand Herald* has the largest circulation, and it is necessary to note that *The Dominion Post*, *The Press*, and the *Waikato Times* are owned by the same publisher and share content.

With these sources, key buzzwords will be coded for. The two buzzwords are “migrant” or refugee,” which seem to dominate current discourse on the matter. While there are variations of each term (which is discussed later), these two words carry substantial normative and legal weight and are reasoned to be inclusive of the language being used in mainstream discourse. Likewise, these terms are two of the most searched for internationally, according to Google News analytics, and serve as useful benchmarks of public interest (Randall, 2015). To create the database, in an Excel spreadsheet, sources with reference to “refugee” will be coded as (1); sources with reference to “migrant” will be coded as (2); and sources using both will be coded as (3).

Finally, findings from both the textual and content analyses will be used together to form a more complete overview of what is occurring in New Zealand with regards to climate change induced migration. While the methods used do not answer the research questions absolutely, a discussion of which follows, they provide a comprehensive look at the first legal cases being made by so-called “climate refugees,” and help puzzle about the role of domestic actors in transnational normative environments, an area not always examined in constructivist works.

2.3 Conclusion

Social scientists have an integral part to play in leading discussions on how to manage the adverse effects of climate change, including the anticipated migration of

people from their homelands. There are blind spots in doing so: climate change is to some degree unpredictable and depends greatly on adaptation and mitigation strategies.

However, there are no excuses for not participating in the development of diverse and multidisciplinary research programs that assist in overcoming such limitations and to adding to a new body of knowledge that is seriously lacking. This chapter explained how the thesis approaches the issue of climate change induced migration as being socially constructed and therefore raises questions such as why our language used to describe it matters. This required the use of a constructivist approach and a complementary research design in order to answer the research questions in a way that has not been done in IR scholarly literature. In doing so, this thesis provides a benchmark on how to study climate change induced migration, and offers a rare “here and now” constructivist account of climate change induced migration as experienced in New Zealand today.

Chapter 3: Climate Change, Mitigation and Adaptation: The Problem

Some species will adapt to new climates. Those that cannot adapt sufficiently fast will decrease in abundance or go extinct in part or all of their ranges (IPCC, 2014: 15).

There are five states in the world that are solely comprised of atolls. Atolls are coral reefs or small ring-shaped islands that surround small lagoons. Typically, atolls are uninhabited due to offering few natural resources, poor soil quality, and because of their isolation, which makes life challenging for those who do call these island states home (*National Geographic*). Kiribati and Tuvalu are two of the five atoll-based states and are located in “Oceania” in the vast central Pacific. Kiribati is much larger than Tuvalu and has nearly ten times the population with close to 105,000 people as of July 2014 (CIA, 2014). Much smaller, Tuvalu has a population of close to 11,000 people (CIA, 2014). Due to the states’ geography, the atolls are between zero to three or four meters above sea level; which makes them highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change, including sea level rise (*AC (Tuvalu) v. NZIPT*, 2014; *AF (Kiribati) v. NZIPT*, 2013). In a 2014 report on the status of climate change, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) noted, at very high confidence³, that “Due to sea level rise projected throughout the 21st century and beyond, coastal systems and low-lying areas will increasingly experience adverse impacts such as submergence, coastal flooding, and coastal erosion” (17).

³ *Very high confidence* suggests that the contributors of the IPCC’s report expressed the highest level of confidence (of which there are five) in the evidence and degree of agreement regarding the finding.

This chapter situates the case study, providing an overview of the climate change-related challenges that confront Kiribati and Tuvalu and by exploring how the states are currently working to mitigate and adapt to them. The chapter then discusses some of the problems that exist for researchers in this emerging field, which are the difficulty in separating the multicausal drivers of migration and in determining how many climate migrants there will be. The conclusion reflects on the impacts of climate change on migration and suggests the need to overcome the research limitations that stand in the way of moving forward with mitigation and adaptation strategies, of which include migration.

3.1 Climate Change Impacts on Kiribati and Tuvalu

As has been discussed, Kiribati and Tuvalu share many geographic characteristics. The two states also have climate change in common, and therefore experience many of the related impacts, including: sea level rise, salt water contamination, coastal erosion, sea-surface temperature increase, debilitated coral reefs, and the increase in extreme weather events. Such impacts are not mutually exclusive, and often occur simultaneously, in a cause and effect manner. For example, sea level rise can lead to the contamination of fresh water and can, overtime, result in coastal erosion. Nevertheless, each impact is briefly reviewed below, starting with those deemed to be “slow-onset” and then moving on to those deemed to be “sudden-onset.”

One of the most well known impacts of climate change is sea level rise. As centuries old glaciers melt, sea levels rise. This phenomenon is particularly problematic for coastal regions like Kiribati and Tuvalu, which are located only metres above sea level. A rising sea threatens to destroy the states overtime, which is why it is classified as a slow-onset climatic event. Nonetheless, consequences of sea level rise impact these states today, with fresh water contamination and coastal erosion being two of the more dangerous challenges that these citizens face. Sea level rise, as well as extreme weather events, which will be discussed later, can result in enormous waves that reach fresh water sources. These limited sources are merely films which rest on top of the ocean and once contaminated by salt-water result in a lack of potable water for the islands (Duvat, 2013: 363). Climate change induced sea level rise also exacerbates coastal erosion. Citizens of Kiribati and Tuvalu have simply relocated inland or to less vulnerable areas on the island, but ultimately, due to the size of the states, there is only so much that can be done before permanent migration becomes necessary.

While these impacts are dire, two scholars suggest that sea level rise is not the greatest threats facing the islands, indeed, the “projected increase in sea-surface temperature [...] poses the greatest long-term risk to atoll morphology” (Barnett and Adger, 2003: 323). Correspondingly, a rising sea-surface temperature kills coral reefs through coral bleaching and because of high levels of CO² in the surrounding oceans, reefs cannot keep growing in order to combat sea level rise (Barnett and Adger, 2003: 325). In other words, a warming ocean kills the coral reefs, which make up these atolls. Under normal conditions, coral reefs are able to grow and adapt to changing conditions like sea level rise. However, because of increased levels of CO², the coral reefs are

prevented from carrying out these functions, and consequently, this chain of circumstances threatens the long-term existence and general feasibility of living on these atoll states.

In addition to slow-onset events, there are also sudden-onset events that endanger low-lying states like Kiribati and Tuvalu such as “storm surges, extreme high spring tides, [and] flooding of residential areas” (*Teitiota v. MBIE*, 2013). These unpredictable weather patterns and extreme weather events “may in themselves constitute a ‘dangerous’ level of climate change to atoll social-ecological systems before, and regardless of, sea level rise” (Barnett and Adger, 2003: 325). Thus, when both the slow and sudden-onset events are put together, it becomes abundantly clear why the issue of climate change induced migration is becoming a major global issue. Likewise, it is perhaps surprising that there have been so few related immigration claims when these effects impact freshwater and terrestrial resources, marine systems, food security and food production systems, key economic sectors, and human health and security (IPCC, 2014). Of course, it could very well be that those effected have been migrating internally to less vulnerable locations or having been migrating outside of the state by using the existing avenues of doing so, like the Pacific Access Category (PAC) of immigration with New Zealand. Yet, even these options are becoming limited. Internal migration in Kiribati or Tuvalu is futile as the impacts affect the entirety of the states, and the PAC immigration stream offers only a few dozen citizens residency and come with a host of restrictions. How, then, are I-Kiribati’s and Tuvaluan’s coping with climate change?

Even though there is much vulnerability, it is vital to emphasize the social resilience and adaptation that is taking place, rather than solely focusing on the

vulnerabilities and challenges of which are occurring in the present and those which are anticipated (Adger, 2006: 277). Understanding these measures restores agency to the affected populations and shows that migration is “one of a range of strategies that individuals, households and communities can use to adapt to climate change” (Birk and Rasmussen, 2014: 3). Moreover, Birk and Rasmussen (2014) note that recent interdisciplinary research has shown that assistance offered to these states is more effective if it is used to compliment existing strategies in place (3). Therefore, researchers and policymakers should pay mind to these efforts when examining the social and ecological effects of climate change and when offering assistance or potential solutions to affected regions.

