

Central Lancashire Online Knowledge (CLOK)

Title	Climate Refugees or Future Migrant Labour Force: a Decolonial critique of Matthieu Rytz's Anote's Ark (2018) and Climate Displacement discourse in the Pacific
Type	Article
URL	https://clock.uclan.ac.uk/48415/
DOI	10.21315/ijaps2023.19.2.1
Date	2023
Citation	Chang, Ti-Han (2023) Climate Refugees or Future Migrant Labour Force: a Decolonial critique of Matthieu Rytz's Anote's Ark (2018) and Climate Displacement discourse in the Pacific. <i>International Journal of Asia Pacific Studies</i> , 19 (2). pp. 1-30. ISSN 1823-6243
Creators	Chang, Ti-Han

It is advisable to refer to the publisher's version if you intend to cite from the work.
10.21315/ijaps2023.19.2.1

For information about Research at UCLan please go to <http://www.uclan.ac.uk/research/>

All outputs in CLOK are protected by Intellectual Property Rights law, including Copyright law. Copyright, IPR and Moral Rights for the works on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. Terms and conditions for use of this material are defined in the <http://clock.uclan.ac.uk/policies/>

CLIMATE REFUGEES OR FUTURE MIGRANT LABOUR FORCE: A DECOLONIAL CRITIQUE OF MATTHIEU RYTZ'S *ANOTE'S ARK* (2018) AND CLIMATE DISPLACEMENT DISCOURSE IN THE PACIFIC

Ti-Han Chang*

Asia Pacific Studies, University of Central Lancashire (UCLan),
Adelphi Building 149, HLGS, UCLan, Preston, PR1 2HE, United Kingdom
E-mail: tchang2@uclan.ac.uk

Published online: 31 July 2023

To cite this article: Chang, T. H. 2023. Climate refugees or future migrant labour force: A decolonial critique of Matthieu Rytz's *Anote's Ark* (2018) and climate displacement discourse in the Pacific. *International Journal of Asia Pacific Studies* 19 (2): 1–30. <https://doi.org/10.21315/ijaps2023.19.2.1>

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.21315/ijaps2023.19.2.1>

ABSTRACT

*Between 2010 to 2020, the global media generally had a very positive view of the voluntary migration schemes or humanitarian refugee visas promised by their Pacific allies (e.g., Australia and New Zealand). However, the actual implementation of climate migrants' relocation tells a different story, particularly in the case of I-Kiribati people. This paper examines Australian and New Zealand's governmental policies of immigration for the Pacific islanders over the last two decades. Drawing on a decolonial theoretical approach inspired by Jonathan Pugh, David Chandler and Elizabeth DeLoughrey, in conjunction with Prem Kumar Rajaram's post-Marxist migrant economy theory, this paper argues that the Australian and New Zealand governments ultimately only paid lip service to humanitarian aid for climate displaced people. In fact, the proposed schemes for I-Kiribati people or other Pacific climate migrants ultimately serve to convert the migrant populations into the host country's labour force, of use for its neoliberal economy. The second half of the paper turns to an analysis of an award-winning climate documentary produced by a Canadian film maker, Matthieu Rytz. Rytz's *Anote's Ark* (2018) aligns with the "migrating with dignity" policy proposed by the former I-Kiribati president, Anote Tong. Bringing in Malcom Ferdinand's decolonial analysis of the figure of Noah's ark in the climate discourse, the paper problematises the general political consensus advanced by this particular type of contemporary climate documentary and challenges the feasibility*

of the “migrating with dignity” approach. Most importantly, it questions whether climate migrants can truly build a future with dignity in their host country if they are conditioned to supply the migrant labour market.

Keywords: Migration with dignity, eco-documentary, surplus populations, Noah’s Ark, decolonial theory

INTRODUCTION

The recognition that the issue of the environment enjoys in principle (since the 1992 conference in Rio) is one thing; the other is that it is now generally accepted that at the same time (or maybe even as a result) there is a deficit of responsibility and accountability because, notwithstanding a range of agreements and treaties in environmental law, we still lack authorities capable of translating lip service into actions.

