

## **‘Floods’ of Migrants, Flows of Care: Between Climate Displacement and Global Care Chains**

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### **Introduction**

‘If climate change makes our country uninhabitable, we will march with our wet feet into your living rooms’. With these words, uttered out of deep frustration over two decades ago, Bangladeshi scientist and climate negotiator Atiq Rahman laid down a challenge to the early industrialising nations to take responsibility for their role in rendering the lives of the world’s poorer people ever more precarious (Rahman cited in Roberts and Parks, 2007: 2). Rahman has not been alone in expressing concerns over the possibility that climate change will set large numbers of people on the move. In the wake of long-standing concerns with migration induced by environmental degradation, discourses on ‘climate refugees’ crystallised in the 1990s around fears that sea level rise, drought and extreme weather events were likely to displace millions of people if global warming could not be brought under control (Bettini, 2013).

While this rather linear equation of warming climate with mass mobilisation has subsequently been complicated by more discriminating accounts of the motivations, pathways and magnitudes of migration, the risks accompanying both slow and abrupt climatic change have not been abrogated. Quite the opposite. There is growing evidence that climate change is already adding to processes of ‘expulsion’ (Sassen, 2014) that are making agrarian livelihoods more precarious in

many tropical, arid and semi-arid regions - and in this way contributing significantly to rural-urban migration. Looking ahead, we would do well to consider recent scientific counsel that ‘upgraded’ the 2°C mark from ‘dangerous’ to ‘extremely dangerous’ (Anderson and Bows, 2011) and the forecast that each degree Celsius of temperature increase will eventually generate a three metre increase in sea level – which without new defences would inundate land currently occupied by some 375 million people (Strauss, 2015). COP 21, the latest round of global climate negotiations, may have been hailed as a breakthrough in global climate governance, but its collective commitments to reduced carbon emission – even if compliance were assured – would push the planet towards 3°C of warming. And in this way, scenarios that in the 1990s seemed extreme or catastrophic are now becoming the bottom line for the changes expected to materialize in coming decades.

The profound sense of injustice spurring Rahman’s intervention has been an untameable motive in climate politics, enshrined in the idea that the nations or regions most likely to suffer the harmful effects of climate change tend to be those who have historically benefitted least from the consumption of greenhouse gas emitting fuels (Roberts and Parks, 2007). By showing how energy intensive life-styles are directly implicated with debilitating climate change in distant regions, critical commentators have sought to encourage those in more privileged regions to take greater responsibility for their actions and to care more for those they are endangering (Bond, 2012; Ciplet, Roberts, & Khan, 2015). In a related sense, it has been argued for some time now that the path to workable climate governance might be smoothed if Northern powers were to relax their self-interested bargaining stances and go to more trouble to ‘demonstrate solidarity, empathy, kindness, friendship, and loyalty to would-be co-operators’ (Roberts and Parks, 2007: 229).

For all the laudable intentions of the quest to ‘level the playing field’ of climate causality and impact, ‘care’ itself is a complex and often paradoxical concept. Its connections and tensions with ‘justice’ or ‘inequality’ are still relatively underexplored in debates about climate change and its

impact on mobility. Critical theorists of care have been encouraging us to be attentive to the way that caring relations and practices themselves are complicated by deeply structured global inequality. Who cares for whom, and whose care gains most recognition and reward in an intensively but unevenly globalising world are pressing and often perplexing questions – with important implications for responding to the challenges of weather and climate (Clark and Stevenson, 2003). But not necessarily in ways we might assume. To offer an example, we have indeed recently witnessed considerable numbers of South Asians, many of whom were of Bangladeshi heritage, marching wet-footed through the streets and living rooms of Lancashire, Cumbria and south Scotland. They arrived not as displaced people, however, but as emergency relief squads responding to the widespread flooding that accompanied December 2015's Storm Desmond. Muslim civil society organisations in the north of England, already experienced in responding to extreme events overseas were able to mobilise quickly to provide food, supplies and clean-up assistance to flood-struck communities closer to home (York, 2015).

Perhaps this should no longer come as a surprise. For years now, the roll call of UK 'flood heroes' – those who have gone beyond the call of duty to assist others in need - has regularly included members of the country's migrant communities. And providing relief during extreme hydro-meteorological events is but a small - if high profile - subset of the extensive and heterogeneous contribution these groups make to the nation's care-work. As Yasmin Gunaratnam reminds us:

It is more than likely that whenever we have been in need of care, or will require it in the future, it will be provided in some part by migrant and minoritized workers.