3.2 Mitigation and Adaptation

In places like Kiribati and Tuvalu, one of the ways islanders have been combatting sea level rise -and have done so for centuries- is with seawalls. Recent studies in Kiribati indicate that a variety of seawalls exist along the coast, including those comprised of stacked and concrete coral blocks, cemented sand bags, solid waste and vegetation, and oil drums or wooden structures (Duvat, 2013: 377). Duvat (2013) uses the case study of the Tarawa Atoll in Kiribati as an example of seawall coverage, reporting that 29% of the atoll has seawall coverage and that 57% of it is in urban, population dense areas (377). Seawalls are the first line of defense against high waves and coastal erosion, and it appears that most urban areas find some coverage from the variety of seawalls put in place.

Larger scale attempts have been made to cope with a changing climate, too. In Tuvalu, a National Adaptation Programme of Action Project with the Global Environment Fund has been put in place which seeks to address issues of food security, accessibility to fresh and safe water, and to secure measures to manage fishing grounds as the adverse impacts of climate change increase (*AC (Tuvalu) v. IPTNZ*, 2014). Both Kiribati and Tuvalu also have organizations available that seek to raise awareness on climate change, and there are some organizations that offer opportunities to learn skills that are in demand in host states if migration did become necessary. Apart from these efforts, Kiribati may have taken the most drastic step in planning for the worst-case scenario associated with the environmental degradation: a disappearing island. In 2014, Kiribati's former president Anote Tong led the government to purchase land in Fiji for \$8.7 million, an inflated price for land reportedly "covered by impenetrable forest" (Pala, 2014). The land has been promised to serve as a new home for a little over half of the population if the negative effects of climate change cannot be overcome and migration becomes an inescapable reality for the state (Pala, 2014).

It is imperative to note that these slow and sudden-onset effects are widely accepted by scientific communities to have been caused by climate change, even though there remains debate about the precise details (although these are still quite clear according to climate scientists). Nonetheless, these effects and climate change are not *out there*, as Oliver-Smith (2013) explains:

In climate change, nature will not be displacing people, but rather an array of human generated forces driven by a massive production of green house gases that are transforming global climate and therefore nature. The wind, rain, drought, erosion and the like that displace people resemble natural forces, but their origins are becoming as much human as they are natural (1068).

We are ensnared in these environmental changes and the consequences that are likely to result from them, such as human migration. We must take responsibility for our actions and mitigate and adapt to a changing climate, particularly in areas that are hardest hit, where living is becoming nearly impossible.

3.3 Multicausal Drivers

Many researchers speak to the next to impossible process of separating migration due to climate change from other common migration drivers (Dalby, 2013; Biermann and Boas, 2010; Bettini and Andersson, 2014; Warner, 2010). There can be many drivers of migration when studying both the causes and outcomes of climate change induced migration. While researchers often focus on environmental drivers associated with climate change, there can also be political and socio-economic drivers of migration. For example, in Kiribati and Tuvalu, along with other Small Island Developing States (SIDS), issues such as “limited terrestrial resources, high exposure to natural hazards, high socio-economic vulnerability and limited capacities of the public and private sectors” may compound and blur the negative effects of climate change (Duvat, 2013: 363). Hence, a life in a new state may be highly attractive and signify a significant improvement in quality of life for residents, irrelevant of the adverse effects of climate change.

It is thus easy to see the limitations that are faced when separating migration drivers, particularly for environmental events, as they are rarely caused by a single agent, but by “the complex interaction of natural and social features and forces” (Oliver-Smith, 2013: 1065). For that reason, it may be advised to first eliminate obvious drivers which

are not associated with climate change, as per what term, definition, and criteria are being used (e.g., migrant, refugee, etc.) and in what context (e.g., regional, transnationally, etc.). For example, two climate migration scholars suggest eliminating some traditional migration drivers first (such as for economic reasons), in order to determine which climate change induced drivers are truly influencing decisions to migrate (sea level rise, a rise in ocean temperature, extreme weather events, drought and water scarcity) (Biermann and Boas, 2010: 69). Another helpful exercise in narrowing down drivers of climate change induced migration include Birk and Rasmussen's (2014) set of questions which suggests factors migrants may consider when choosing whether or not to migrate due to climate change. They include: how is climate change being felt in affected regions? How much capacity is available to mitigate and adapt to these adverse effects? What constraints or support are available for those who may migrate? And lastly, what are the "perceived benefits of staying compared to leaving" (2)?

Yes, there are many diverse and overlapping reasons for why an individual may leave their homes and we are ill equipped at this point to pinpoint exactly how climate change plays a role in these decisions. On the other hand, it is becoming more and more necessary to understand climate change-specific migration drivers in governing for this type of migration, particularly under the *Refugee Convention*, as the causes and decisions of migrating hold extreme ramifications in terms of rights and protection to be afforded. While Oliver-Smith (2013) notes that "it is incumbent on climate and migration researchers to clarify issues of causality when discussing the complexity and interrelationships of drivers in the displacements of populations" (1067), it may be easier said than done and depends greatly on context-specific details which we may not yet

have. Indeed, it may be best to keep chronicling the movement of climate migrants and in listening to the reasons they have about why they are choosing to migrate. In New Zealand, climate change is not as of yet a valid reason for migrating alone; however, as the Tuvaluan case illustrates, the effects of climate change, when paired with other reasons (difficulty finding employment and a lack of land in their home community), is acceptable and grounded in law.

3.4 How Many Migrants Will There Be?

Like the desire to separate migration drivers, most scholars and policy makers insist on calculating how many climate migrants there may be. Having an exact number is attractive and the value is clear: it makes the phenomenon easier to plan for (in theory, at least) and we can regain some control of the matter (again, in theory). On the other hand, some scholars suggest that the exact number of climate migrants is not that important to know, and that such a figure can be problematic if it inspires fear in populations which foresee an onrush of displaced climate migrants (Baldwin, 2013: 1483; Bettini and Anderson, 2014: 176). Noted in Chapter 1, the UNHCR (2012) puts forth the figure of 200-250 million climate migrants by the year 2050. The UNHCR's estimation remains a generally accepted figure in academic circles, although it is not unproblematic. As can be assumed, anyone who studies climate change induced migration will be well aware of the difficulties involved in determining and testing what precisely climate change induced migration is, as doing so rests on who a migrant is, what is driving them to move, etc.: the same conceptual and analytical questions which plague the entirety of work on climate change induced migration.

3.5 Conclusion

Just because we may not know the specifics of climate change induced migration does not mean we should not act. Referring to the 1987 Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, Barnett and Adger (2003) explain that scientific uncertainties are common and that states must overcome these problems in forming precautionary policy anyways (330). Fortunately, the 1987 Montreal Protocol moved forward, despite the lag for science to confirm the details of the now well-known associations between ozone depleting substances and the protection of earth's ozone layer. Like the Montreal Protocol, it is, of course, essential to understand the science behind climate change induced migration and what this means in the here and now, and what it will mean in the future. Just the same, there is a degree of urgency in which to develop and implement some form of framework on climate change induced migration, regardless of the specifics. The slow-onset and sudden-onset impacts of climate change are being felt in Kiribati and Tuvalu and people are starting to move because of them, sometimes regardless of existing mitigation and adaptation programs. As the IPCC (2014) suggests, while lacking in “quantitative projections in mobility, due to its complex, multi-casual nature,” improving and expanding opportunities for those affected to move will reduce vulnerabilities (20).

This chapter has shed light on the harsh reality of climate change in Kiribati and Tuvalu, but it also considered the diverse ways in which these states are coping with these challenges. Next, the chapter reviewed some of the research issues faced in developing and implementing strategies to govern climate change induced migration. Despite these conceptual and measurement limitations, this chapter has argued that states

require guidance now on how to deal with this migration, as ad hoc responses may be suitable for today, but certainly will not be as climate change intensifies and the handful of related immigration claims become hundreds (or thousands, or even the UNHCR's anticipated millions). Action is needed, and "anticipatory planning such as national adaptation process[es] [are] crucial to mitigating displacement, reducing vulnerability, and strengthening the resilience of communities" (IOM, 2014: 5).

Chapter 4: The Legal Implications of “Climate Refugees”

Bold speeches and elaborate commitments to the pursuit of noble goals like refugee rights, environmental protection and sustainable development typically fall prey to narrow geopolitical interests when the time for action comes. The result is that forced climate migrants fall through the cracks of international refugee and immigration policy. There is no “home” for forced climate migrants, either literally or figuratively (Brown, 2008: 34).