– Ulrich Beck, *World at Risk* (2009)

Fifteen years ago, the renowned German sociologist, Ulrich Beck, published *World at Risk*,¹ in which he theorises contemporary environmental issues and the underlying risks they pose to global society. His pessimistic conclusion is that, despite the existing consensus of our moral responsibility and legal duty towards environment, “we still lack authorities capable of translating lip service into actions” (Beck 2009: 180). More than a decade later, environmental issues relating to climate change, global warming, or rising sea levels appear to occupy the centre of global political debates, and we see that Beck’s theory has had an effect on some intergovernmental bodies’ climate discourse. For instance, the recently published report of the United Nations’ (UN) Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) still identifies the concept or framework for climate actions as the organisation’s priority (IPCC 2022: 4). Sadly, however, the lack of significant efforts to translate propositions or policies into long-term workable actions remains very limited. Today, climate issues are still our biggest challenge, especially climate-induced migration and displacement. The political debate around the subject remains inconclusive, since the interests of different governmental entities clash with each other. Consequentially, the climate migration issue, particularly for the vulnerable Pacific Island states, has suffered from inconsistent political measures.

Prior to 2020, the global media generally held a positive view of voluntary migration pathways or humanitarian climate refugee visas. But, looking at the 2022 IPCC report, the overall strategies for small island states subjected to high climate risk are worded to highlight resilience building and adaptation. Though migration is still qualified as one of the adaptation responses, the IPCC concludes that it is a “low agreement” strategy and argues that limited evidence has been produced so far to support it as an effective approach (IPCC 2022: 2048; Roland and Curtis 2020: 169–172). The IPCC report thereafter proposes to establish climate mitigating plans by rising dwellings and key infrastructures, transitioning to eco-tourism and green energy sectors, or collaborating with informal private sectors in an attempt to meet sustainable development goals (SDGs) (IPCC 2022: 2076, 2091–2093). Ironically, with these new “adaptation approaches”, one can also argue that these proposals also fall back on an old discourse of SDGs, which prioritise the sustainability of the economy rather than the environment.

The article opens with a quotation from Beck and a critical engagement with the latest IPCC report not because it wants to seek answers to resolve all inconsistent political measures, but because it aims to debate and investigate the reasons why this challenge is still present. More specifically, by adopting a decolonial approach, the article attempts to produce a dialectical critique which can give further insights into why it is almost impossible to translate “lip service” into actions when the issue concerns climate-induced migration. My research tackles the pressing issue of climate-induced migration in the Pacific region, specifically the case of Kiribati. In this paper, attention will be drawn to the problem of the economic surplus value of migrant labourers in the context of climate displacement, and a decolonial critiques of “Western-centric” or “Global North-centric” climate narratives will also be put forward.

The paper begins by bringing together a theoretical review, presenting first Ulrich Beck’s social theory of environmental problems and then the decolonial and island critiques of climate displacement, notably those of Elizabeth DeLoughrey, Jonathan Pugh and David Chandler. This latter part of the review demonstrates how, in the last decade, discourse of climate displacement has taken a decolonial turn, attempting to “provincialise” the Anthropocene through a Global South perspective, as DeLoughrey firmly asserts (2019: 2). It also provides an explanation of how eco-documentary becomes a tool for forging a reductive climate discourse in the Pacific, which falls back on a colonial reimagination. Knowing that today’s global climate and environmental problems cannot be addressed without the transnational and regional contexts, my research also applies Prem Kumar Rajaram’s

post-Marxist reading of “migrants and refugees as surplus population” to critically evaluate climate-related humanitarian schemes offered by the developed countries in the Pacific region, notably Australia and New Zealand. And since the paper uses the case study of the “sinking island” of Kiribati to illustrate the main discussion points, it also offers an overview of the country’s geographic, economic, and demographic dynamics in the context of climate displacement. A critical reading drawing from the decolonial school and Rajaram’s theory will demonstrate why, although solutions to climate-induced displacement have become one of the priorities of the current climate justice framework, concrete results have not been attained.