These caregivers deliver our children, tend to our parents and grandparents, cook our food, clean our hospitals and bear witness to our naked emotional distress' (2013: 14)

Taking cues from feminist ethics of care and phenomenologies of embodied inter-relating, care can be seen as a kind of give-and-take between bodies, or what Roslyn Diprose (2002) refers to

as ‘inter-corporeality’. There is something at once remarkable and very ordinary about caring practices – in the sense that these very exchanges between bodies function as deep and pervasive ‘load-bearing structures of society’ (Vaughan, 2002: 98). As Diprose would have it, the ‘giving’ of inter-corporeality is where agency and practice is born. But by the same logic, she insists, it is also the premier site of forgetting and under-recognition: the differentiated valuation of the giving and caring capacities of some bodies over those other bodies being the very foundation of social injustice (2002: 69, 9). Or as Genevieve Vaughan puts it, such inter-corporeal gifts ‘travel upward in hierarchies, bearing with them the implication of value and power of those above over those below’ (2002: 111).

In this regard, as Gunaratnam and fellow theorists of care have noted, the presence in the UK and other Northern nations of a great many care-workers – the majority of whom have come at some point from lower income economies - reflects complex global conditions in which wealth and opportunity are deeply stratified and ‘bodily vulnerability is unevenly fabricated, distributed and defended against’ (Gunaratnam, 2013: 14). It speaks of a world in which mobilisations of care most often go against this gradient of vulnerability: flowing from zones of relative want to sites of comparative comfort and sufficiency. In critical social and spatial analysis, the concept of ‘global care chains’ has been developed as a way of understanding these uneven relations of care. Global care chains, as defined by Arlie Hochschild, refer to ‘a series of personal links between people across the globe based on the paid or unpaid work of caring’ (2000: 131) – in ways that draw attention to the gendered and often racialised creation and distribution of value in the trans-local provision of caring work (see also Yeates, 2004; Raghuram, 2012). Such an understanding of the structuring of care relations in the contemporary world, we will be arguing, has much to offer when it comes to evaluating emerging policy directives around climate displacement – and for grappling with the broader question of climate justice.

Like climate science itself, global policy-making finds it difficult to descend from high levels of abstraction and generalization to the grainy particularity and embodied experience of daily life

(see Jasanoff, 2011). In this paper, we make an effort to move back and forth between more macro scales of political discourse and the more micro-level, everyday kinetics of climate stress, displacement and attempts to stay put. Our argument hinges on the idea that responding to climate change is as much about offering care - and providing support to existing and emerging care relations – as it is about the provision of ‘technical’ or ‘economic’ assistance. As is also the case with more conventionally ‘practical’ responses to changing climate, the epicentre of these relations of care is deep within the most exposed and vulnerable communities. Care, we insist, takes shape through inherited and evolving practices at grassroots level, in both exceptional and everyday contexts (and in an ‘everyday’ that is becoming increasingly ‘extreme’).

The immediate concern motivating this paper is that strategically important developments in policy with regard to climate-induced displacement look to have potentially adverse – indeed, counter-productive – consequences for the provision of care *where it is most needed*. Reviewing the climate change and migration policy landscape, we identify a recent shift from an ‘alarmist’ and environmental determinist framing to a more flexible approach that views climate migration as a potentially positive adaptation to changing conditions. However, what look to be more hospitable and caring policies, we suggest, actually embody sorting mechanisms that will exclude many of the most vulnerable. We then turn to accounts of ‘ground level’ responses to both chronic and rapid onset climate events – with examples that include flooding in Jakarta, Dhaka and Mumbai and super typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines - in order to offer a sense of how caring practices actually emerge under conditions of environmental stress. Bringing the arguments of these two sections together, with attention to the unequal gendering of care, we propose that climate migration policy is becoming disturbingly complicit with trends in the global economy of care-work that effectively syphon the most ‘able’ carers away from where they are *most needed* to places where need may be *least* urgent. In this light, we suggest, *there is an urgent need to bring together the critical analysis of global climate displacement with critical studies of global care chains*.

Along the way, we ask questions about the very nature of caring practices. If caring relations

might be seen as emerging out of a kind of embodied attentiveness to the appeal of others who are exposed or laid low (Dikeç, et al, 2009), so too do effective caring practices require structure and organization. With this in mind, we conclude with some considerations of what climate policies might look like that seek that to support care-giving where it is most needed – while also reflecting on some of the inherent tensions between the ‘spontaneous’ offering of care and the need for institutional or infrastructural support.

### **Protecting Climate Refugees or Mobilizing the Labour Force?**

Among the decisions taken at the Climate Summit held in Paris in December 2015 was the establishment of a task force in order to ‘develop recommendations for integrated approaches to avert, minimize and address displacement related to the adverse impacts of climate change’ (UNFCCC, 2015). This was the apex of a long story, with climate-induced displacement and migration featuring in successive reports by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 1992, 2007, 2014) and entering the agendas of a number of major players in climate politics and governance (e.g. Council of the European Union, 2008; Greenpeace, 2008; Stern, 2007). A wealth of studies has offered insights and detailed accounts of the rise of environmental and climate migration in international policy arenas and the emergence of a series of competing discourses (Hall, 2016; Ransan-Cooper, Farbotko, McNamara, Thornton, & Chevalier, 2015).

