

9 **Uncertainty and Fiji’s role in shifting norms on state-led responses to climate mobilities**

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Climate change is reshaping pathways of climate mobility. Despite the dawning reality of how the effects of climate change will shape human movement, there is still a great deal of uncertainty around how states should respond to and assist those forced to move.¹ Looking specifically at cases of climate-related internal movement in a Pacific Island state like Fiji, there is an extreme level of risk and uncertainty surrounding the issue. While climate-related hazards pose risks to the physical security of states and individuals, they can also pose risks to their ontological security – their specific identities through time and space. The particular issue that exists around internal climate mobilities² is the uncertain nature of the response that is required. Uncertainty here is complex. It is driven both by external sources – the uncertainty due to a lack of information about how climate-related hazards will continue to displace populations and reshape mobilities – and by human sources – too much information about what could be done in response to climate mobilities domestically, and a lack of shared meaning at the international level about what responses are most appropriate. In the language of this volume, however, it is an instance of extreme ontological uncertainty.

Matejova and Shesterinina in this volume define extreme uncertainty as that which ‘ruptures everyday routines and expectancies in major ways.’ We argue that in the case of climate-related displacement, future uncertainties – or the lack of sustainable, long-term prospects for at-risk individuals and communities – rupture the future expectations and routines for people, communities, and states. While the disruption may not be as temporally acute as some of the other examples discussed in this volume, the absence of long-term security and safety for at-risk populations certainly manifests as an extreme form of ontological uncertainty.

Our case is Fiji, which is already experiencing such forms of uncertainty. The significance of the Fijian case is that the government has made strides towards regulating this extreme uncertainty by contesting normative understandings of how state-level actors should respond to cases of climate mobilities. They have done this by creating some of the first policies in the world to specifically address instances of climate-related displacement and relocation. By creating clear guidance where previously none existed, Fijian authorities have been able to mitigate and regulate uncertainty by clarifying how states should respond when populations are at risk of climate-related displacement.

The Fijian response can be divided into four separate processes. The first traces how local communities within Fiji first experienced extreme uncertainty and sought out government assistance. The second process sees Fiji draw on existing analogous international norms to craft a response that addresses the issues and manages uncertainty for communities and the state. The third process sees this response formalized in an attempt to relegate the extreme uncertainty to the more manageable level of routine and inherent uncertainty, whilst maintaining Fiji's material and ontological security. Finally, the fourth process sees the practices and understandings within the Fijian response promoted internationally as a new standard of acceptable behavior in response to domestic climate-related mobilities. This final process looks to secure the identity of the state in the eyes of the international community and to validate their actions by having the practices accepted as part of a nascent climate mobilities norm regime.

We begin by exploring how climate change and climate mobilities have created extreme ontological uncertainty for Fiji, driven by both natural and human-made causes. But, in Fiji's case, the government has responded to this uncertainty by engaging in a process of norm entrepreneurship, seeking to recast a mixed range of international normative understandings within the climate mobilities issue area into a clear set of prescriptions to help guide the behavior of other states and decrease ontological uncertainty, a set of prescriptions which has led to a nascent norm regime. To do this, we provide an overview of current theorizing around processes of norm entrepreneurship and norm contestation before turning to an in-depth exploration of Fiji's efforts.

Ontological uncertainty and security

In the case of Fiji, and many other similar places in the Pacific and around the world, the risks stemming from anthropogenic climate breakdown and the hazards associated with it have caused an increase in uncertainty. Climate change poses both a current and future risk to residents of the Pacific, particularly those communities who reside in low-lying coastal areas. The rising sea levels, more frequent and intense flooding and erosion from storm surges, and salination of soil from increased salt-water intrusion all pose potentially catastrophic risks for these communities. However, despite the doomsday discourse that dominates discussions of climate-related displacement, the process is often slow. Communities move over years. Additionally, the relocations conducted in Fiji to date are measured in the number of households, rather than by the thousand. For those affected, the results are dire, and the number of people who could be at risk is potentially extremely high. But in the short term, the number of people participating in these early relocations is relatively low. What is uncertain is exactly how many people will be affected, when they will be affected, and how long they will have to plan for their movement once staying in their homes becomes untenable.