In addition to these theoretical critiques, my article also calls into question the ethos of the “migration with dignity” policy, the cross-border labour migration scheme, which is highly valued and promoted by the ex-president of Republic of Kiribati, Anote Tong. Frequently addressed in academic research, media and intergovernmental forums or assemblies,² the “migration with dignity” policy receives much acclaim. However, the positive response to this policy often occurs when people align themselves with a Eurocentric or Global North perspective on climate issues in the least developed or low-income countries. The birth of the “migration with dignity” policy and its popularity under the climate justice framework are undeniably coupled with the global capitalist economic model of liquid modernity.³ The article thus proposes a critical study of the multiple dynamics of climate-induced migration and displacement, including people’s socio-economic vulnerability and the economic incentives of labour migration.

This article further problematises the general political consensus proffered by contemporary eco-documentaries. The final section puts forward a critical analysis of the award-winning eco-documentary, *Anote’s Ark* (Rytz 2018), which promotes Tong’s “migration with dignity” policy. This type of eco-documentary follows a narrative arc, according to which developed economies of the Global North are to be blamed for the ecological crisis, or have moral obligations towards vulnerable states, as they are often the sources of environmental hazards or global warming. In this section, my analysis also ties in with Malcom Ferdinand’s theological climate critique of the allegorical figure of Noah’s ark to deconstruct the neocolonial Global North position that the film takes. Adopting Ferdinand’s decolonial approach, my article argues that the way colonial history interconnects with the Pacific Island states is overlooked. The political consensus generated by the film will inevitably follow the operating logic of global economic capitalism and further favour its functioning. Dangerously, this shared consensus eventually benefits the

capitalist market as it allows it to extract surplus value from these climate/labour migrants, and in so doing reconfigures and reduces them to “surplus” populations in our neoliberal and neocolonial reality.

From Cosmopolitan Outlook to Provincialising the Global North Climate Discourse

When Ulrich Beck published *World at Risks* in 2007, climate-induced migration, especially displaced or relocated peoples from the low-lying Pacific islands, was neither at the centre of international political discussion, nor one of Beck’s featured topics. However, some of Beck’s key ideas, as well as his emphasis on adopting methodological cosmopolitanism as an approach to global environmental risks later became widely received, especially in the arts and humanities when portraying or representing climate displaced people.

In Beck’s view, global environmental problems are social problems. In *World at Risks*, Beck states that global environmental problems (*umweltproblemen*) as social problems (*innenweltprobleme*) mainly arise from a linear process of industrialisation which disregards the consequence of our consumption on the world’s natural and cultural foundations (2009: 161). The “latent side effects” of these industrial decisions, driven by either economic or state enterprises or individual consumers, as Beck (2009: 161) highlights, are the roots of the environmental hazards we experience today. This resonates with Rob Nixon’s concept of “slow violence”, which refers to the invisible or less visible long-term effects of the violation of health standards of distant populations, which can be witnessed in toxic chemicals in food, nuclear radiation, smog, or rising sea-levels (Beck 2009: 161–162; Nixon 2013: 16). According to Beck and Nixon, this “slow violence” therefore divides the world into “cause regions (or the so-called First World decision making regions)” and “side effect regions (or the Third World periphery)” where the effect transpires. In the case of Kiribati and many other low-lying Pacific islands, human displacement induced by global warming thus contextualises these places as “side effect regions”. Beck further explains that there exists a “decoupling” between these First World decision-makers and the distant populations at the Third World periphery, and this gap is so great that it ultimately becomes the source of our political inaction. To respond to this decoupling, Beck urges us to call for a cosmopolitan outlook, which affirms the necessity to produce works, especially digital works or technological simulations which enable people to visualise a reality from which they are disengaged but which is constantly experienced as everyday

familiarity in the Third World (2009: 161). One therefore understands why the medium of documentary film, especially eco-documentary, later became a popular and often employed means of delivering visualised climate reality to those who have little experience of it. Paradoxically, eco-documentary is also the most dangerous means, given that it has the capacity to strongly influence viewers' ethical stance with respect to the presented issues. Considering this, my article chooses to follow Elizabeth DeLoughrey and Malcom Ferdinand's decolonial approach in reflecting how issues of climate displaced people are represented in documentary films, as well as how they should be reconsidered if we situate them in the emerging Anthropocene islands discourse.