The association between climate change and refugees is powerful and permeates public discourse; however, are these people actual refugees, as per the *Refugee Convention*? This question has fuelled recent debates on the issue, with a consensus on the meaning of the term hard to agree upon. Outside of academic debate, applications of this term are being put before the courts, as we see in the case study. The two men involved in the cases in New Zealand have, as of yet, failed to make the case that they should be protected under the current *Refugee Convention*. But, for how long will this exclusion be justified, especially as the numbers of those seeking refuge from the effects of climate change increase?

To situate the legal context of this issue it is necessary to examine the international and domestic laws that may play a role in governing climate change induced migration. This chapter analyses these bodies of law in order to determine whether the “climate refugee” frame is indeed grounded in law and thus deserving of protection, or whether protection gaps remain, placing those affected outside of any useful governance mechanism. Next, alternatives to current international and domestic laws relating to climate change induced migration are considered – as many experts feel that this

emerging issue warrants new policy (Chirala, 2013; Williams, 2008; McAdam, 2010; Zetter, 2011; Docherty and Giannini, 2009). In agreement with these experts, this chapter argues that a new framework on climate change induced migration is urgently needed in order to reduce the vulnerabilities faced by affected populations, including I-Kiribati's and Tuvaluans.

4.1 International Law and the Refugee Convention

There is a growing body of literature that explains in detail the rationale as to why the effects of climate change are not regarded as suitable reasons for seeking refugee status under the current Convention (see McAdam, 2010; Zetter, 2011; Chirala, 2013; Docherty and Giannini, 2009; Williams, 2008). Despite the lack of agreement as to whether climate migrants qualify, or should qualify, as refugees, there are a number of key themes that have emerged in the Human Rights literature to this regard, including: the extent to which the home states of climate refugees are still protecting them, whether the climate refugees are members of a particular social group, and lastly, whether climate refugees are being persecuted.

Nevertheless, there are many who advocate for the idea of “climate change refugees.” Some leading scholars in the field value this language, noting that it conveys a moral sense of obligation (Chirala, 2013) and that “by using this term, the protection of climate refugees will receive the legitimacy and urgency it deserves” (Biermann and Boas, 2010: 67). It is therefore understandable why popular discourse appears to be using this language at present, as the idea of climate refugees *makes sense* in a normative and

moral way, particularly in these early stages where the issue is relatively unknown.⁴ This reasoning aside, the legal arguments against granting refugee status for those who must move appear to be quite compelling. The main arguments against the application of the *Refugee Convention* follow; along with a discussion of some of the other reasons why scholars find the current Convention inadequate to deal with the issue of climate change induced migration.

One of the arguments against the application of the *Refugee Convention* for climate migrants deals with the role of the home state (McAdam, 2010; Zetter, 2011; Docherty and Giannini, 2009). In the typical refugee paradigm, refugees must flee their home states because the state is persecuting them or cannot protect them from the persecution they are confronted by. As the effects of climate change intensify, it may be that a state cannot protect its citizens. However, in the two cases in New Zealand it was decided that the home states of the claimants, Kiribati and Tuvalu, were, by the court's standards, adequately looking after their citizens from the effects of climate change and were attempting to be proactive in planning for the expected continued degradation of the environment (*Teitiota v. MBIE*, 2013). In fact, in 2014, Kiribati's former president Anote Tong bought "back-up property" in Fiji – a move that many have criticized as being ill considered (*The Atlantic*, 2014), but which was an attempt to secure a potential future home for his people. Therefore, as long as home states continue to provide protection in some form; however minimal, it is unlikely the *Refugee Convention* would be applicable to those "fleeing" their home states.

⁴ The normative implications of "climate refugees" will be expanded on in the following chapter.

The most explicit reasoning against allowing climate migrants to claim refugee status is that they are not being persecuted in their home states and that they are not facing persecution due to their status as members of a particular social group (McAdam, 2010). Article 1A(2) of the *Refugee Convention* implies that to qualify as a refugee there must be a “well-founded fear of being persecuted” and that there is a fear of persecution based only on “race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.” Such a stipulation immediately excludes those who are escaping the effects of climate change based on these two grounds. The migrants do not form a particular social group, and while one claimant in New Zealand tried to argue that they were facing persecution at the hands of the developed world as they contributed to the advancement of climate change and its subsequent negative effects, the argument was dismissed, noting:

There is simply no basis for concluding that countries which can be said to have been historically high emitters of carbon dioxide or other greenhouse gases, have any element of motivation to have any impact on residents of low lying countries such as Kiribati, either for their race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion (*Teitiota v. MBIE*, 2013).

The ruling subsequently thwarted any chance of the claimant, or others facing similar predicaments, gaining protection under the *Refugee Convention*, putting to rest the idea that climate change is a form of persecution that should be fled from.

While these three arguments form the most compelling responses against granting refugee status to climate migrants, there are still several other challenges or gaps which exist, suggesting the *Refugee Convention* does not offer the specifics needed to assist in helping climate migrants. One of the most convincing of these arguments is that climate migrants may leave their home states proactively in the wake of slow-onset climate

change related events, making such migration a “rational and normal adaptation strategy” that is seen as being more positive than the alternative (McAdam, 2010; Zetter, 2011; Chirala, 2013).

On the other hand, in some circumstances, affected populations will have no choice but to leave, particularly if their home state is inhospitable or disappearing, as is predicted to occur in Kiribati and Tuvalu. In this regard, it is obvious that the affected citizens will have no choice but to leave (McAdam, 2010). Importantly, the “right to return” is a major principle in the *Refugee Convention*; “non-refoulement” states that no refugee should ever be returned to a dangerous home state, but that ultimately they can if circumstances change. Thus, the right to return exists as per the *Refugee Convention*, but it is ultimately a right that the majority of climate migrants would not be able to access.

One of the final reasons as to why the *Refugee Convention* is not really suitable for climate migrants is that it does not easily support group-based migration with long-term planning for the new and uncertain futures these populations will face. Scholars advocate for group-based migration with long-term resettlement strategies based in part on the principles of human security (McAdam, 2010; Zetter, 2011; Docherty and Giannini, 2009; Elliott, 2004). Such principles will vary according to host states, but may entail language or job training, amongst other basic resettlement requirements (IOM, 2014: 6). As such, the current *Refugee Convention* does not have the scope needed to ensure the extended rights of these climate migrants who *must*, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, leave their homes and who will do so for good.

Legally, climate refugees do not; as of yet, conform to the stipulations of the *Refugee Convention*. Frequently referencing it, New Zealand’s courts have rigidly

adhered to the *Refugee Convention* when ruling against refugee claims in both immigration cases (*Teitiota v. MBIE*, 2014; *AC (Tuvalu) v. IPTNZ*, 2014). Nevertheless, in one of the rulings, the High Court pointed out that the claimant's rights simply are not being addressed by the *Refugee Convention*, and that in the future, the effects of climate change may lead to "pathways" which could result in a new or improved *Refugee Convention* (*Teitiota v. MBIE*, 2013). What remains clear is that the existing *Refugee Convention*, along with countless international climate change and human rights regimes and frameworks, do not address climate change induced migration. As Docherty and Giannini (2009) note, "As evidenced by the inadequacies of the existing refugee and climate change frameworks, there is a clear need for a more specific and specialized legal instrument to fill the gap that presently exists within international law" (361).

4.2 New Zealand's Domestic Immigration Laws

The decisions made by New Zealand's courts on the two climate change induced immigration cases were opposed to accepting the adverse effects of climate change as being a driver of migration, mostly to discourage the "opening of flood gates" to any future climate migration. The courts did; however, eventually grant residency to the Tuvaluan appellant who abandoned his refugee case and instead pursued a humanitarian case. In the ruling, the Immigration and Protection Tribunal noted that the Tuvaluan family had strong ties to New Zealand (the appellant's family resides in the state) and that the effects of climate change would be negative, particularly for the appellant's children (*AD (Tuvalu)*, 2014: 7). Cumulatively, the Tribunal decided that it would be "unduly harsh" to decline residency, and that it would "not be contrary to the public

interest to allow the appellants to remain in New Zealand” (*AD (Tuvalu)*, 2014: 1).

Notwithstanding, the Tribunal suggested that the “other” factors were good enough reasons to allow the family to stay, so they did not have to weigh in on climate change as a factor in the case (*AD (Tuvalu)*, 2014: 9).