External sources of uncertainty are reinforced by human sources of uncertainty: the lack of a clear framework for responses at the international, regional, and local levels. For those who do move, the majority of them will move within their state

of citizenship or habitual residence. Therefore, because they have not crossed an international border, the Refugee Convention will not apply (McAdam 2012: 43). Instead, the most relevant source of rights and protections for people who are internally displaced by environmental hazards and disasters are the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (Kälin 2010: 92–93; Kolmannskog 2012: 39). While not a legally binding international agreement, the importance of the Guiding Principles lies in their acknowledgment of the nexus between human-made and natural hazards and forced displacement (Kälin 2008: 2).³ While these protections form the basis of a nascent internally displaced persons (IDP) protection regime, the protections are informal. Without formal protections, states and other actors are not legally bound to observe these rights (Orchard 2018: 7). Further, there are open questions about whether those uprooted by slow-onset hazards such as sea-level rise, as opposed to sudden-onset hazards such as tsunamis, are covered by the Principles and what the threshold is between voluntary and involuntary movements (Cohen and Bradley 2010: 108).

To add to this uncertainty, while the rights and protections owed to those forced to move are unclear, it is clear that states have an obligation under international law to do something to protect their citizens in these circumstances (Bellamy 2008: 619; Ferris 2011: 66, 203; McAdam and Ferris 2015: 158; UN General Assembly 1991; UN High Commissioner for Human Rights 2012: 226). Included within this is the obligation to take preventative action to protect rights, and assist when they are violated, as a result of exposure to environmental hazards (Ferris 2011: 212; McAdam and Ferris 2015: 158). Further, jurisprudence from the European Court of Human Rights has shown that states have a specific obligation to protect people from foreseeable harms that may occur because of environmental hazards (Burson et al. 2018: 384; Cohen and Bradley 2010: 126; Ferris 2009; UN High Commissioner for Human Rights 2012: 226). This forward-looking assessment of future harms has been reinforced by a 2020 decision by the UN Human Rights Committee, which found that states may have an obligation not to return people to situations in which their lives might be at risk because of climate-related factors (Human Rights Committee 2020).

This has created an almost perfect storm of issues and uncertainty for Pacific states to navigate. On the one hand, states lack basic information and cannot calculate exactly how climate change will alter environmental systems and processes, and what needs to be done to assist communities in adapting and surviving as these conditions precipitate more frequent and intense hazards. On the other hand, states also have too much information – a range of competing and ambiguous obligations that exist, driven by a range of different norms emerging from distinctly different contexts – which dilute shared understandings about what exactly should be done. It is the collision of these two factors that makes the continuation of politics as usual in Fiji almost impossible and breeds such extreme levels of uncertainty.

Uncertainty and climate-related disruptions can also undermine the ontological security of those at risk. Ontological security can broadly be understood as ‘how individuals, groups, states, and societies secure their sense of identity through time and space’ (Steele 2020). To remain secure in their sense of self, actors must

consider how their actions will affect their identity and gel with the autobiographical narrative they tell, taking account of traditional concerns like capacity, material costs, and interests (Steele 2008: 10, 68–72). The desire for ontological security can help us understand how and why states act as they do – particularly when they act in ways that clash with their interests, put their physical security at risk, or seem to be far beyond their means of implementation (Zarakol 2010: 19–20).

To preserve their ontological security, states use narratives to ensure autobiographical continuity is maintained during periods of upheaval and crisis. The stories that are told, both domestically and internationally, allow required policy changes to be justified and reconciled with the practices that have come before (Subotić 2016: 611, 616). While norms serve as a behavior guide for actors with a given identity, these autobiographical narratives serve to (re)construct the identity of the actors practicing the norms (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998). Crises can disrupt existing norms – as Legro (2000: 420) has argued, they can show ‘the old ideational structure is inadequate thus causing its collapse.’ But such periods can also create windows of opportunity when new norms can be created (Berger 1996: 331; Orchard 2014; Price 1998: 622). In such a situation, the state can weather a period of crisis by adapting its autobiographical narratives through a process of normative change, with new norms clarifying inconsistencies and establishing new behavior guides. Norm change can reanchor states’ perceptions of ontological security by making them surer about who they are, what they should do, and what processes to follow in similar crises.