Early engagements tended towards alarmist predictions of catastrophe-driven mass migration, triggering proposals to ‘secure’ potential host nations against anticipated influxes of so-called ‘climate refugees’ (e.g. Myers, 1993, 2005; Reuveny, 2007). Basically, the idea was that the impacts of climate change, above a threshold, would make vulnerable areas uninhabitable – thereby effecting mass displacement. This in turn built on a mechanistic and mono-causal model of migration – that for a long time had the effect of alienating migration scholars from debates on the climate-mobility linkages. While largely discredited in academic circles (Black, 2001; Castles, 2002; Farbotko & Lazrus, 2012; Oels, 2010), framing in terms of mass displacement, climate

refugees and security has been very prominent in advocacy (Christian Aid, 2007; Environmental Justice Foundation, 2009) and in policy arenas (Council of the European Union, 2008; Stern, 2007), and still features in media headlines<sup>1</sup>. Notwithstanding its flaws, the figure of the climate refugee has an undeniable evocative power and provides a ‘human face’ to climate change, and it resonates with the lexicons, concerns and agendas of environmental and humanitarian organizations (Bettini, 2013).

In the last few years, and in particular since the publication of a very influential report from the UK Foresight Office (Foresight, 2011), a more nuanced and measured register has gained ground in policy and academic circles. The multi-causal understanding of migration prevalent in contemporary scholarship has become widely accepted, as has the idea that - given the tangle of factors playing out in migration processes - it is almost impossible to point to individuals or populations whose mobility is determined solely by environmental change (Carr, 2005; Massey, Axinn, & Ghimire, 2010). The nexus climate-migration is increasingly understood as a matrix of mobility responses characterised by different combinations of voluntariness, aims, geographical scope and duration (Adger et al., 2015; Foresight, 2011; IPCC, 2014; Warner et al., 2013). While concern over permanent cross-border climate-induced displacement has not waned (see for instance the Nansen Initiative and the recently launched Disaster Displacement Platform), contemporary policy debates also discuss the idea of planned relocation (de Sherbinin et al., 2011). There are increasing concerns also about so-called ‘trapped populations’ (Black et al., 2013). Indeed, in a world in which climate change is accelerating, particularly one in which ‘dangerous levels’ are reached, mobility could be disrupted rather than enhanced. Labelling populations as ‘trapped’ is analytically difficult and requires caution – as it risks legitimizing top-down relocation plans (Adams, 2016). However, under conditions in which ecological vulnerability and socio-economic marginalization are escalating, it seems likely that the number

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<sup>1</sup> See for instance articles in *The Independent* (Bawden, 2014), *The Guardian* (2015), *The National Observer* (Dinshaw, 2015), *Time* (Baker, 2015).

of people lacking the means to move would also rise. An increasing number of people might thus find themselves ‘forced’ to stay put.

At face value, some of the emerging narratives appear to acknowledge the grassroots or vernacular coping and adaptation strategies deployed by many vulnerable communities. In particular, the idea that (governed) migration can be a successful adaptation strategy has recently gained popularity (e.g. Black et al, 2011; Tacoli, 2009; UNFCCC, 2010). As influential an actor as the Asian Development Bank (ADB) has been among the non-academic supporters of this idea, stating that ‘properly managed and supported, migration ... can often improve livelihoods, reduce poverty, meet labor force needs, bolster economies, and strengthen links between communities and countries’ (ADB, 2012). In this way, the vulnerable themselves are represented as agents of adaptation and resilience.

When compared to the scaremongering and the pathologization of migration inflecting much of the debate on ‘climate refugees’, these recent narratives have an appealingly humanistic façade – especially when the tides of fear surrounding migration are high, as at the moment of writing. At a closer look, however, the idea of ‘migration as adaptation’ is less reassuring. In fact, what it praises are not autonomous practices of mutual care, solidarity and support – such as those in Jakarta, Dhaka and Mumbai that we will shortly address. In the discourse on migration as adaptation the ‘vulnerable’ are expected to take their destiny into their own hands – quite literally, as it is through the mobilization of their labour force that they are expected to become resilient.

This focus on labour migration as adaptation mechanism signals a developmentalization of climate discourse. But this is not in the sense of viewing vulnerability and displacement as a result of international economic gradients and inequalities – as was the motivation for the intervention of Atiq Rahman with which we opened the paper. Rather, in the discourses in question, being ‘adaptable’ is equated with being ‘able to respond tactically to anthropogenic alterations of the biophysical world while becoming ever more the subjects of capitalist market relations’ (Felli &



Castree, 2012: 1). And this vision of adaptation is largely ‘consistent with the neoliberal practice of constituting a new global reserve army of labour’ (Felli & Castree, 2012: 3). Labour markets and economic exchanges become the main vehicles for adaptation – and for climate policy more broadly. This emphasis on the ‘agency’ of the vulnerable, to be exercised by mobilizing their labour and producing remittances that will finance self-adaptation, echoes the agendas of mainstream international players concerned with the so-called development-migration nexus, which have indeed become key actors in climate change policy (for a critical discussion of this point, see Bettini & Gioli, 2016). What is heralded is an economized logic in which South-South circular and temporary migration function as decentralized mechanisms of risk management and sources of funding for adaptation and development.