The contradictory nature of these cases is apparent. Pursuing refugee status as a climate migrant is not succeeding; yet, pursuing humanitarian relief appears to work. This raises several questions, such as what grounds New Zealand is using in determining what is in the “public interest” regarding the entry of climate migrants into the state. As has been raised, New Zealand subscribes to the *Refugee Convention* and has domestic immigration laws, which together govern the state’s immigration policies. New Zealand also appears to hold human rights norms that guide such policies. In order to gain a better understanding of the state and its interests, it is useful to track its “identity”, mainly: what has been New Zealand’s perceived moral responsibilities as a state in relation to immigration? How may these obligations and norms sit with climate change induced migration? To answer these questions, a closer examination of New Zealand’s history of domestic immigration policy is necessary.

New Zealand is one of four of the so-called “traditional lands of immigration,” alongside Canada, the United States, and Australia and has a long history of migration both in and out of the state (Beaglehole, 2009). The state has a mixed legacy with regards to its treatment of migrants and refugees, with earlier discriminatory policies in the 1930s and 1940s against certain ethnic refugees, and with more liberal policies that let in migrants that no other states would take (Beaglehole, 2009). Overall, New Zealand has maintained a “‘fine’ record of humanitarian assistance,” which has supported ideas about

the state's national identity as being "principled" (Beaglehole, 2009: 109) and a "world leader in humanitarianism" (Neumann, 2009: 147). New Zealand's *Immigration Act* (1987) made it so that migrants were now being selected due to criteria such as skills and qualifications, rather than their ethnicity (Beaglehole, 2009: 112) and in the *Immigration Act* (2009) the state officially incorporated the *Refugee Convention* and its Protocols into law (*Teitiota v. MBIE*, 2013); demonstrating a move towards even fairer, more internationally-recognized policies.

While New Zealand has seen major immigration from the United Kingdom, China and India, it also has historic ties with neighbouring Pacific countries including Tuvalu and Kiribati. As of 2001, approximately 6% of immigrants to New Zealand were from Pacific countries (Bedford, 2003). To manage this migration, the state has a specific immigration stream called the Pacific Access Category (PAC). PAC is run on a random ballot system, which entails applicants meet the following requirements: they must have a full-time job offer from a company in New Zealand, meet health and character requirements, meet English language requirements, and be between the ages of 18-45 years old (Immigration New Zealand). Over 1,000 random ballots are given out per year, with up to 250 people from Tonga and 75 people each from Tuvalu and Kiribati (and their dependent family members) being granted residency if they are selected.

At present this is the only way for citizens of these Pacific states to resettle in New Zealand, with PAC reflecting the state's "long term commitment and links to the region" and being designed "to assist people from these countries gain residency visas to live and work in New Zealand" (New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2013). PAC has been regarded as being "an economically orientated immigration move

to bolster New Zealand's workforce" (Williams, 2008: 515). Therefore, it was not surprising when the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade announced in a press release, around the same time as the two climate change immigration claims were before the courts, that PAC had no linkages to those affected by climate change, and that the state was working towards supporting the Pacific in efforts to address these issues with a NZ\$5 million per year voluntary commitment (2013). The timing of the press release was likely not coincidental and was meant to make clear the state's policies: PAC is not a morally-driven policy and should not be viewed as such.

This press release echoes the strange inconsistencies apparent in the two cases. New Zealand seeks to act out their humanitarian nature by providing financial support to Pacific states affected by climate change. But this is quite a modest offering if it is compared with the cost of letting climate migrants into the state, or even in helping the affected states make substantial progress in developing and implementing mitigation or adaptation strategies. This confirms the notion that when humanitarian-based solutions are needed, states are faced with "greater obligations, resource commitments, or both" (Orchard, 2014: 36). It is here that we become aware of New Zealand's interests and preferences and how they appear to be slightly straying from the state's perceived identity due to the financial costs associated with climate migrants.

Nevertheless, climate change induced migration is only just emerging, as evidenced by the two cases. If greater numbers of migrants seek residency, and as norms develop and become integrated in public discourse on the topic⁵, it can be expected that New Zealand will work towards a solution with their Pacific neighbours. As Hopf (1998)

⁵ A discussion on emerging norms and public discourse in New Zealand follows in Chapter 5.

explains, social practices (like welcoming migrants) reproduce an actor's identity (New Zealand as a leader in humanitarianism), which in turn reproduces intersubjective social structures (Pacific states should help each other) (178). According to constructivist logic, New Zealand will assist the climate migrants of Kiribati and Tuvalu, as they are supposed to. On the other hand, financial considerations of the state and the developing norms and political will of the population are all highly important in how New Zealand will proceed.

4.3 The Compatibility of International and Domestic Law

The lack of immigration streams in New Zealand grounded in domestic or international law for affected Tuvaluans and I-Kiribati's is glaring. New Zealand, it would seem, embraces human rights norms, and holds steady its perception of having "a reputation and a track record of behaving in a more compassionate way to refugees than other countries" (Beaglehole, 2009: 111). Thus, international law and norms have been successfully incorporated into domestic policy, and quite proudly, as New Zealand has oftentimes chosen to subscribe to them when other states did not. However, as has been noted, we have not yet seen New Zealand lead in governing climate change induced migration, despite being one of the first states to encounter it. The state has instead fallen back on the *Refugee Convention* to justify the exclusion, noting, "It is not for the High Court of New Zealand to alter the scope of the Refugee Convention in that regard. Rather that is the task, if they so choose, of the legislatures of sovereign states" (*Teitiota v. MBIE*, 2013). Throughout the multiple trials, New Zealand's courts made it clear that other state's can change the *Refugee Convention*, respecting norms of sovereignty, but that New Zealand and its courts will not do so on their own. Nevertheless, might it be

possible to keep the *Refugee Convention* but to also create compatible domestic policy to govern climate change induced migration? If so, what are New Zealand's alternatives?

4.4 Alternatives: A New Framework for Climate Change Migration

Climate change induced migration is complicated. As was discovered in Chapter 3, the drivers of this type of migration are diverse and often multicausal, making it scientifically challenging to know for certain whether climate change is forcing people to leave their homes or whether there are other factors influencing the decision to move (e.g. food insecurity or lack of employment linked to climate change). Likewise, climate change governance exists at a nexus of environmental law, international law, international human rights, international humanitarian law, sovereign domestic state law, and includes countless institutions and non-governmental organizations. These challenges are compounded with the knowledge that a working solution to alleviate or minimize the negative impacts of climate change will require a huge degree of global cooperation and funding. Despite these major hurdles, one thing that the literature has shown is that a new framework to govern climate change induced migration is needed, one which would “repair the inadequacies of current laws and properly account for these migrants and their rights” (Chirala, 2013: 362).

A new framework (or legal regime) has been the subject of debate: who will oversee the framework - the UNHCR, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), or a new, autonomous body? Should the framework build on existing frameworks like the *Refugee Convention*, or should it be created anew to address the unique and complex issue of climate change induced migration? Further, will

it be international in scope or domestic or regional? These are the questions that must be answered in order for such a framework to move forward in addressing the gaps that prevail in the emerging issue of climate change induced migration.

Understandably, those advocating for a new framework on climate change induced migration suggest the need to build on the successes and failures of existing policy, and that a new semi-autonomous body needs to be created to govern it. The reasoning for this is that most institutions do not have it in their mandates to take over the issue of climate change induced migration (Docherty and Giannini, 2009; McAdam, 2010; Chirala, 2013; Williams, 2008). In one of the most comprehensive accounts for why a new convention is needed, Docherty and Giannini (2009) explain that it is possible to build on existing structures, methods and norms when needed in order to create a framework that has a “basis in the law,” that is “attuned to humanitarian needs” and is “tailored for the specific circumstances of climate change” (391). For example, Zetter (2011) suggests using the *Refugee Convention*’s existing norms and principles as a basis for the new framework (63). Likewise, a body of scientific experts, like the UNFCCC employs, will be necessary to confirm the causes of climate change, to analyze a state’s role in contributing to climate change, and to study and track climate change as it relates to migration flows (Docherty and Giannini, 2009: 390). As such, despite the benefits of having an autonomous body focused on the issue, some interagency work will be necessary for both the framework’s short-term and long-term success.

Notwithstanding the need for a new framework, most experts suggest that the framework requires a bottom-up process (Zetter, 2011) that is regional in scope (Williams, 2008). There is a case to be made for starting on a smaller, localized scale

when creating climate related policies. Where climate change induced migration is felt regionally, it is only fitting that we see what is being done in the region, particularly in the affected states (e.g. any adaptation strategies that are in place to combat migration, or whether citizens are even considering migrating). By including both the affected and the potential host states, human agency and choice are safeguarded, and this engagement will undeniably lead to the development of a customized and flexible framework that builds on the region's existing relations and any agreements or laws they share (Zetter, 2011; Williams, 2008; Docherty and Giannini, 2009; Birk and Rasmussen, 2014). In the case of New Zealand, Kiribati and Tuvalu, such a framework seems more realistic and easily obtained than would an overhaul of the *Refugee Convention* or waiting for a new framework to be developed to govern the migration. Correspondingly, migrating within the region will likely be a more attractive move for those migrating, especially if there are already diasporas present that would ease integration, as is the case for Tuvaluans and I-Kiribati's who would move to New Zealand.