For communities in Fiji that have important spiritual and cultural connections to land and place, the prospect of having to move is extremely confronting. Not only are there material issues and financial costs in moving, but there are also identity costs – at the individual, community, and state level – to consider. Therefore, managing the extreme uncertainty around what will happen to those who may have to move because of climate change is an issue of both physical and ontological security. A clear normative guide around how and when states should act in instances of potential climate mobilities would help routinize this uncertainty and give the actors involved the tools, knowledge, and meaning to be able to manage the issue now and into the future. But how can Fiji, as a relatively small Pacific Island state, create such normative guides to reduce its overall levels of uncertainty? In the next section, we explore how International Relations (IR) constructivism as an approach details the process of norm change before returning to the case of Fiji.

Uncertainty and the power of norm entrepreneurship

As a theoretical approach, IR constructivism has focused on the role that “social facts” – such as norms, standards, rules, and ideas – can play alongside material facts in explaining political decisions (Ruggie 1993; Searle 1995), leading to an understanding of structures and agents operating in a mutually constitutive manner (Wendt 1999). An early focus was on so-called norm entrepreneurship, with entrepreneurs seen as critical for explaining the processes of norm emergence and change. In Finnemore and Sikkink’s widely cited norm life cycle model, norm

entrepreneurs played an important early role as agents who would first place an issue onto the international agenda through their efforts to call ‘attention to issues or even “create” issues by using language that names, interprets, and dramatizes them’ (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998: 897). Framing was crucial for these calls, ‘the conscious strategic efforts by groups of people to fashion shared understandings of the world and of themselves that legitimate and motivate collective action’ (Benford and Snow 2000: 614; McAdam et al. 1996: 6). These frames need resonance, determined by the frame’s own credibility and the credibility of the actor using them, and salience with the receiving audience to be effective (Benford and Snow 2000: 620–622).

These initial accounts of entrepreneurs, however, quickly proved to be problematic. The conception of agency is narrow, with entrepreneurs playing a role only in the process of norm emergence before being replaced by early adopting states who become ‘norm leaders’ and socialize other states to follow them through a variety of mechanisms that can include legitimation effects, self-esteem effects, and the pressure for conformity (Coleman 2013: 166; Finnemore and Sikkink 1998: 901–902). The third stage was similarly dominated by states. Once a critical mass of states adopts a new norm, it passes a threshold or tipping point (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998: 896–906). After this point, the new norm is so widely accepted that it is ‘internalized by actors and achieve a “taken-for-granted” quality that makes conformance with the norm almost automatic’ (Risse and Sikkink 1999: 15).

Norm entrepreneurship also presumed an outside-in process, with outside norm entrepreneurs seeking to influence states only at the early stages, rather than including a range of actors such as key figures within governments and even states themselves as playing such a role (Davies and True 2017; Orchard 2014; Orchard and Gillies 2015: 491). Finally, rather than being led by interests, early accounts conceptualized norm entrepreneurs ‘as altruistic, principled actors who are not primarily guided by their own interests’ (Wunderlich 2020: 29), committed to the ideas and values embodied in the norms even if those norms had ‘no effect on their well-being’ (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998: 898). This idea of moral authority was seen as critical for the main set of actors that were being viewed as norm entrepreneurs: transnational civil society (Price 2003). But even such actors were found to operate out of self-interest as well as principled beliefs (Ron et al. 2005), engaging in “agenda vetting” to legitimate some new claims and ignore others (Carpenter 2011). Thus, Wunderlich argues norm entrepreneurs as well as other actors need to be understood as acting in both interest and norm-driven ways (Wunderlich 2020).

These accounts presumed that norm entrepreneurs acted as a positive force in another sense as well, providing unified advocacy to push new normative understandings. While this did occur in some cases such as with respect to the landmines convention (Price 1998), quite rapidly the literature identified these efforts as existing within a competitive environment. Norm entrepreneurs compete with other entrepreneurs with their own frames to convince states to adopt particular understandings (Krebs and Jackson 2007: 44–45; Payne 2001). Other groups, “antipreneurs,” may not put forward new understandings, but instead ‘defend the entrenched normative status quo against challenges’ by seeking to refute claims

and undermining any new norms (Bloomfield 2016: 321). A third group – norm saboteurs – may seek to undermine efforts to adhere to existing norms and thereby undermine the existing status quo (Schneiker 2021: 107). Such efforts may mean that wins are not possible. Opposition may cause potential changes to be stymied, stalled, or blocked (Bob 2012: 32).