Whereas Beck's early environmental discourse emphasises the importance of understanding global environmental problems as a linear process and attempts to bridge the "decoupled" realities between the First and the Third Worlds, Jonathan Pugh and David Chandler's island critique challenges the very idea of linearity and the logic of that world division. Referencing David Quammen's re-interpretation of Charles Darwin's works, the authors argue that living beings on islands criss-cross each other and "species do not evolve in the sense of a linear telos of 'progress'"; rather, they follow a non-linear pattern which helps them to adapt to their conditioned environment (Pugh and Chandler 2021: 11; Quammen 2018: 6). Viewing islands and life on islands as symbols of non-linearity, Pugh and Chandler also criticise that contemporary climate or environmental debate that continues to follow the European modernist idealisation or fantasy of islands (2021: 11). They state:

Under old European and modern thought [,] the island was often understood as insular, isolated, liminal or backward, even populated by savages, when compared to continental, mainland reasoning. Building directly from these older narratives, in debates about climate change, islands are still of course frequently reductively framed in Western and modern fantasies of control; understood as helpless, disposable, or in need of saving by others (Pugh and Chandler 2021: 3).

In line with this, the decolonial thread that is proposed by DeLoughrey becomes crucial to read and analyse allegories and narratives produced by eco-documentaries, particularly those that articulate the climate displacement issues in the Pacific Island context. To some extent, one can argue that DeLoughrey though disagrees with Beck's cosmopolitan call to "bridge the decoupled worlds" through visual simulation, she does not fail to recognise its significant influence. As she notes, there has been a rapid rise in the

global popular media of the discourse of “sinking islands, vanishing worlds”, particularly in films and documentaries, as these media are necessarily engaged in the process of world-making (2019: 169). But, contrary to Beck, she considers this world-making medium to be limited, since the world presented to the viewers signifies the politics of finitude and is often unable to move away from the colonial settlers’ mentality (DeLoughrey 2019: 169). DeLoughrey is more in line with Pugh and Chandler, believing that the current climate discourse continues to draw on a narrative framing according to which the Global North has the responsibility to “rescue” the innocent, nature-loving indigenous subjects in the Global South (2019: 170). As she puts it: “[a] new body of climate change films frames the indigenous island subject as an *endangered species* in the wake of anthropogenic sea-level rise” (DeLoughrey 2019: 169; emphasis mine). For DeLoughrey, these climate eco-documentaries not only disempower the Global South, but they also trade in the extinction narratives of the Anthropocene and use allegory as a mode of mourning to call for an urgent rescue of these perishable cultures, peoples and environments for eternity (DeLoughrey 2019: 170). In DeLoughrey’s terminology, this Global North or neocolonial climate approach is termed “salvage environmentalism”. She further explains that the more an eco-documentary embraces salvage environmentalism, the more it “*decouples* the Pacific islanders from the continental modernity and [further] mystifies the causal links between industrialized continents and sinking islands” (DeLoughrey 2019: 170; emphasis mine). Through this decolonial lens, DeLoughrey argues against Beck’s call to employ visual simulation to bridge the two decoupled worlds (i.e., the North vs. the South, the first world vs. the third, the developed vs. the under-developed). Most importantly, her concept contributes to “provincialise” this current trend of climate narrative framing.

It is in this light that the present paper views Matthieu Rytz’s eco-documentary as problematic, for it subconsciously assumes and favours this Eurocentric or Global North perspective. Despite its laudable intention to address issues of climate-induced migration, *Anote’s Ark* adopts a neoliberal stance which encourages the free flow of economic migrant labourers as one of the key ethical solutions to climate displacement. Neoliberalism is a much-celebrated political-economy approach that emerged in the context of late European modernity. Reiterating what Pugh and Chandler assert, one can argue that this economic approach reinforces the old colonial narratives and sees the Pacific islanders as reduced and passive subjects that need to be “helped” or “saved” by their colonial settler counterpart. The embrace of a neoliberal approach becomes most problematic when migrant or refugee

issues are concerned, as it promotes and accelerates the production of the “surplus labour value” of migrants. Once more, the climate-induced migrants or refugees inevitably falls into the “victim category” of global inequalities. While Rytz’s eco-documentary calls for a humanitarian outlook to climate justice, it could, ultimately, be used to strengthen the Global North position and reinforce the neoliberal migrant market.

MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES AS “SURPLUS POPULATION”

In line with the critique of the Eurocentric view on climate migration, I would like to draw on Prem Kumar Rajaram’s Marxist reading of the so-called “surplus population”, which further complements my usage of the decolonial approaches. Although Rajaram’s research primarily focusses on the marginalised migrant and refugee groups in a specific part of Budapest, I would suggest that his political-economic critique be further extended to study climate migrants or refugees.⁴

Rajaram (2018: 627) demonstrates that displaced people—be it refugees or migrants—necessarily become part of the global capitalist economic system, regardless of the degree of their resistance to it, and are often turned into a “surplus population” during the displacement. “Surplus populations” are people who are identified as marginalised or subaltern groups that are “struggling to translate their body power into valorised labour” (Rajaram 2018: 627). It can therefore include refugees, migrants and sometimes other ethnic minorities such as Roma people, whose nomadic way of life reconfigures them as “stateless people” under the structure of the modern nation-state. Furthermore, the distinctive feature of this “surplus population” is the very fact of being a reserve army of labour. As Rajaram explains, “[t]he surplus population and the normal working population are connected. The surplus is a cheaper alternative; the existence of this population that employers can theoretically turn to can restrict labour organisation and act as a downward pressure on wages” (2018: 633). It is by this rationale, refugees, migrants, or “stateless people” become the subject of capitalist exploitation. Sadly, while they remain the most exploited subjects, they easily become the remainder of a homogeneous society, since the cheap labour they provide is also the source of antagonism for the regulated market within the homogenised state. It is from this antagonism that racialised discourse and gender discrimination are produced to further marginalise them, and they hence become “surplus population”.

Linking more closely Rajaram's study of "surplus populations" to my research on Pacific climate migrants, especially those who are also incentivised by economic reasons, an interesting dynamic of colonisation needs to be explained here. Rajaram emphasises that the role of colonial history in configuring migrants and refugees as "surplus population" should not be overlooked. He points out that the concept of "productive labour" was born out of the colonial context, which was contrasted with colonisers' prejudiced views on the "non-productive work" carried out by the colonised natives or indigenous populations. Referring to Syed Hussein Alatas's work, *The Myth of the Lazy Native* (2010), Rajaram asserts that "[w]ork' was not simply replaced by 'labour' in the colony, [in fact,] labour evacuated 'native' work of any inherent meaning or value" (2018: 628). The statement affirms that, under the colonial regime, traditional tasks which used to be carried out by the colonised natives or locals to ensure the functioning of the pre-colonised society, i.e., using fishing, hunting or agricultural goods to participate in the subsistence economy, were not qualified as "productive" work. These tasks were seen as being without inherent value. To be recognised as having inherent value for the work, "the colonised peoples had to translate their body power in to 'productive' labour, but many would be doomed to always fall short" (Rajaram 2018: 628). In the eyes of colonisers, colonised natives and locals were often attributed cultural traits which prevent them becoming "reliable good labourers" (Rajaram 2018: 628; Alatas 2010: 83–98). In this sense, they are either people who cannot effectively translate their body power into productive labour or people whose culture was thought to prevent them from being good labourers. In both cases, they constitute a "surplus population". This colonial legacy continues to be reproduced in the neoliberal or capitalist economic system today and is widely adopted in contemporary political regimes. Below, I will first provide an overview of Kiribati's current geographic, economic and demographic profile in the context of climate displacement. I will then follow this up with an analysis of different types of Pacific migration schemes offered by the Australian and New Zealand governments, demonstrating how these countries fully endorse this idea of productive labour in their neoliberal economic systems, and successfully reconfigure the climate migrants as "surplus population".