Alas, there are critics who argue regional frameworks would be of no use because they would not be equipped to deal with the large groups of migrants predicted (Chirala, 2013: 379). While this is true, it will not be the case initially. At present, climate change induced migration is manageable and those who do migrate are doing so through individual claims, as occurred in the two case studies. Nonetheless, the slow trickle of migrants we have seen so far could simply be because no current policies exist that would assist groups in relocating. Taking into account the many considerations of creating a new framework, it seems most probable that regional arrangements and norms will precede any equivalents created with an international scope. This assumption follows

Finnemore and Sikkink's (1998) well known "norm lifecycle:" norm emergence, when norms emerge (which is where I would place the New Zealand case); norm cascade, when norms become accepted by the majority of international society; and internalization, when the norm becomes so engrained in society that it is no longer questioned.

As stated, New Zealand appears to be only just entering the norm emergence stage. The challenges of climate change have led to migrants seeking residency in the state, but at this time, no policy, framework or norms exist to guide this process. Questions such as who qualifies as a climate migrant and why should we let them in are being raised. Finnemore and Sikkink (1998) explain, "Norm emergence is not a simple 'surfacing' of a pre-formulated norm in international society [...] but [is] a crystallization process in which the emerging norm acquires its specific shape and content" (166). New Zealand is being forced into the position of being a "norm leader" (Orchard, 2014) on climate change induced migration and will thus be responsible for the process of negotiating new norms (Coleman, 2011). Regional frameworks will therefore guide subsequent international frameworks in governing such migration by providing best practices and shared normative understandings. This will lead to an inside-out dispersion of norms, from the domestic to the international (Williams, 2008: 521-2; Checkel, 1999: 86). Overtime, it is possible that a norm cascade will occur, and eventually, perhaps, internalization of the norms in international society. From where the issue stands today, it is clear that there is a long way to go.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has argued that the governing bodies of international and domestic law are ill equipped to prevent the harmful effects of climate change. The result of which is the forced migration of people from their homes, and the inability to protect those who leave. To limit these vulnerabilities, this chapter has suggested the need for a new framework on climate change induced migration. On top of preparing for those who will leave their homes, a new framework will also have to take into account those who will choose to stay, as well as how states can contribute to minimizing these risks, such as through humanitarian aid, without offering refuge. Thus, there are significant challenges to be faced in moving forward in governing climate change induced migration, and there is one challenge in particular that will be decisive in determining the way forward: the public. Do people feel sympathetic for those who must leave their homes because of climate change (something we have all had a hand in exacerbating)? As Ferracioli (2014) explains, “Changing the public’s perception of the trustworthiness of refugees and the validity of their moral claim is therefore essential to bringing about positive and enduring legal change” (136). Ferracioli speaks of this in terms of a new *Refugee Convention*, but the same idea applies here regarding the importance of discourse in creating a climate change induced migration framework. To begin to move forward, the language we use to speak of those affected by climate change matters, and public discourse matters. So: what is being said?

Chapter 5: The Case

Discursive categories matter because they generate their own altered realities, setting the terms of debates, changing political landscapes and shifting power relationships between people, institutions and non-human entities (McNamara and Gibson, 2009: 476).

To gain a better understanding of the complexities of climate change induced migration and any of its future trajectories; it is essential to pay close attention to what is being said about it at present. As McNamara and Gibson (2009) note, “Indeed, as an environmental phenomenon escalating to ‘crisis’ status in the public realm, accompanying climate change has been a series of new discursive categories and labels into which processes, people, and things are put: ‘polluter’, ‘problem’, ‘adaptation’, ‘climate friendly’, ‘mitigation’, ‘clean coal’ and ‘solutions’ are just some examples” (476). These labels and the discourses they are found in may seem clear, but in reality they carry with them a multitude of meanings, norms and beliefs. The same phenomenon is occurring in the relatively new area of climate change induced migration.

Internationally, scholars have observed a few distinct normative enterprises taking shape around this area, including: international assistance (e.g. fund adaptation and mitigation efforts), protection of migrants (e.g. humanitarian concerns for migrants which are rights-based), environmental sustainability (e.g. curb emissions to avoid these adverse affects), and lastly, international security (e.g. this migration will lead to conflict and should be dealt with as a security threat) (Mayer, 2014; Baldwin, 2013; McAdam,

2014b). The two most dominant discourses present internationally speak of those affected by climate change as being “victims” or “threats” (Baldwin, 2013: 1475).

Understandably, how a population will interpret and cope with this type of migration depends on a number of factors including prior experiences with migrants (for host populations), and the awareness or knowledge of climate change and its effects. Likewise, the labels being given “matter:” are these people migrants? Are they refugees? Are they something else altogether? To discover what discourse may be gaining traction in New Zealand and what this could mean for the future direction of norms for climate migrants, I reviewed a selection of the New Zealand’s news media, coding for “refugee,” “migrant,” or a mix of both. This chapter provides an overview and analysis of the results, questioning whether “refugee” is a fitting label, normatively. The chapter concludes by confirming the importance of the language we use in speaking of climate migrants and discusses what emerging norms may be adopted by New Zealand and later by other states experiencing similar migration.

5.1 Results

After undertaking a content analysis of English print news media in New Zealand, it was clear that the topic of climate change induced migration is being discussed in popular discourse, and has been for sometime. Such a finding is not surprising, as Farbotko and Lazrus (2012) explain, “Climate exposed populations, including Tuvaluans, are magnets for media and researchers, often from the industrialised world” and that the issue of “opening or closing western borders” is what makes these stories newsworthy (4-8). Of the sources examined, the earliest story “Briefings urge block on ‘climate

refugees”” (*The Dominion Post*, 2007), confirms Farbotko and Lazrus’ point about western borders (in this case being that we must not let them in) and provides an indicator of what labels would catch on in public discourse, that of “climate refugees.”

What the orientation of the coverage revealed was that the refugee label has “stuck;” 81% of the sources used the term “refugee” to describe those who may have to leave their homes due to the adverse effects of climate change. Trailing behind at 10% were sources that used a mix of both “refugee” and “migrant,” and only 9% of sources used “migrant” in reference to climate migrants. Furthermore, results indicated that 76% of all sources on climate change induced migration made no reference to the high-profile climate change immigration court cases this thesis examines. Only 24% of coverage referenced the court cases, which is surprising considering the international media attention the cases have received. It was also notable to learn that only one of the sources that used a mix of both labels referenced the court cases, with all other non-“refugee” labels not referencing the court cases. These findings are peculiar as it would be assumed that the outcome of the court cases would dissuade media and the public from using climate “refugee” as it was found to have no basis in domestic or international law; nonetheless, results confirm that over time this has not been the case and that the “refugee” label remains a predominant feature of related coverage.

Aside from the overall findings on which labels are being used, the content varied and put forth a surprisingly thorough examination of climate change and New Zealand’s role in it. In “Climate change forum’s hot topic” government officials attending the Pacific Islands Forum (of which Tuvalu, Kiribati and New Zealand are members), spoke of the challenges of climate change in the region and how New Zealand should stand up

and take a leading role on the issue of climate change induced migration (Fox, 2013). Similarly, one journalist for the *New Zealand Herald* criticized New Zealand's unimpressive response to climate change, suggesting, "...even a dramatic global reduction in carbon emissions is unlikely to save the most vulnerable places in the Pacific. For Kiribati, for Tuvalu, for the Marshall Islands, the most constructive thing that New Zealand can probably do [...] is commit to welcoming these tiny populations" (Manhire, 2013). The majority of articles reviewed were substantive and dealt directly with the issues of climate change and how the region should deal with them. Overwhelming, they suggested helping those affected. Likewise, the articles about the court cases provided clear commentary of the proceedings, which typically concluded with a straightforward response that questioned what would be next for New Zealand and these people. While there was some degree of sensationalizing the plight of the climate refugees, especially by perpetrating the "refugee" label, the articles would be unrecognizable when compared to international coverage on the same topics that made headlines with stories titled "Drowning Kiribati" (Goldberg, 2013), "New Zealand case hints at future climate refugee crisis" (Aulakh, 2014), and "Beyond The U.N. Headlines, Small Islands Struggle For Survival" (Brown, 2013).