Agency and norm contestation

So far, our critique has focused on the need for a more expansive understanding of norm entrepreneurship in theorizing norm creation and change. Equally important, however, has been a growing critique of how norm change itself is conceptualized. Initial constructivist work tended to assume that norms were created with a fixed identity, a ‘stability assumption’ in other words (Wiener 2014: 23), and that their process of emergence would lead to a clear endpoint, culminating in an internationally institutionalized norm that was internalized by states (McKeown 2009: 9). This notion of a fixed norm is problematic because it removes agency from other actors, particularly the capacity of societal agents at the international and domestic levels to understand, challenge, and recreate a given norm in different forms rather than just being norm takers, and it prioritized the international level over domestic level actors.

Instead, how norm change is conceptualized has changed, with Krook and True (2012: 104) arguing that all norms exist as ‘works in progress’ subject to contestation, cooptation, drive, accretion, and reversal. This reflects the “dual quality of norms” as Wiener (2007: 49) puts it: ‘they are both structuring and socially constructed through interaction in a context. While stable over particular periods, they always remain flexible by definition.’ In this way, norms can be considered to legitimize a range of policy options, goals, and means – not just one course of action (Klotz 1995: 461–462). This flexibility allows norms to ‘simplify choices’ and reduce ‘the complexity of choice-situations in which actors find themselves,’ without being narrowly prescriptive (Kratochwil 1989: 10). But, as the volume’s introduction notes, norms can also be an important source of shared meanings for actors and thereby contribute to lessened uncertainty. If norms are so malleable, then, how do shared meanings persist through change?

In brief, through the process of contestation, norms may change but also gain legitimacy and clarity. Let us first turn to how this process of contestation works at the theoretical level before illustrating it by exploring Fiji’s norm entrepreneurship around climate mobilities. Contestation, following Wiener (2018: 2), is a societal practice in which rules, regulations, or procedures are critically questioned. This can occur either explicitly, such as through contention, objection, questioning, or deliberation, or implicitly such as through neglect, negation, or disregard. Through contestation, stakeholders either object to or critically engage with norms. Objections, or reactive contestations, reflect activities such as protest, rejection, negation, or accusation. Critical engagement, or proactive contestation, by contrast, sees agents creating both normality and normative effects through that engagement. Proactive contestations, in other words, are constitutive: through the process

of contestation, legitimacy gaps can be identified and filled, thereby increasing the overall legitimacy of the norm (Wiener 2014: 2–3).

How a norm is implemented at the domestic level can become critical to how it is understood. The implementation process sees formal legal and policy mechanisms introduced to routinize compliance and practices, but this creates new arenas for interpretation and contestation of the norm by relevant actors (Betts and Orchard 2014: 3; see also Stimmer and Wisken 2019: 521).⁴ Implementation will shape how the actor understands the norm. In some cases, the norm will be accepted intact. In other cases, actors will fit the norm into their own specific understandings and then communicate it back up to the international level (Acharya 2013: 469; Job and Shesterinina 2014: 144),⁵ leading to either reactive or proactive contestations focusing either on its core validity claim or on how it should apply to a given situation (Deiteloff and Zimmermann 2020: 56–57; Wiener 2018: 13). It can also lead to a third type of contestation, interpretive contestation, whereby an actor has ‘*unknowingly* adopted a different interpretation of what a given norm means’ (Orchard and Wiener, forthcoming). As opposed to the other types of contestations, this is not deliberate and may remain hidden or opaque to other actors. Thus, we can understand the process of norm contestation occurring at two levels: at the domestic level within the state (or within other corporate actors such as international organizations) and at the international level, with the ability for specific contestations of a given norm to be transmitted from one level to the other. The process of contestation itself helps clarify the norm and increase the norm’s legitimacy. In turn, by serving as an effective behavior guide for states, such a norm reduces their level of extreme uncertainty.