If the most ‘adaptable’ individuals from climate-impacted zones are being offered the ‘opportunity’ of incorporation in global labour markets, it must be asked, what happens to those left behind to face worsening environmental hardship? What will be the fate of those who do not have the capital (financial, social, human) to ‘rise to the occasion’ and become mobile, adaptable and resilient? Here we see signs of the ‘global triage’ of the fit from the unfit identified by Dillon and Reid (2009) as key ingredient of developmental interventions. In the climate migration case, this means the separation of the adapted from the maladapted, of those able to render their mobility into a fruitful investment from those fleeing because of desperation or stuck because of deprivation. In other words, the idea of migration as adaptation appears as a mechanism fostering ‘good circulation’, but one that also further marginalizes the sources of ‘bad circulation’. From this angle, climate refugees and climate migrants appear as two sides of the same coin. On the side of ‘bad circulation’ are all those who are undeveloped, non-resilient, maladapted and pathologically unfit, and on the ‘good circulation’ side those who are adaptable to climate change and fit for neoliberal rule.

There is a ruthlessness in this mechanism, with those (at risk of being) displaced by a synergy of climatic and extra-climatic destabilization finding themselves ‘free’ to provide the low-wage work

in wealthier cities, regions, or nations – with the added irony that this often involves care work. This directly links precariousness in relation to changing ecological and geoclimatic conditions to precarious employment. While abandoning the majority who lack resources, it translates mobility into the capacity to take one’s labour power elsewhere. In this context, we ask, if the most ‘able’ people from vulnerable regions are to end up - among other things - providing care for the wealthier populations of less vulnerable regions, who is expected to look after those suffering at the sharp end of climate change? From the more rarefied domain of international policy discourse, we turn now to the lived experience of those people most exposed to climatic variability and extremity – to the mundane reality of living with storm surges, overflowing drains and rivers, collapsing infrastructure.

### **Practicing Care under Conditions of Climate Stress**

In this section, we look to the ground-level ‘advent’ of care in the face of climatic exposure - both for the lessons it might offer in a world of accelerating climate change and for what it means *right now* for those caught in the path of deteriorating conditions - many of whom have already migrated out of climate-impacted rural areas only find themselves vulnerable in a new and different ways in their adopted urban environments.

Climate science currently lacks – and may never attain - the granularity that would permit us to isolate the proportion of any weather event directly attributable to human influence. Even so, there is scientific consensus that anthropogenic climate change is already adding a significant surcharge to many hydro-meteorological rhythms and events. There is now a considerable body of research concerned with the ways in which rural people are attempting to deal with environmental stresses to which these climatic transitions contribute (Adger, 2003; Agrawal and Perrin, 2009). Only recently have similar questions been seriously asked of urban populations, especially those in cities where infrastructure cannot be relied upon to cope with excessive – or even ordinary – demands. As Jabeen et al observe:

significant lessons can be drawn from examining how the urban poor are already coping with conditions of increased vulnerability induced by changing climate as well as extreme weather events such as floods, heavy rains, landslides, heat and drought, and understanding how they respond to hazards caused by them (2010: 415)

Many of the world's most populous and fast growing urban agglomerations are coastal or located on river watersheds and subject to the variability of monsoon systems or the El Nino Southern Oscillation - both of which, climatologists have suggested, show variations linked with global warming (Kumar, 2013; Satterthwaite et al, 2007: 24). In Mumbai, monsoonal flooding is now considered 'normal', while parts of Jakarta were inundated five times in 2015 (Macfarlane, 2012: 100; Holderness and Turpin, 2016). So accustomed are many Jakartans to the resurgence of polluted, foul-smelling floodwaters, disaster response teams recount, that they are reluctant to leave their homes until water levels reach two or more metres - at which point urgent evacuation is called for (Maclean, 2014). It is these routine struggles, we would suggest, more so than either spectres of mass migration or strategies of entrepreneurial trans-nationalism that characterises the mundane reality of climate displacement and attempts to stay put.