Despite the measured response, the articles about climate change induced migration still use the label "refugee" almost exclusively. Why is this? Why does it matter? Further, if "the high circulation of climate refugee narratives is produced in response to the invisibility of much climate change phenomenon to the naked eye or layperson's perspective," than why would New Zealand's seemingly climate-literate population resort to them (Farbotko and Lazrus, 2012: 8)? An analysis follows, which

seeks to make sense of these apparent disconnects occurring in New Zealand's public discourse, and examines the normative implications of the use of label "climate refugee" in New Zealand.

5.2 Analysis

Results confirm that New Zealanders are talking about climate change induced migration in popular discourse. One factor that influences this dialogue may be that the state is a neighbour and one of the closest allies of these low-lying Pacific island states. The states share a long history together, which in some part is due to the regularly occurring migration of islanders to New Zealand. It is thus important to remember that:

Thousands of Tuvaluans live in New Zealand, having moved there not because of some immediate flooding imperative, but because of ever-increasing webs of involvement with New Zealand formed by educational, employment, environmental and familial needs and opportunities (Farbotko and Lazrus, 2012: 15-16).

With this in mind, why is it that the public have become interested in the two cases suddenly, as migration is common between the states? Furthermore, why is public discourse using "refugee" to describe a man who has overstayed his visa and who perhaps was looking for any possible avenue to stay in New Zealand? One scholar argues that the "climate refugee" case would lead to the "early (mis)framing of the issue as being about 'climate refugees'" (McAdam, 2014a: 13). The misframing is problematic because it is not grounded in law and does not tell the whole story of climate change induced migration; instead it threatens to paint those affected as being "weak, passive victims with little internal resilience to fight for much more than relocation" (McNamara

and Gibson, 2009: 479), or as the “distressed, uprooted refugee” (Farbotko and Lazrus, 2012: 15).

Another negative implication of the “climate refugee” is that she is written into discourse in a “language of potential” as she occupies “an ambiguous time between present and future” and exists in an “ambiguous space between order and disorder” (Baldwin, 2013: 1474) where she is on the margins of discourse, language, and politics. As such, one scholar suggests that the figure of the climate refugee “expresses a set of ‘white’ anxieties to do with an impending loss of control and disorder, and the dissolution of boundaries” (Baldwin, 2013: 1474). Baldwin (2013) argues that this figure is one of an “other,” who is becoming racialized by the language, text, and images they are put into (1478). He continues by explaining that those who participate in this discourse are not necessarily racist, looking to hurt or intentionally exclude those affected, but that they may “do so with the best intentions (e.g. assisting those less fortunate) while simultaneously occupying a position of white dominance with the discourse” (Baldwin, 2013: 1478). Baldwin (2013) concludes by noting that people will likely act this way towards climate migrants (1478).

Baldwin’s ideas are interesting in relation to the developing discourses on climate migrants. One of the major challenges associated with climate migrants is that there is a great deal of uncertainty with regard to how many migrants there will be and where they will go. Nevertheless, in most cases, it is important to discourage painting the climate migrant as being a threat, which can lead to a securitization of the issue. One way to avoid the misrepresentation of migrants is to listen to them, establishing “consultation with and participation of affected communities” (IOM, 2014: 6). By doing this, a human-

rights framework is prioritized, which will safeguard the rights and identities of individuals. Despite our best efforts to do so, it may still not be enough, especially if Baldwin's assumption that people will support and sympathize (while othering) the figure of the climate refugee or migrant. Indeed, this appears to be true in New Zealand, where the "climate refugee" is an increasingly talked about figure, despite there being no basis for seeing them as refugees in the current international and domestic refugee regime.

Lastly, the figure of the climate refugee also embodies a sense of defeat in that climate change could not be curbed in time to prevent major disruptions to life. In interviews with leaders of small island states, McNamara and Gibson (2009) explain that the leaders encouraged states to curb carbon emissions, rather than to change their immigration laws (480). They continue by noting that "the category of 'climate refugees' legitimises future visions of a climate change affected world in which mass population mobility and loss of homelands are considered unfortunate, but acceptable 'solutions' to the problems of the social impacts of climate change" (McNamara and Gibson, 2009: 482). That is to say that those affected are unlucky to be on the "losing end" of climate change, but lucky for them, we can probably save the day (just not by mitigating climate change). Thus, it may be that New Zealanders have continued using the label of the "climate refugee" rather than alternatives (e.g. climate migrant, environmentally displaced person, etc.) in order to offer consolation, or moral sympathy, to this image of the dejected, homeless -or soon to be- islander. Moreover, it may be that domestic, international and transnational actors, norm entrepreneurs, see the "climate refugee" as a more powerful rhetoric in gaining the public's sympathy, promoting shared normative

understandings of what it means to be a climate refugee, and in offering solutions for how to deal with them.

Norm entrepreneurs in the domestic sphere can be non-governmental organizations or governmental actors such as elite decisions makers, the judiciary, or other institutions (Orchard, 2014: 209). As was touched on in Chapters 2 and 4, norm entrepreneurs use language that frames normative understandings. To be successful in introducing a new norm, norm entrepreneurs can attempt to match the content of the new norm to pre-existing public understandings (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998; Orchard, 2010; Acharya, 2004). In New Zealand, for example, norms regarding climate refugees could be grafted onto existing human and refugee rights. As the findings show, discourse on climate refugees is increasing in New Zealand; so, have there been any norm entrepreneurs attempting to strategically frame or shape this emerging discourse?

In order to detect any potential norm entrepreneurs in New Zealand, further research was required. After an extensive search of media sources, immigrant or refugee centres, and advocacy groups, it became apparent that there are more prospective actors that may become interested in championing the issue than there are actors actively constructing the issue. For instance, it can be argued that Ioane Teitiota and his lawyer Michael Kidd are individual norm entrepreneurs. Teitiota and Kidd are promoting the language of the “climate refugee” and are shaping subsequent norms to guide behaviour, which is that New Zealand should protect Teitiota and other climate refugees. Teitiota and Kidd are also active in speaking to the media, and Kidd has been guest speaker at events such as “Climate Voter,” speaking to audiences about the case (Botur, 2014). “Climate Voter” was a “non-partisan initiative” in New Zealand during the 2014 election

that was in collaboration with several non-governmental organizations, including WWF, Oxfam and Greenpeace. The initiative urged voters to elect political parties that promised to act on climate change (Climate Voter New Zealand, 2014). Collaborations like this suggest important emerging partnerships amongst norm entrepreneurs on the issue of climate refugees, particularly if Teitiota and Kidd continue to align with international non-governmental actors. International organizations could provide a source of guidance and legitimacy regarding the creation of a new norm, and would have the capacity to help promote it, nationally and internationally.

Another potential norm entrepreneur is the Refugee Council of New Zealand Inc. (RCNZ). Gary Poole, spokesman for the RCNZ, has criticized the inadequacies of the Refugee Convention in the media, and has suggested “New Zealand now has a unique chance, with a seat on the UN Security Council, to develop protocols to address the problem of climate change evacuees” (Jolliff, 2015). RCNZ is a national organization that provides advice and assistance to those seeking refuge in New Zealand, and amongst other purposes, “campaign[s] to ensure that New Zealand meets its legal and humanitarian obligations under the 1951 United Nations Convention on Refugees” (Refugee Council of New Zealand, 2014). Interestingly, Poole uses “evacuee” rather than “refugee,” in his references to the *Refugee Convention* and climate migrants. For organizations like RCNZ, muddying the waters about what exactly a “refugee” is, is inherently risky. The work of groups like the RCNZ necessarily involves support for more traditional “refugees” and their familiarity with refugee law places them in a unique position to judge the applicability and pitfalls of simply treating climate migrants like other refugees. Nonetheless the council’s goal of assisting refugees indicates that this

population will fall under the RCNZ's jurisdiction and that they will likely campaign on the affected's behalf. Furthermore, the RCNZ partners with the UNHCR, the New Zealand government, and other agencies in order to meet its objectives. This demonstrates the council's access to elite decision makers and institutions, which could impact the success of norms on climate refugees in New Zealand. Hence, the RCNZ may play a key role in defining whatever normative structure emerges in New Zealand to manage this problem.