Finally, so far, we have focused on how individual norms are introduced by norm entrepreneurs and contested. Yet, norms rarely exist in isolation. Other structures are needed in order to ‘emphasize the way in which behavioral rules are structured together and interrelate’ (Donnelly 2012: 625; Finnemore and Sikkink 1998: 891). Whether referred to as ‘norm clusters’ (Lantis and Wunderlich 2018: 571) or ‘regimes’ (Orchard 2014: 241), these structures matter because they bundle together what might otherwise be disparate norms. Such structures, therefore, provide a clear sense of the scope of international behavior required and how states and other actors *should* deal with a particular problem. Linkages created by a regime bring an increased regularity to state practices than would otherwise be the case; they ‘frame the nature and scope of a given problem and provide potential response scripts’ (Orchard 2014: 241). Thus, while we have previously referred to individual norms as serving as behavior guides for states, in practice it tends to be these wider norm regimes that states end up following, such as how the international refugee regime, rather than individual norms within it, offers a guide to how states should provide protection to refugees (Betts 2009; Orchard 2014).

While there are clear norm regimes around issues such as internal displacement, refugees, humanitarianism, a regime is yet to clearly coalesce around climate mobilities, and particularly those mobilities that occur within states. The lack of a clear norm regime means there is uncertainty due to a lack of directly applicable information, a wealth of potentially applicable information, and because there is

no clear agreement on how existing norms should be understood when applied to climate mobilities. Thus, the question becomes: how can a set of norms be created to lower this level of uncertainty?

Fiji, climate mobilities, and managing extreme uncertainties

The government and residents of Fiji are facing the confluence of risks exacerbated by climate change and the lack of clarity surrounding how states should respond to climate mobilities at home. The changes in everyday political practices that have already occurred at the state and community levels, plus the rupturing of future expectations, render this situation one of extreme ontological uncertainty for Fiji. While the uncertainty created by climate change itself is not something that individual states in the Pacific can control – despite their best efforts – Fiji has sought to shape a new understanding of norms around climate mobilities in order to reduce the uncertainty around acceptable and expected responses. The following section explores how, through a series of four processes, Fijian actors have attempted to manage and regulate this uncertainty – effectively acting as norm entrepreneurs and creating the foundations of a nascent norm regime on climate mobilities in the process.

The uncertainty around climate mobilities in Fiji is not just a future concern – it is already disrupting the patterns of everyday life for affected communities, creating extreme uncertainty. Fiji has already relocated – fully or partially – six communities because of climate-related factors. These include the much-publicized relocations of Vunidogoloa and Narikoso (Kumar 2021). In addition to these relocations, the government has identified more than 40 communities in need of immediate relocation and over 800 others who will need some form of assistance in the near future (Piggott-McKellar and McMichael 2021: 106).⁶ The drivers behind this mobility are not limited to sea-level rise but also encompass related issues like worsening erosion, salt-water intrusion into farming lands and water sources, and increasingly destructive storm surges.

The Fijian response to the extreme uncertainty created by climate-related hazards and their effects on human mobility can be broken down into four separate processes. These trace the process of how uncertainty is experienced and managed from communities first being affected by climate-related hazards and requesting assistance; through government actors stretching, translating, and contesting potentially applicable norms to craft appropriate responses; the formalization of this response to regularize previously extreme uncertainty; and finally the international promotion of this understanding of how states should respond to climate mobilities, marking the emergence of a nascent norm regime around state-led protection of those at risk of climate-related displacement.

Process 1: Community responses to extreme uncertainty

Unsurprisingly, the first Fijians to experience the extreme uncertainty of potentially having to leave their homes because of climate-related hazards were those living in low-lying coastal communities. The first two state-sponsored community

relocations due to climate change to be carried out in Fiji were the coastal communities of Vunidogoloa and Narikoso. In both cases, it was the communities that first reached out to government officials to request help.

Vunidogoloa is a village of around 150 people on Fiji's second-largest island of Vanua Levu. Originally, the village consisted of 26 houses located only meters from the shoreline of Natewa Bay. In recent years, the community had experienced widespread damage to homes, infrastructure, and subsistence gardens from recurrent inundation and saltwater intrusion. To adapt to the rising seas and changing weather patterns, the community had abandoned houses several times, rebuilding homes further from the shoreline and raising them off the ground, making them more resilient. Several sea walls were also constructed to protect the village; however, they were progressively broken down and eventually had a detrimental effect as they prevented water from receding during flooding events (Charan et al. 2017: 23–24; McNamara and des Combes 2015, 316–317; Tronquet 2015: 122–128). As one villager said,

We were trying to adapt by our own so that we don't have to leave our land and each time the sea came to our doorsteps, we moved a little away from it until it became so worse that we knew we had to relocate.

