

For the region yet to come: Interrogating the kinetic politics of 'climate migration' in Oceania

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The context

- Oft-cited estimates of 200 million to 1 billion people displaced or forced to move due to climate change over the next 50 years
- Globally, there are ongoing political obstacles for effective, creative and humane approaches to migration governance (particularly for insecure migrations or for people responding to insecurity through migration)
- Ongoing and increasing vulnerabilities to insecure (im)mobilities in the Pacific – increasing vulnerability due to warming, limits to adaptation, constrained opportunities for migration and international mobility, ‘development’ challenges.

The problem

- 'Rush for Oceania' (Reclaiming Oceania Collective 2018)
- Solidaristic approach to regional security and climate change / ructions around leadership and representation / geostrategic competition / security politics from the outside
- Reluctance to address climate mobility in intersectional terms in national and regional policy frameworks (political and cultural sensitivities abound)
- Limited (but important) policy developments linking climate and mobility – Fiji, Vanuatu, Regional
- Despite some progress, the governance of human mobility in regional terms is characterized by a kind of epistemic inertia – proposed solutions and frameworks for change are bound up in statist, static and sedentary modes of thinking
- Is the 'national order of things' limiting our thinking on the governance of climate mobility in the region?

Problematising state-centric mobility governance

- *Radical uncertainty*
- *Dominant Narratives*
- *Divergent norms around migration governance*
- *Complex scalarity*
- *Triple mobility crisis (Sheller): climate change, urbanisation, refugee crisis*

Climate change is changing the political systems, politico-economic structures, historical narratives, epistemic frameworks and norms that we have long assumed to be stable. The international is transforming through climate change. It is no longer the scale of protection, normative progress and the redistribution of mobility rights and security. As the region changes, we may have to move with it.

Rethinking the region

Region is a term and a concept that we rarely consider, even if much of the trauma and crisis of modernity is happening there. We need to understand the dynamics of region if we are going to challenge the indifferent systems of infrastructure and politics that carve up and control everything in their orbit. Region owes nothing to the forms of citizenship granted subjects by states, or to the power that comes from the indifference to the spaces traversed by the infrastructure of modernity. Might region allow us to understand anew the connections of space, belonging, and environment needed to take on the political challenges of our era?

Imre Szeman 2018, e-flux

Mobility justice and regional security

“Mobility justice is an overarching concept for thinking about how power and inequality inform the governance and control of movement, shaping the patterns of unequal mobility and immobility in the circulation of people, resources, and information”

Mimi Sheller 2019

Boe Declaration is silent on mobility

- Can we think about human security without thinking about mobility justice?
- Mobility also colonised through colonisation (Banivanua Mar)
- Human security depends on a multi-scalar engagement with mobility (in)justice – from the local to the international and beyond
- While ‘climate migration’ is not a desirable outcome, the framing of regional mobilities through contemporary discourses of migration management, border security, poses a zero-sum game
- We need to align future (im)mobilities with mobile ontologies and kinetic theories of justice under conditions of climate change

Kinetic politics and regional transformation

‘kinetic politics’... denotes that ‘polity formations and political relations are not spatially determined (that is, by processes of boundary formation and relations that travel across these boundaries), but are constituted through movement as people come and go. The importance of this manoeuvre is that it shifts the focus of political analysis away from the nation-state, and instead considers how migration features in political constellations that extend beyond the ‘territorial trap’ of the nation-state’

Samid Suliman 2016

Rethinking mobility governance through the region

- No regional security without climate justice
- No climate justice without mobility justice
- Need for political systems that guarantee security in (im)mobility as a first order concern
- Resist the instrumentalization, pathologization and securitization of mobile people as they respond to climate vulnerability through relocating, or as a resource for staying in place.
- Keep in the intangible in view – loss of dignity, autonomy, heritage, culture, citizenship, sovereignty and a rightful place in the world is just as damaging as the bio-physical effects of climate
- Regionalisms from above and below, from within and from the outside, must be negotiated in the pursuit of mobility justice and secure climate mobilities
- From this perspective, what can everyday struggles by Pacific peoples in migration and through the diaspora tell us about alternative visions for the region? What new institutions can we imagine to govern (im)mobility in a changing climate?
- Australia must take a lead on supporting mobile and pluralistic conceptions of the Blue Pacific, and imagine itself as one island among many, a kinetic archipelago that is inextricably bound to Oceanian histories and futures

THANK YOU