5.3 Language and Emerging Norms

Without a doubt, the label of the "climate refugee" has prevailed in public discourse in New Zealand, despite the fact that it has not yet won the support of the state's courts or legal experts. Will there be a change in the way state media covers this information? Or does it even matter what the media conveys if the issue has already captured domestic support in its current frame? Moreover, even if the language used to describe those affected changes to be in line with the law, will the existing narratives and emerging norms associated with climate refugees not just be carried over to an alternative label should one be decided on? The question arises as to whether the labels even matter – and if the narratives and norms behind them are more important to the formation of some type of governance on climate change induced migration.

On the contrary, it appears as though labels may indeed matter in this case study. The court cases definitively brought to reality the issues facing New Zealander's neighbours in Tuvalu and Kiribati, and that while these might be the first two cases, that many more would follow. From an outsider's perspective, it looks as though "refugee"

status may legitimize the islander's climate-induced plight – while “migrant” status does not convey these same realities. More so, the understanding of the climate “migrant” appears to greatly differ from the regular migrants from these states who arrive in New Zealand to pursue opportunities for a better life. Instead, the climate migrant will come because it is their last chance at maintaining even some quality of life as it becomes inhospitable to do so in their current homes and communities. Thus, the “refugee” label might not be legally correct, and is bound up in complex political, cultural and racial meanings, but it appears to hold a different meaning in popular discourse which is the closest one yet to encapsulate the diverse and complex issues that New Zealanders are encountering today.

5.3.1 What is Next for Climate Migrants?

Aside from the language of climate change induced migration, it is not as yet clear what emerging norms may be gaining traction amongst the public in New Zealand. What is clear; however, is that the state is going through a period of change, which may be slow at first, but is one in which will demand a response from the state sooner than later. The state has taken the steps to discourage future climate refugee claims by denying refugee status to I-Kiribati Ioane Teitiota, but political parties in New Zealand are looking to understand more fully and preside over their roles in climate change induced migration in the region. Likewise, the findings confirm that the public seems to care, or at very least be interested in the issue of climate refugees. So, what is next for New Zealand? How will the state act toward the climate migrant? Understandably, there are

countless scenarios of which could occur, but building on the work of constructivist scholars and using the research findings, I will discuss a few of the possibilities below.

One of the ways norms on climate change induced migration may be generated and adopted in New Zealand is if the issue becomes a crisis. Should the public view the incoming climate refugees as a crisis, the state may realize that the status quo (e.g. existing domestic and international law) is no longer feasible in handling the issue (Orchard, 2014: 32). A crisis event can have a “material basis,” such as an increase in the number of refugees seeking asylum, or an “ideational basis,” such as a new group of refugees requiring protection (Orchard, 2014: 33). While there is clearly not yet a material basis, there seems to be an ideational basis for a crisis event in New Zealand. Findings confirm that there is a discourse of concern over the issue of climate refugees, and should the public continue to show support for climate refugees, even without a basis in law, an ideational crisis appears to be highly likely to occur. Additionally, with New Zealand’s identity as a perceived humanitarian leader, the public could be more easily persuaded by norm entrepreneurs to act to protect climate migrants. Should this scenario take place, New Zealand could become a norm leader in governing climate change induced migration. Furthermore, New Zealand could encourage other states to adopt similar norms “by a combination of diplomacy and public pressure” (Coleman, 2014: 176), eventually leading to a norm cascade.

Another way New Zealand and other affected states may deal with climate change induced migration is through soft law. Many scholars have drawn parallels between climate migrants and internally displaced persons (IDPs) because the trajectory of IDP law in the international system may be similar to what a climate migrant framework

would follow in becoming institutionalized in domestic or international law (Zetter, 2011; Chirala, 2013; Docherty and Giannini, 2009). Soft law is regarded as having propelled the awareness and legitimization of IDPs worldwide, rather than institutional construction governing the issue (Orchard, 2010: 303). Soft law established norms around the acceptable behaviour to be followed with IDPs, suggesting that this could also occur with climate change induced migration. If this association is indeed correct, then the discourse occurring in New Zealand amongst everyday citizens suggests that norms associated with humanitarianism and human rights may be re-framed in order to include climate change induced migration, putting forth a new code of behaviour for the state to follow.

The use of soft law in guiding the issue of climate change induced migration seems likely, particularly since New Zealand already abides by the principles and norms which would form a part of it (e.g. human rights, sovereignty). If so, then this would confirm the constructivist notion that new norms that are similar to existing ones held by a region or state will be accepted more easily (Acharya, 2004: 250), and points to the importance of domestic law, that is the social construction of identity of the potential adopter, in order to see if there is a “cultural match” with regards to new and existing norms (Checkel, 1999: 86). Such a realization implies that there is a strong probability that the domestic sphere, in this case, New Zealand, will lead in the creation of new norms and practices to govern climate change induced migration, rather than the international. The reason is clear: the effects of climate change will vary greatly by region. As such, a one-size fits all approach to governance is simply inadequate at present. It is only logical that domestic discourse, norms, and practices will differ at first due to regional differences and due to differing experiences with climate change. These

domestic or regional approaches will still be of great importance; however, in the development of an international framework, or even in simply establishing a consensus via soft law, which would govern and supervise the phenomenon of climate change induced migration.

While positive change on the issue of climate change induced migration is assumed in the above scenarios, it may not be that New Zealand will pursue action at all, or will do so in less impactful ways than by offering residency. For one, New Zealand may simply offer humanitarian aid to help climate migrants cope with the negative impacts of climate change. The New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade has already committed NZ\$5 million per year to the cause, so they might offer more in the future (2013). Money is a significant factor in all of these scenarios. If New Zealand does not have the resources to resettle climate migrants, it will not. If New Zealand does not have the resources to offer humanitarian aid, it will not. Hopf (1998) reminds constructivists that while discursive power matters – economic power is needed to realize discursive power (179).

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter analyzed and discussed the results of the research project, questioning whether “refugee” is a fitting label normatively to describe those affected by climate change. It was found that despite the label having no basis in law, the use of “refugee” seems to be sticking in New Zealand as evidenced by discourse analysis. The majority of news articles reviewed almost exclusively referred to “climate refugees,” even with two court cases occurring in the state that were finding the label inaccurate.

This language we use to speak of climate migrants has important implications for emerging norms on how to govern climate change induced migration, in New Zealand and beyond. Will New Zealand address the issue and move to find solutions for those affected? What norms would need to be present for this to happen? The chapter concluded by suggesting potential scenarios in which such norms would be adopted by New Zealand in governing (or not) climate change induced migration. It was noted that the current discourse of concern expressed by the public might be implicative of norms that would protect climate migrants (or “refugees”). On the other hand, the chapter concluded that while discursive power is crucial to how the state will respond to the issue, economic power and resources are imperative to being able to carry out any protection agendas, including the resettlement of climate migrants. What was made clear; however, is that the language used to speak of those affected is of major importance. Researchers, international organizations, non-government organizations and others on the frontlines of climate change induced migration must get the language right: the next and final chapter provides an overview of these implications and offers research priorities to assist in governing climate change induced migration.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Planned relocation should seek to support and at a minimum not impede, affected people in the process of reconstituting social geometry so as to enable them to answer three primary questions: Who are we? Where are we? How do we relate to one another? (UNHCR, 2014: 23).

My research question sought to explore how the language we use to speak of climate change induced migration matters in managing what is an emerging and complex policy problem in international politics. In addition to examining the legal implications of this language, my research also sought to investigate the normative implications of the “climate refugee” or “migrant” categories. This required exploring the emerging norms on climate change induced migration in New Zealand, and a discussion of which norm entrepreneurs may be involved in this process. I then speculated on how likely it was for a new norm or collection of norms to be adopted by New Zealand, and in the future, by other states experiencing similar migration.

Using a constructivist approach and by undertaking discourse analysis of major print media sources in New Zealand, it was discovered that the language and norms of climate change induced migration *matter* in governing the issue. Chapter 3 provided evidence of the effects climate change is having on low-lying Kiribati and Tuvalu. Unfortunately, it appears that those seeking refuge in New Zealand (and elsewhere) will rise exponentially as affected states become more and more inhospitable. The question was raised whether those affected were, in fact, “refugees,” “migrants,” or something else altogether. Chapter 4 began to explore the issue, examining whether the terms have legal implications, particularly that of the “climate refugee.” It was found that the “climate

refugee” is not grounded in international law, such as the *Refugee Convention*. Likewise, domestic law in New Zealand lacks measures to deal with the “climate refugee” or “climate migrant,” placing those affected outside of any useful governance. The knowledge of this protection gap has led academics to suggest potential ways forward, such as by expanding the *Refugee Convention* or through the creation of a new framework on climate change induced migration.