The everyday life of most cities of the South, it has been observed, demands constant work of adjustment, of making connections and new articulations. In the words of AbdouMalik Simone: 'the urban fabric is always changing, driven by the relative lack of "cemented" trajectories and networks of relations among materials, people, events, and space (2011: 361-2). Layered into these ordinary theatres of improvisation are emergent responses to climatic variability: dwellings with new forms of 'green' shading to reduce heat stress, storing crucial, household goods on shelves or high ground, elevated door entries and sandbagging, raised furniture and houses on stilts (Maclean, 2014; Banks et al 2011, Braun and ABheuer, 2011). In Jakarta, already a centre of dense social media usage, a new online platform allows urban residents in their hundreds of thousands to contribute to a real-time flood mapping application that both assists emergency

management and helps citizens negotiate flooded cityscapes (Holderness and Turpin, 2016; Padawangi et al, 2016).

When it comes to weathering extreme events, even more important than sociotechnical and material practices, most researchers attest, is the role of social networks and solidarities. It is associations of neighbours, relatives and friends – usually referred to as ‘informal’, however organized they might be – that most often provide emergency shelter, provisioning, information and emotional support, and frequently financial assistance, in times of hardship (Roy and Hulme 2013; Jabeen et al, 2010). As Braun and Aßheuer observe of hydrological extreme events in Dhaka: ‘Given that neighbors and relatives have, in most cases, also been affected by the flood, the significance of these personal networks for mutual help is surprising. People help each other regardless of how much they are affected themselves’ (2011: 782).

Much of this assistance has a distinctly demotic and non-hierarchical tenor. Indeed, it has been noted that the very design of many low-income settlements – with shared courtyards and other collective spaces – serves to encourage inter-household networking and collaboration (Jabeen et al, 2010: 429). But other aspects of social support during and after extreme events follow well-entrenched social hierarchies. Western observers might be surprised to hear from researchers in Dhaka that ‘slum’ landlords often seem to take their responsibilities seriously in times of crisis, to the extent of providing food, clothing and other provisions to tenants and allowing displaced friends or relatives of existing tenants to stay free of charge (Roy, Hulme and Jahan, 2013: 168; Braun and Aßheuer, 2011; 780). Most researchers stress the importance of mutuality in support networks in the cities of the South, often using the term ‘social capital’ to refer to a gradual accruing of trust, shared values and reciprocity over time (Adger, 2003; Braun and Aßheuer, 2011).

Other observers have drawn attention to overtures that break out of this imagined circuit of exchange, pointing to openings to others that are in advance or in excess of any foreseeable

reciprocation: outpourings of care and assistance that often come from those we might imagine to have least resources to spare. Flows of care do not (always) mirror gradients of affluence or power. In the context of Hurricane Katrina (2005), John Protevi tells of the many thousands of New Orleanians who did not abandon the elderly, the incapacitated and the most vulnerable, but stayed on to help, in acts of 'heroic solidarity, (that) what we should not be afraid to call "love"' (2006: 377; see also Clark, 2011: 146-159). Likewise, Jonathan Shapiro Anjaria's account of grassroots responses to Mumbai's extreme flooding of 2005 which spotlights an effusive and generous street level self-organization:

people came out of their homes to hand out biscuits, bananas, bottled water, and cooked rice and lentils to those stranded in buses....Who were these young men who jumped into the water to save stranded bus passengers? .... These men constitute the city's vast population of unemployed or, more commonly, underemployed .... In sum, they constitute the notorious crowd and chaos of the Indian city's streets, for long the nightmare of modernist city planners (2006: 81).

While Anjaria offers a heart-warming and provocative rereading of a maligned sector of the Mumbai populace, we might also ask who cooked the food that these young men were distributing, and what else might have been going on away from the visibility of the street. As in so many other contexts, much of the responsibility for providing care in situations of environmental deterioration and extremity is taken upon by women - or falls upon them.

Accounts of super typhoon Haiyan (Yolanda) that struck the Philippines in 2013 foreground women's caring and compassionate roles, and in many cases, their enhanced post-Haiyan community leadership and income-generating roles. Though researchers are quick to add that 'in many instances these new responsibilities have not led to the rethinking of traditional gender roles, but have simply translated into increased burdens for displaced women and their families'

(Sherwood et al 2015: 4). As in many disaster contexts, over the course of typhoon Haiyan women and girls not only faced exacerbated health and hygiene challenges, but also suffered increased sexual violence and abuse (Valerio, 2014; Sherwood et al, 2015: 58-9). There were also reports that human traffickers were able to capitalize on conditions of relaxed border controls, displacement and loss of livelihood to intensify existing practices recruitment into forced labour – including sex work (Tesfay, 2015).

However, there are other, potentially more positive ways in which trans-border mobilizations played a significant role in the vernacular response to the Haiyan crisis. Ranked in the top ten of nations for climate change vulnerability and second in terms of natural disaster risk (Tesfay, 2015: 11), the Philippines are also at the forefront of exporting ‘surplus labour’ to higher income nations, with some 10 million people - approximately 25 percent of the labour force – currently working overseas, positioning the country as the world’s the third largest recipient of migrants’ remittances (Mosuela and Matias, 2014: 5-8). Cleovi Mosuela and Denise Matias (2014) draw our attention to the importance not only of ongoing remittances by Filipina/Filipino trans-national workers during the post-Haiyan recovery process, humanitarian assistance, but also of dedicated fund-raising and other long-distance humanitarian efforts. As they put it: ‘cross-border migrants ... constitute an international network of Filipinos who are instrumental not only in keeping the Philippine economy afloat but also in constituting a network that may serve as a response to major environmental disasters in the Philippines’ (2014: 8).