Overview of Kiribati's Climate Displacement

The Republic of Kiribati is composed of thirty-two atoll islands and a raised coral reef island, Banaba, with a land mass of 810 square kilometres. Most of

the atoll islands have costal lagoons and are only two meters above sea level, the main exception being the raised coral reef island, Banaba. Looking at their geographical layout, the atolls are by default vulnerable to high tides, storms and rising sea levels. The general public may only have heard of Kiribati or other Pacific low-lying islands facing climate challenges very recently. But as a matter of fact, Kiribati was already listed as very prone to the rising sea-level caused by global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in a 1989 official report conducted by a Commonwealth Group of Experts (Holdgate et al. 1989: 83). In 2016, a UN report also confirmed that a significant number of I-Kiribati households were negatively impacted by the continuous rise of sea-level (Oakes et al. 2016: 68). The finding shows that an average of 94.5% of the I-Kiribati households reported being affected by at least one natural hazard, and 81.0% of them stated that they are directly impacted by rising sea-level (Oakes et al. 2016: 35–36). Local village communities in Abaiang and Kiritimati islands have either gone through internal relocations or come up with other in-situ coping strategies. With the worsening of anthropogenic climate change, it is generally expected that seawater inundation and flooding will be much more frequent in the coming years.

Kiribati stands as a unique case not only because its low-lying atolls are severely endangered by climate change effects, but because it is still considered as a least developed country (LDC) by the UN. Kiribati was identified by the World Bank as the lowest income country amongst all Pacific Island Countries (PICs), with an estimated USD1,424 per capita in 2015 (Voigt-Graf and Kagan 2017: 2). Despite its gross domestic product (GDP) showing a slight increase (USD1670 per capita) in the latest 2020 figures, the overall economy of Kiribati remains relatively unchanged (The World Bank 2021a). Kiribati's poor economic status cannot be overlooked in the context of climate migration because, paradoxically, it is both the biggest hurdle and the main driver for I-Kiribati people to participate in the "voluntary" migration schemes offered by other economically developed countries. To start with, the international relocation scheme often requires a large sum of visa fees and travel costs, which exceed even the average GDP per capita.⁵ For households that do not have the financial means to afford these costs, international relocation is always a difficult option. Furthermore, the recent growth of Kiribati's population also puts strains on the country's economic health. The World Bank data shows there is a slow but steady growth of population in Kiribati over the last sixty years (The World Bank 2021b). However, some of the land remains uninhabitable and unequally distributed. This subsequently leads to Kiribati's high unemployment rate and inactive youth. Drawing on

data reported by Kiribati's Ministry of Finance and Economic Development (2012), Carmen Voigt-Graf and Sophia Kagan's research (2017: 4) shows that the unemployment rate was already 31% of the labour force in 2010, which implies one third of the active population was unable to contribute to economic production. James Webb's (2020: 14) published research also confirms that there was a further increase in Kiribati's unemployment rate in the 2015 census. In keeping with the census report he found for job growth over the period of 2015 and 2019, Webb concludes that overall unemployment rate might have dropped since 2015; yet it is difficult to be certain of this because of the unreliable data collected by Kiribati Provident Fund (KPF), and this employment growth may also not be sustainable (2020: 14). Ultimately, for those who have sufficient financial means to migrate overseas, many would not consider climate or environmental factors as the sole reason for their international migration. Main drivers, such as the lack of employment and income opportunities, largely motivate their decision to relocate.

This overview of Kiribati demonstrates that the perceived "climate" displacement or movements are often more complex than we think since they are tied to both economic incentives and climate reasons. It is therefore rather difficult to have a clear determination of any individual's motivation for migration. As Rajaram further adds, "migrants and refugees do not simply move, they move as potential labour power, to be incorporated into modes of production" (2018: 632). Analysing Kiribati's socio-economic and demographic profiles in relation to its international migration movement offers us a different understanding of the issue of climate displacement. Whereas current calls for climate justice highlight the fact that Kiribati people's displacement and relocation are caused by the climate emergency and environmental changes, the additional economic reasons for migration are often overlooked or simply mentioned as a complementary factor. Rajaram's Marxist reading of migration movement reminds us that all migrants and refugees—no matter what initially causes or motivates them to relocate—migrate to find works or take part in modes of economic production. With this in mind, the paper argues that one should be more cautious in accepting claims of climate justice,⁶ and see this issue through a critical lens.