Chapter 5 went past the legal implications and investigated the normative implications of the language of climate change induced migration. It was discovered that the “refugee” label prevails in discourse in New Zealand, perhaps because “migrant” conveys a different reality, a reality that one can choose for themselves. The “climate refugee,” on the other hand, is ultimately forced from their homes, and New Zealanders appear to care about this. If this assumption is correct, the response from the public suggests norm emergence in the state. The chapter concluded by considering what may happen next in New Zealand regarding climate change induced migration, noting that it is probable that the state will eventually act on governing the issue, so long as the public continues to care about it, and if resources allow for it.

Overall, this case study illustrated the importance of using critical theories such as constructivism in understanding new global issues like climate change induced migration. Constructivism allows researchers to view the world as complex, changing, and most importantly, socially constructed. The study of climate change induced migration benefits greatly from the approach: we can follow along and study a world that is literally changing all around us, we can explore how and why this change is occurring through the

study of identity, interests, and norms, and we can see who is contributing to this change, and how actors choose to deal with it.

This case study also challenges some of the problematic tendencies in the constructivist research program. While constructivists acknowledge a wide variety of actors in international society, most studies explore the way norms originate in a purely international context and that domestic actors either lack agency, or that domestic politics simply are not important in the norm lifecycle. Nevertheless, it is clear that the domestic sphere matters greatly in explaining not only the eventual institutionalization of norms, but also their initial creation. New Zealand is experiencing a period of normative change as climate change cases come before its courts, challenging the status quo in immigration and refugee policy. The state has been thrust into the change, and now has choices to make that are precedent setting, as the world looks on in anticipation of how it will lead on this issue. Despite ruling against the legal case for the “climate refugee” in the Court of Appeal, the appellant, Teitiota, is having his case re-heard with New Zealand’s Supreme Court (Jolliff, 2015). New Zealand cannot eschew its role, or the domestic and international interest it has generated. Climate change induced migration is an emerging issue that is only going to become more prominent over time. New Zealand is the first state to encounter it and how they respond has repercussions internationally.

Beyond adding to constructivist literature, the case study has filled a significant gap in climate change induced migration literature, which up until now has been sporadic and limited. This thesis provided an overview of the first experiences of climate migrants in international society. It has critically examined the language we use to speak of climate change induced migration and the extent to which we must be conscience of how terms

like “refugee” have legal and normative implications, which in turn effect policy, governance, and most importantly, those affected. As political scientists, we have an important role to perform in providing answers to these new questions, and guidance on how to proceed in the most appropriate way. This thesis has documented the challenges faced in the area of climate change induced migration, and has puzzled over how to overcome them. Thus, the work of this thesis has several implications, of which will now be discussed.

6.1 Implications

The findings of this research hold implications for all those who are affected by climate change, or those who will be. The effects of climate change are farther-reaching than the low-lying areas this case study examined. It will affect everyone in some way, and should not be cast aside as a problem to be dealt with in the “future.” It matters today. This research has implications regarding the language we use to speak of climate change induced migration, and on how we design governance to oversee the issue.

The research question specifically focused on the language of climate change induced migration: does it matter what we call these people? This thesis makes it abundantly clear that it does matter. The “refugee” label is politically attractive to advocates and to many less informed observers, because not only does it better capture the realities of these migrant’s experiences, it is seen as an institutional and legal “shortcut” to addressing the problem. The fact that the label does not “fit” under the existing norms of refugee law highlights the extent of the protection gap.

Furthermore, it clearly matters to the extent to which we should not construct these people as *threats*. In many cases, climate change induced migration is being framed as a security issue – both human security and military security (Barnett, 2003; Becklumb, 2013; Biermann and Boas, 2010; Brauch, 2008; Elliott, 2004; Dalby, 2013; Reuveny, 2007; Scheffran et al., 2012; Warner, 2010). While human security seeks to advocate for securing the rights and protections of the effected, viewing climate migrants as threats often raises concerns of military security: are our populations safe from the desperate masses fleeing their homes due to climate change? Yet, there is no evidence to suggest that this migration should become violent. Indeed, it confirms the importance of creating a strong framework that protects those affected, and alleviates sources of contention at home and in host states.

It is also vital to avoid constructing the climate migrant as the “other” (Baldwin, 2013; Hopf, 1998). We must see climate migrants as *people* and should include their voices and perspectives when chronicling their experiences and in creating and implementing measures to govern climate change induced migration. To summarize, all actors, including international organizations and the media, should be mindful of what we call the climate migrant. Standardized language will provide the basis for a framework on such migration, and will give shape to the “climate migrant’s” rights under any emerging norms on the issue. Given that it is necessary to eliminate a number of uncertainties which currently prohibit action on climate migration, we need to be clearer about the right way to speak about this challenge.

The findings of this research also provide suggestions on what ought to be considered when creating governance on climate change induced migration. As has been

discussed in Chapter 4, a new framework that oversees climate migrants should be attuned to the long-term interests of those affected (Adger, 2006; McAdam, 2014a), which are “assured through adequate attention to site selection, livelihoods, integration (identity and culture) and host communities” (UNHCR, 2014: 6). As well, we should be reminded of failed historical experiences with relocations, and that a loss of place is disruptive to a community and culture (UNHCR, 2014: 23). We should foster “migration with dignity,” as the former president of Kiribati has called for (Weiss, 2015). Furthermore, those in the position to be proactive in planning for such migration (e.g. states, international organizations, non-government organizations) should seek to implement these strategies ahead of time, voluntarily, rather than in the midst of crisis. We know what is coming, and like curbing our carbon emissions, we must take precautions against a changing climate. Lastly, while financial resources are vital to a number of factors in governing climate change induced migration, we should not equate the rights of migrants exclusively with monetary values when making decisions (Barnett and Adger, 2003: 331).

At the very minimum, it is my hope that this thesis helps climate migrants in answering the questions posed at the beginning of the chapter: “Who are we? Where are we? How do we relate to one another?” (UNHCR, 2014: 23).

6.2 Research Priorities

The study of climate change induced migration is only now emerging. Thus, possibilities for future research are endless. Despite the enormous gap to fill in understanding this migration, there are several research priorities which need our

attention. Building on the lessons of this study, future research should aim to include the voices of those directly affected by climate change. Most attention paid to climate change induced migration has neglected to include these voices, which in turn excludes valuable understandings of the issues faced and how to deal with them. In this study, knowing what those affected by climate change *want to be called or labelled* would have provided a transnational understanding of the emerging discourse and how it differs from what is occurring domestically in New Zealand. Likewise, where the affected are not engaged, it is important to ask questions such as “in whose interest is ‘this’?” As researchers, we should attempt to use the best practices available to explore issues through. Including the perspectives of those who our research focuses should be of paramount importance going forward in the climate migrant research program.

Building on the work of this thesis, it would also be useful to undertake discursive analysis, now and in the future, of other regions and states experiencing the impacts of climate change induced migration. Together, these domestic accounts can be used to see the bigger picture, providing a comprehensive overview of how the issue is unfolding globally. As well, discourse and norms are continuously evolving and require constant analysis (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998: 892). As climate change induced migration grows in prominence, it will be essential for researchers to explore its trajectory.

Climate change induced migration is not an easy phenomenon to study. It is complex, uncertain, and *new*. We lack past experiences to know how to deal with it. Alas, this is the very reason why we should, as political scientists, lead in understanding it. This is a rewarding and meaningful research program with much left to explore.

6.2 Final Thoughts

In conclusion, there are great implications of using the “refugee” discourse over alternatives like “migrant” to describe those who are forced to move because of the impacts of climate change in New Zealand. Apart from the label not being legally correct, it otherwise conveys something more complex than that of the traditional refugee. By adding in “climate” – the climate refugee takes shape: someone who is perhaps vulnerable, or desperate, or opportunistic, or simply unlucky due to their location in the world and the environmental forces brought upon them and who move because of these reasons. Nonetheless, the climate refugee is one that is changing as we learn more about the effects of climate change, and as we encounter those who identify as climate refugees or as something else all together. Thus, the language we use to describe these people will continue to evolve and as stands, New Zealanders, Tuvaluans and I-Kiribati are at the forefront of this change, discarding some labels, re-framing others, and constructing their own meanings to reflect these unknown realities.

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