In this section we have been observing the improvisational hustle – at work in Mumbai, Dhaka, New Orleans, Jakarta, or the Philippines’ Tacloban City - through which resourceful but under-resourced people endure environmental hardship. If Haiyan’s ground-level ‘stories of hope, courage, creativity, and empowerment’ are representative of the way the people in so many low-income, under-resourced regions manage to endure catastrophe (Valerio, 2014: 156; see also Sherwood et al 2015: 46), so too is it vital to recognize that ‘grass-roots’ does not simply imply local: the Philippines case being a reminder that capacities for care now flow and circulate as

globally as the components of climate itself.

We have no hesitation in following Mosuela and Matias in affirming the ethical and practical import of mobilizations by transnational migrants in response to the devastation wrought by Haiyan. However, we want to step back at this point and consider what else might be at stake in situations in which migrant workers find themselves drawn to respond to extreme or chronic environmental conditions *from a distance*. In the light of our earlier discussion of recent policy shifts regarding climate displacement, we ask what it might mean to reconfigure migration as a positive, flexible, and economically-rational response to intensifying climatic stress – in a world in which increasingly numbers of people are implicated in the stretched out and uneven relations that characterise global care chains. Or to put it another way, in times of ‘dangerous’ or ‘extremely dangerous’ climate change, how is heightened participation in an economized logic of transnational care-work likely to impact on existing grassroots adaptive and caring practices – in the most vulnerable places?

### **When Climate Change meets Global Care Chains**

The Philippine government, through the outward-looking orientation of the Department of Labor and Employment, has itself come to recognize the contribution of overseas workers to disaster relief – in keeping with its active promotion of the ‘heroic’ work ethic, discipline, and flexibility of its migrant workforce. In a nuanced account of Filipinas working abroad, Gibson, Law and McKay (2001) encourage us to view these women – many of whom domestic labourers or care-workers – neither as heroes of national development nor as passive victims of the demands of global capitalist labour markets, but as active – if constrained – agents with scope for negotiating their working conditions and advancing their own economic aspirations (see also Yeoh et al, 2005). This resonates with Mosuela and Matias’s assessment of the self-organizational capacities and adaptability of post-Haiyan trans-border mobilizations ‘(I)ransnational activists’, they observe, ‘gain new attitudes, try out new forms of action in

response to feelings of empathy and emerge with new identities as empowered individuals through their contacts within and across borders' (2014: 20).

While the Philippines 'has earned international recognition as a global model country for labour-exporting countries' (Mosuela and Matias, 2014: 7), other climate-change vulnerable nations or regions – such as Indonesia and Bangladesh - are also major sources of labour migration. Much of this work is in the caring and domestic sectors. Analyses of transnational political economies of care suggest that demand for the care-giving capacities of women from low income regions arises in large part because current market (under)valuation of their labour ensures that their care-work generates a certain surplus of value. As Parvati Raghuram explains sums the workings and of these global care chains - and their implications: '(in) the global redistribution of care resulting from female migration – migrant women from the global South care for families in distant countries of destination, typically in the North, while leaving behind a care deficit in the source countries' (2012: 158). Similar logics are at work, we would add, in the accelerating circulation of domestic labourers or care-workers between relatively poorer and wealthier zones *within* the global South

This is no small business, not simply a supplement to the 'real deal' of global circulation of commodities or of so-called 'productive' labour. Addressing not only migrants who provide some kind of domestic labour and the household relation they enter into, but also the multiple ways that 'care deficits' are filled in countries of origin, Maliha Safri and Julie Graham (2010) propose that the unit of the household ought to be viewed as a significant transnational economic actor. Indeed, when they tote up all those incorporated in some way in domestic relations with some form of economic value that stretch across national borders Safri and Graham estimate that at least 800 million people – 12 percent of the world's population – may now be living in what they refer to as 'global households' (2010: 108-9).

While these mostly female workers look after the young, the elderly the infirm of wealthier



regions, researchers have shown, they simultaneously construct complex topologies of care-at-distance as they seek to sustain intimate relations with their own loved ones at home (Parreñas, 2005; Yeoh et al 2005). If maintaining caring relationships at either end of the ‘global care chain’ can be profoundly stressful and demanding at the best of times (see van der Ham et al, 2015), it is difficult to imagine the fear, uncertainty and raw physical disconnection experienced when an event as catastrophic as Haiyan is witnessed from across an unbridgeable distance (see O’Brien, 2013).