In 2006, community elders agreed they had run out of time and options for keeping the village in its existing location (Charan et al. 2017: 24). To manage uncertainty and ensure security, they decided to relocate the community, although they recognized that they did not have the capacity to do this autonomously and reached out to the government for assistance.

The story of Narikoso is a similar one. Located on Ono Island, Narikoso is a 27 household-strong village with a population of around 100. Between 2010 and 2016, the coastline receded around 15 meters due to erosion (Green 2016: 818). Numerous attempts had been made to deal with the changes wrought by rising seas in the past. However, actions such as the construction of a sea wall in the 1960s had detrimental effects on the community's ability to withstand hazards, as during construction mangroves and coastal vegetation that had provided a natural buffer were removed and struggled to recover. Similar to Vunidogoloa, once the sea wall collapsed, it exacerbated flooding in the village (Green 2016: 818). The community made a direct appeal to the prime minister in 2011 and a formal request to the government for assistance with adaptation works the following year (Barnett and McMichael 2018: 345; Edwards 2014: 214). Later in 2012, initial works to relocate the seven most at-risk households began – although this process experienced repeated and significant setbacks (Kürschner 2017).

Process 2: State-level responses to extreme uncertainty

The communities' requests for assistance set a second process in motion – the reaction of the state to the uncertainty created by a lack of clear, established legal or normative guidance around exactly how to respond to this emerging issue. In

2012, we see the first concerted efforts of the Fijian state apparatus to engage with and attempt to manage the uncertainty around climate mobilities. The initial work for the relocations of Vunidogoloa and Narikoso both began during this time. Fiji was also struck by Tropical Cyclone Evan in 2012, which displaced 8,400 people across the country (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre 2013, 30). Cyclone-related damage wrought by storm surges led to 19 households from the community of Denimanu being slated for relocation away from the shorefront (Martin et al. 2018: 4), and a landslide also displaced the community of Tukuraki who required relocation assistance (Tabe 2019: 219).

These relocations have not run smoothly; communities reported frustrating and traumatic experiences throughout the process. In the flagship Vunidogoloa relocation, community figures claim they were forced to self-fund over half the cost of the relocation (Rika 2018). Additionally, despite lengthy consultations with government officials and contractors, the finished houses did not include kitchens as promised. Residents were left to build these themselves, repurposing equipment from the old houses (Piggott-McKellar et al. 2019: 140). There were similar issues in the partial relocation of Denimanu. While the new site was officially opened in January of 2014, residents claim the project was not fully completed until 2016 (Martin et al. 2018: 5; Bua Provincial Council 2018). Alongside the lengthy delay, the community expressed reservations that only around half of the community was relocated, as well as concerns about housing construction, drainage in the new village, inadequate sewage septic tanks, and the increased risk of landslides at the new site (Martin et al. 2018: 4; Piggott-McKellar et al. 2019: 8, 10–12). In response, the government acknowledged that it was learning from past mistakes as it moved forward on both the policy development and implementation fronts.

Setting the stage for the third process, the government also began building the groundwork for policy development in this space during this time. They held the first National Summit for Building Resilience to Climate Change in 2012, which identified the gaps, concerns, and challenges of managing climate-related mobilities – and specifically planned relocations – within their existing frameworks (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation 2012). Similar meetings and consultations were conducted throughout the drafting process of what would become Fiji's Planned Relocation and Displacement Guidelines. Here, the lack of a clear international framework was an important motivating factor – in 2017, Fijian Ambassador to the United Nations Nazhat Shameem Khan acknowledged that it had been difficult to develop country-specific guidelines when there was an absence of international experiences to draw upon (Khan 2017). In this case, rather than preventing action, the uncertainty of the situation motivated state-level actors to act in a way that would potentially reduce uncertainty in the future.

While there were no existing policies that could be directly drawn upon during the development process, Fijian authorities did lean on international expertise and support to help them write, promote, and implement their guidelines. Both the Planned Relocation and Displacement Guidelines were financially supported through European Union funding funneled through the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development and the German Development

Fund. Professor Cosmin Corendea, an advisor whose services were provided by the German Development Fund, played a leading role in authoring both guidelines. Further expertise across the two sets of guidelines was provided by UNHCR, the UN Development Programme, UN Women, UN Officer for Disaster Risk Reduction, International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Platform on Disaster Displacement, and several regional organizations like the Pacific Community, Pacific Islands Development Forum, and the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (Ministry of Economy 2018, 2019). Therefore, while Fiji was not able to wholesale implement existing international norms to create their policies around climate mobilities, there was a degree of translation, localization, contestation, and stretching of existing norms during the implementation process.