Assessment of "Humanitarian Aides" for Climate Displaced Pacific People

On the subject of climate change displacement in the Pacific, many research studies and policy papers attempt to establish an ethical imperative for

developed countries in the region, namely Australia and New Zealand, to implement policies to accommodate climate-induced migration (Opeskin and MacDermott 2009: 353–354; Voigt-Graf and Kagan 2017: 19–20). Contrary to this approach, the following section presents critical analyses of the recent international migration pathways provided by the Australian and New Zealand governments, which claim to work under a humanitarian framework for climate displaced Pacific people. It shows that the proposed migration pathways pay only lip service to humanitarian migration and are often unable to deliver concrete and positive results. The paper argues that these migration schemes have ultimately become an alternative method for developed economies to absorb cheap foreign labour. Furthermore, this approach offers only a “symptomatic” treatment of the issues raised by climate change. My analysis thus includes a critical assessment of the developed economies’ currently adopted measures for GHG reduction (a focus on New Zealand). By including this critical review, we can fully understand why offering opportunities for international relocation is nowhere enough to mitigate climate-induced displacement in the Pacific.

Australia

Between 2006 and 2014, the Kiribati Australian Nursing Initiative Programme (KANI) was set up to fund I-Kiribati youth to undertake nursing training. Voigt-Graf and Kagan’s research underlines that KANI is generally recognised as an alternative solution for the Australian government partially to contribute their humanitarian aid for I-Kiribati citizens (2017: 9). However, although a long-term programme that lasted for nearly eight years, the total number of enrolled and funded students was only 87.⁷ One should remember also that Kiribati’s total population was around 100,000 when the programme was running. Although it is difficult to quantify the exact number of people who needed immediate or medium-term help for overseas relocation, the very limited number of places provided by the KANI programme was nowhere near enough to deliver significant humanitarian results.

The outcome of the KANI programme, on the other hand, is generally viewed positively. Out of the 87 funded students, 78 graduated with a BA degree or obtained a Diploma in Nursing, Social Work, Human Services, Community Welfare and Aged Care (Shaw et al. 2014: 7). The high completion rate suggests that, with a suitable programme and comprehensive education, it is possible to deliver positive long-term results and help secure a better socio-economic life and a climate-danger free environment for the vulnerable

I-Kiribati people. It also shows that I-Kiribati students' have the ability to qualify for skilled employment. Despite this high completion rate, only "55 [remained] working as trained nurses in the aged care sector (24 full time and 22 part-time in Australia, and 9 in Kiribati)" (Voigt-Graf and Kagan 2017: 9). With only 24 full-time employed nurses continuing their professional careers in the host country, this implies that less than two-thirds of the students were able to make a professional success of their course of study in their migration destination. Although KANI has been rated overall as a successful programme, when the programme ended in 2014, no further educational or training programme was proposed by the Australian government. This suggests the training programme was set up as a one-off response to political pressure; it served mainly to "pacify" the humanitarian request from Australian's low-income yet high climate-risk neighbour.