We need to keep in mind that alongside the physical suffering and loss of homes and livelihoods resulting from the super typhoon, there was widespread grief, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (Sherwood et al, 2105: 57). So too should we recall that climate change, in ways that escape precise metrics, is nudging extreme events from the exceptional to the normal. Whether it is Jakarta’s five episodes of flooding in 2015, the six other major hurricanes that accompanied Katrina in the North Atlantic Hurricane season of 2005, or the average of twenty four other typhoons that struck the Philippines in the year of Haiyan (Mosuela and Matias, 2104: 9), life in many parts of the world is increasingly a matter of living *with* extremity.

If the global household, as Safri and Graham (2010: 118) suggest, is now a ‘cornerstone’ of the international economy, what happens, what might yet happen, we are asking, when the pillars of these economic and emotional load-bearing structures are submerged, storm-damaged, dehydrated? If the supply chains of care-work and related forms of insecure, low income labour provide the likely channels for the ‘good circulation’ of climate migrants, so too will deteriorating climatic conditions – particularly at sites of origin – increasingly shape the contours of care deficits and the practices that respond to these shortfalls. And if, as Raghuram points out, there are already extensive ‘care deficits’ in the source countries of domestic labour migration, what kind of shortfalls should we expect in a world experiencing ‘dangerous’ to ‘extremely dangerous’ climate change?

But just as Safri and Graham contend that the very significance of the global household in the contemporary transnational economy – with all its hidden, undervalued, but none-the-less pivotal activities – has an immense transformative potential, so too are we proposing that existing ground-level capacities for care and mutual support are the cornerstone of collective responses to changing climate. ‘(S)mall, dispersed, unorganized, and relatively invisible’ household actors, Safri and Graham insist ‘... are not aspects of a futuristic dream but existing formations that are actively transforming economic landscapes’ (2010: 121,113). By the same token, we are arguing, a vast host of under-resourced, under-recognised, unorganized or semi-organised actors are already providing the vital sub-structure of care in the time of climate crisis – and in this regard deserve to be considered a key to future climate policy.

### **Towards Care-ful Climate Policy**

Earlier in the paper we recounted how critical commentators have grown anxious over emerging complicity between more alarmist approaches to the ‘climate refugee’ issue and concerns with territorial securitization. But we have also shown how a set of discursive and practical responses that initially seemed more ‘balanced’ in their reframing of migration as an adaptive response to climatic deterioration turn out to have complicities of their own. Although it is often extreme events that make suffering - and the responses it attracts - most visible, our intention has been to work towards the increasingly mundane presence of intensifying climate change. We have seen how crisis situations, with their upending of everyday social relations, can help foreground the caring capacities of those whose ethical-practical potentialities are often marginalized or overlooked, especially in the urban context. So too have we cautioned that the drama and heroism of the catastrophe can itself privilege the acts of some over others – in particular by obscuring the more quotidian, ‘load-bearing’ care-work of women. But this gendering of care and its unequal recognition, we have been arguing, is also reproduced at larger scales.

As we noted above, this is a formative moment in the assembling of policy platforms that are promoting care in the context of climate change to ‘travel upward in hierarchies’ from the places where deficit is most keenly, painfully felt - towards relatively secure regions endowed with disproportionate care-purchasing power. We would stress that such turns in policy priority contravene the principle of wealthier nations subsidizing poorer nations in their development of adaptive capacities to respond to climate change that was enshrined twenty five years ago in United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, just as they undermine the commitment to ‘integrated approaches to avert, minimize and address displacement related to the adverse impacts of climate change’ that the majority of the world’s nation states signed up to at COP 21 in 2015.

To lever climate policy in the direction of supporting grassroots, community and household efforts at the sharp end of climate vulnerability is partly a matter of foregrounding the existing adaptive capacities of the under-resourced and the marginalized. As Banks, Roy and Hulme insist, the urban poor must be ‘equipped with an institutional framework that supports their efforts to increase resilience...’ (2011: 500). But alongside this, it requires the full acknowledgement that the embodied, affective and practical capacities of care itself are basal components of the ‘resilience’ and ‘adaptation’ that enable everyday life to go on in much of the world. If climate policy is to be care-ful, if it is to enhance the care of those impacted by chronic or extreme conditions, we are arguing, it must take its bearings from immensity of ‘worldly’ gestures and practices through which bodies shape and sustain each other - not least during those times or in those places in which more formalised supporting structures fall short.