Process 3: Managing uncertainty on the domestic front

The finalization of policies like the guidelines shows how in the third process Fiji sought to formalize and routinize their response. The lessons from initial relocations and principles from existing applicable norms were combined into several key documents. Alongside the Planned Relocation and Displacement Guidelines, Fiji also established the Climate Relocation and Displaced People's Trust Fund in 2019, and wrote these policies, and others like them, into law with the passing of the Climate Change Act in 2021.

This formalization mitigated the extreme nature of the uncertainty. While climate change still poses the same risks, there is now a degree of certainty around how state actors will respond to them – now and into the future. Reducing uncertainty by developing regulated responses effectively reduces both the material and ontological security risks to the state. The material risk is reduced by having clear, effective plans in place to respond when hazards occur, or communities are at risk of harm. The ontological security threat is reduced as these plans reinforce and extend the self-narrative that Fiji has told itself domestically and others internationally.

Extreme uncertainty can create practical crises but also identity crises – state-level actors can have their identities eroded if they are not able to match policy and practice to the narratives that they have previously talked about themselves. In Fiji's case, they have framed themselves as leaders in the fight for climate justice and as strong advocates for setting emissions-reduction targets that would protect the future of low-lying communities, particularly in the Pacific. Inaction on domestic climate mobilities then would create a rupture in this identity, leading to a reduction in ontological security. The formalization of these policy responses to climate mobilities has allowed Fiji to create a degree of certainty in this area – to the extent that they know how state-level actors should respond to climate mobilities, and that the identity and history of Fiji make it likely they will continue to strive to protect climate-vulnerable communities in the future.

In addition to giving government actors guidance around how to engage with communities, this formalization also gives communities reassurances that assistance will be offered, and they will have a future, in some form, even if movement – whether relocation or migration – becomes inevitable. These policies have

established standards of appropriate behavior for Fijian government actors, and their associates, in situations of climate mobilities. By creating and formalizing this collection of practices, Fiji has taken the first steps towards establishing a nascent norm regime around climate mobilities and protection. This, in turn, has the potential to solidify understandings of how states should respond to climate mobilities, reducing the level of uncertainty from extreme to routine.

Process 4: Promoting norms and identity narratives internationally

The final process is how these formalized policies and practices are then promoted internationally. This promotion has a two-fold effect. Firstly, it secures Fiji's identity in the eyes of the world. Secondly, it floats the idea of these practices being accepted as the standard of behavior in this space.

Fiji has perhaps fortuitously promoted these understandings of how to respond to climate mobilities at a time when extra space has been created for actors of all levels to act as norm entrepreneurs, advancing contestations of how climate mobilities should be managed. The uncertainty of whether and how existing norms apply to the emerging issue area of climate mobilities created one level of opportunity to advance new norms and behavior guides in this space. The space opened up exponentially, though, when the USA retreated from its traditional position as a norm leader on issues of climate change and human mobility under the Trump Administration (Selby 2019: 471–473). It is in this context that Fiji has promoted its various policies to the world.

The Fijian government has been strategic in its promotion of these ideas. Key policies are always launched to coincide with major international events – both sets of guidelines were launched during the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change Conference of the Parties events, while their Trust Fund was launched during the 74th UN General Assembly in 2019. In part because of its advocacy for these issues, Fiji was invited to host COP23. UN Secretary-General António Guterres subsequently praised their 'leadership in addressing issues of human mobility and climate change' during a visit to Fiji in 2019 (Guterres 2019).