So too do we need to be mindful that the very idea of *organizing* care – in the context of climate change or in any situation – is always going to be a complex and paradoxical proposition. For if, as we have been suggesting, the very event of caring depends on a susceptibility and openness to the perceived need of others – then there is always a vital aspect of care that precedes or exceeds whatever formal provisions are put in place to facilitate caring relations. The question then arises

– or rather, is always already present – as to how to make the move from the ‘spontaneity’ of receptivity to the decisive, intentional and organized actions that make for an effective response. Indeed, how to keep these moments ceaselessly and productively open to one other is a tension or demand that animates the most searching ethico-political inquiry. As Noxolo, Raghuram and Madge insist, without ‘a set of practices – there is no “responsibility work”– and therefore, there are no institutional parameters for assessing responsible action’ (2012: 420). But as Gunaratnam adds, care-giving organizations and professional cultures find themselves constantly interrogated, interrupted, or provoked by the singularity and specific needs of those to whom they attend (2013: 47-50).

Competent care, in this regard, requires at once the granularity of attention to lived, embodied experience and a clear eye to the conditions that both frame the caring relation and structure the very need for care. As Jacques Derrida asserts, in a more general sense, ‘one can't make a responsible decision without science or conscience, without knowing what one is doing, for what reasons, in view of what and under what conditions’ (1995: 24). But this only serves to underscore the immensity of the challenge that faces ‘caring’ climate policy – with its yawning spatio-temporal disjuncture between, on the one hand, the global scale of climate science and climate negotiation, and on the other, singular human bodies struggling to cope with deluge, heat, dirt, hunger and exhaustion.

While there is a growing body of critical work on politics and policy around climate displacement and a burgeoning genre on the lived experience of changing climate, there is still much to be done to connect up these registers – in both thought and practice. In this paper, we have been suggesting that a pivotal – if perplexing – issue is how to articulate between ‘ground level’ improvisation and ‘higher level’ policy-making – whether at city, state or inter-state scales. More pointedly, we have drawn attention to articulations between grassroots or communal care are *already taking shape* in international climate migration policy initiatives – in ways that we find deeply disturbing. The challenge, we would suggest, is how to arrest and reverse the move to

entice care-giving capabilities to travel against the gradient of greatest need while at the same time discouraging modes of critique that position the climatically vulnerable simply as victims – and in this way efface both their compassion and their practical capacities.

Without wishing to absolve wealthier nations from their responsibility to lower income and climate vulnerable regions, there are good reasons to question prevailing assumptions about the directionality of care and support at the global scale. One of the motivations of Anjaria's counter-posing of Mumbai and New Orleans was 'to understand the Third World city as offering some of the solutions for the world's cities (2006: 82): an aspiration in keeping with a more general tendency in post-colonial thought to conceive of multi-lateral circuits of knowledge and practice that unsettle received familiar North-to-South hierarchies (Noxolo et al, 2012; Jazeel and McFarlane 2007, Murphy 2015). In this regard, we would do well to recall Cuba's (declined) offer of emergency assistance to US Gulf States hit by Katrina – a potentially effective intervention given Cuba's own first-rate domestic record in hurricane protection and relief (Martin 2005), and Bangladesh's exemplary achievement in reducing the death toll from super cyclones by some 99% in less than four decades (Roy, Hanlon and Hume, 2016: 2, 63).

Similar capacities that work against assumed aid-beneficiary gradients may also be embodied by migrants themselves. As Raghuram observes: 'Migrants bring ... different understandings of care – how to care, towards what purpose, who should be cared for, how care should be shared or paid for – when they move' (2012: 160). They may also, as in the case of the Al-Imdaad Foundation - the north England Islamic civil society organisation that mobilized so effectively during Storm Desmond – bring with them a certain breadth of climatic experience.

By way of conclusion we would make a strong case for critically analysing climate migration policy and practice in close collaboration with the study of global care chains. And although we are realistic about the powerful counter-forces in play, we offer four key policy recommendations:

- Addressing climate change must be understood to be as much about supporting and facilitating care relations as about seeking technical solutions.
- As is the case with more ‘practical’ responses to environmental stress and change, the most crucial site of caring practices is the everyday world of affective and inter-corporeal relations.
- There is an urgent need to review current policy priorities that encourage the movement of the most able caregivers from sites or regions where they are likely to be most in demand to places where there is a relative abundance of care.
- Learning to care and to support caring practices more effectively is a process that ought to be broadly searching, ceaselessly experimental and multi-directional, at very least moving backwards and forth across global divides of economic privilege.

Finally, we need to recall that there would be no global economy of care without the inclination of embodied actors to open themselves to the needs of others, no opportunity to convert climate-stressed bodies into mobile, profitable labour if those exposed to climate change were not already supporting each other through demanding and debilitating circumstances. Caring relations, we have been suggesting, are constantly shifting, evolving, recreating themselves. Care in the time of chronic and catastrophic climatic change can emerge both in the most mundane and the most extraordinary situations. Either way it can do with all the support it can possibility get. There is an urgent need, we have been arguing, for developing policy responses that will nourish and sustain dis-positions towards care in the places where it is most needed. But care is always fraught with tension, cut with impurities, fated to fall short or go awry. And this is why its organization or institutionalization is as risky as it is necessary, a process – at its best – of

constant attentiveness and interminable learning.

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