While the final process of norm promotion is still in progress, it seems that the international community is receiving these practices – and potential norms – well. For a practice to become a norm it has to be accepted as a standard of behavior by the targeted community of actors. Regionally, there is symmetry between the policies of Vanuatu and Fiji that shows a tacit endorsement of each other's paths of action. New Zealand was also the first state to contribute to Fiji's relocation trust fund, which can be interpreted as a signal of their endorsement of Fiji's policies and practices as well. Most significant, though, is the reception of these practices by the USA. Under the Biden Administration, the USA has committed to reengaging on issues of climate change and human mobility. A taskforce report responding to Biden's executive order on Rebuilding and Enhancing Programs to Resettle Refugees and planning for the Impact of Climate Change on Migration suggested that the US government should contribute to Fiji's trust fund in addition

to also working with IOM to replicate the Fijian model in the Americas where states are facing similar issues (Ober et al. 2021: 31).

The reception of and responses to Fiji's actions seem to suggest that a nascent norm regime around climate mobilities may be coalescing around practices such as those promoted by Fiji. Through a process of norm circulation, Fiji has acted as an entrepreneur to stretch and contest a range of existing norms and form them into a new regime to address an emerging crisis. Whether these become widely institutionalized and implemented remains to be seen, though initial signs show that the international community seems to believe it is the best of the behavior guides that have been advanced so far.

Conclusion

The climate crisis and its effects on low-lying communities in the Pacific has created a situation of extreme uncertainty. The uncertainty in the Fijian case stems not just from the lack of information around exactly how climate change will continue to impact states in the Pacific, but also the lack of clarity around how the wealth of existing norms around state protection obligations and the rights of displaced persons may apply in the context of climate mobilities. The collision of these underlying factors has resulted in an instance of extreme ontological security that has disrupted everyday political life in Fiji, ruptured future expectations, and reshaped patterns of behavior around how state-level actors engage with individuals and communities who are at risk of displacement from climate-related factors. In an attempt to manage and regularize this uncertainty, Fijian authorities have developed, implemented, and promoted a suite of policies on addressing climate mobilities.

This has been a bottom-up process, with local communities first accepting the need to relocate, leading to the implementation of national-level policies that Fiji has then promoted globally. Fiji has, therefore, used the mechanisms of norm entrepreneurship to create and promote new shared understandings of how actors should respond to issues surrounding internal climate mobilities. In doing so, they have effectively reduced the extreme uncertainty to regular and inherent levels. Fiji is not what would be viewed as a traditional norm entrepreneur. The challenges to its physical and ontological security mean it is very self-interested in improving the global response, rather than seeking to behave altruistically. Further, Fiji is a clear example of state-led norm entrepreneurship, which has given Fiji the ability to create and contest norms in ways no nonstate entrepreneur could have, including hosting COP23.

This is a process that remains in flux. Recent steps by regional neighbors like the Solomon Islands and New Zealand to adopt similar approaches, as well as endorsements from international organizations suggest that Fiji's norm-leading efforts have been well received by the international community. If these practices are widely adopted in the future, the establishment of these policies by Fiji could well become viewed as a critical moment in the birth of a now nascent norm regime around climate mobilities. Through its norm entrepreneurship, Fiji will have improved its

resilience capabilities and, therefore, its physical security, secured its identity as a climate leader, and developed a clear behavior guide to increase certainty around acceptable courses of action – potentially reducing future uncertainties to manageable, routine levels.

Notes

- 1 See Kelman in this volume for a broader discussion of uncertainty, climate change, and disasters.
- 2 We adopt the term climate mobilities rather than displacement, as it more fully captures ‘multiple forms, directions and multiplicities of human movement [and immobility] in the context of climate change’ (Boas et al. 2019: 901).
- 3 IDPs are defined as ‘persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border’ (Kälin 2008: 2).
- 4 In some cases, implementation simply does not happen, either because a state is unable to implement it due to domestic opposition or a lack of capacity, or because it has no actual interest in complying with the norm (Orchard 2018). Stimmer and Wisken refer to this as a form of behavioral contestation (Stimmer and Wisken 2019: 520–522).
- 5 This can be either in terms of the basic understanding that a norm creates, in terms of how they understand the application of the norm to a given situation, or the norm may be ‘stretched,’ either interpreting the norm as applying more widely to a specific situation than by another actor, or as being included in a specific situation for which the norm generally is not seen to apply (Betts 2013: 31).
- 6 As Piggott-McKellar and McMichael (2021: 106) note, the official number of sites identified by government officials for relocation vary according to source and change over time. Around 40 communities in need of relocation and 800 at risk of needing assistance in the future seem to be the most oft-quoted figures, however.

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