Furthermore, Australia's recent Seasonal Work Programme (SWP), introduced almost at the same time as the KANI programme (in 2007), has always targeted semi- or low-skilled foreign workers to supply labour for the country's economy. After the KANI programme, the Australian government showed no intention to establish a similar programme. On 1 July 2018, the Australian government launched a new Pacific Labour scheme, stating that its priority is to give access for PIC nationals from Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Papua New Guinea (PNG), Samoa, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. The government claims that the scheme would complement the existing SWP and works in PIC citizens' interests if any long-term settlement is envisioned, given that it offers an up-to-3-year working visa and obliges the employers to provide a minimum one-year employment contract. However, compared to the KANI programme, which provided a higher level of education and work-skills training, the new Pacific Labour Scheme targets only dispensable and replaceable labourers. On the governmental website, it clearly states that low and semi-skilled work opportunities would be offered to these foreign workers. The low- and semi-skilled working opportunities offered to the Pacific migrant workers directly reflect what Rajaram's research tells us—a discriminatory colonial gaze which leads negative cultural traits to be strongly associated with the Pacific islanders. Borrowing from Rajaram's theory, this colonial gaze prevents the Pacific migrants from translating their body power into productive labour, as their culture has a perceived association non-productive work. Unable to be seen as "good labourers", ultimately these Pacific migrants could only constitute a "surplus population" in Australia.

New Zealand

The New Zealand government was praised for its humanitarian action on climate change issues vis-à-vis its Pacific Allies. In 2017, the minister for climate change, announced that New Zealand would consider issuing an experimental humanitarian visa for Pacific islanders significantly affected by climate change. But after only six months, the offer of a visa was no longer on the table. According to Helen Dempster and Kayly Ober (2020):

New Zealand dropped its plan to issue “climate refugee” visas for one crucial reason – Pacific Islanders didn’t want them. They saw gaining refugee status as a last resort. Instead, they called on the New Zealand government to institute a step-wise approach: reduce emissions, support adaptation efforts, provide legal migration pathways, and finally, if all fails, grant a form of legally protected status.

In New Zealand government’s defence, it is the Pacific islanders’ rejection to this proposal which led to the abandonment of the climate refugee visa. However, one can argue that Pacific islanders did not simply reject this proposal, but they appealed to the New Zealand government to introduce serious measures to deal with climate change and the subsequent displacement issue. Apart from dropping the plan, the New Zealand government showed no signs of implementing the “step-wise approach” demanded by the Pacific islanders.

On the subject of reducing carbon emissions, New Zealand’s official data suggests that a reduction of CO₂ emissions has not occurred. The data published by the Ministry for the Environment shows that, in the last 30 years (from 1990 to 2019)⁸ overall gross emissions followed a pattern of growth. Although the figure has stabilised around 800,000kt per year since 2005, we still do not see a significant drop in New Zealand’s gross emissions (Ministry for the Environment 2021). Furthermore, looking at New Zealand’s net emissions, which takes into consideration the offset units bought from the country’s land and forestry management, the figure still wavered between 500,000kt to 550,000kt per year for the last eight years, not to mention that recent net emissions are much higher when compared to the period of 2007 to 2010 (Ministry for the Environment 2021). Interpreting these data, it implies that effective measures have not been introduced to significantly reduce New Zealand’s carbon emissions.

One could argue that although New Zealand has not achieved great results as regards CO₂ reduction, it was quick to offer a legal migration

pathway and to embark on a long-term resettlement scheme for other PICs. A benign intention to engage with human welfare can be credited to the government's creation of the Pacific Access Category (PAC), as it guarantees indefinite length to stay in New Zealand and allows visa holders to both work and study in New Zealand. Moreover, the scheme also grants entry to a partner and dependent children under age 24, which shows that long-term family integration into New Zealand society is desired (New Zealand Immigration 2021a). Nonetheless, the PAC operates by a completely random lottery system, which selects only 75 I-Kiribati citizens per year (New Zealand Immigration 2021a). For a country that faces critical threats associated with climate change and demands climate justice, the 75 places offered seem unable to satisfy the needs. Furthermore, though qualified as a "humanitarian" approach, the governmental website puts forward strongly worded messages about how New Zealand's work ethic should be respected by the incoming Pacific migrants. On the New Zealand governmental website, a brief summary explicitly states, "[b]e prepared to work hard in New Zealand. It is important to be responsible and committed to your job – it will help you settle well in New Zealand. Do not waste this opportunity" (New Zealand Immigration 2021b). This emphasis interestingly echoes Rajaram's idea about how an ideal of "productive labour" is embedded in the neoliberal/colonial ideology.

The governmental website also intentionally advertises the story of a "hard-working" I-Kiribati female migrant, Ritia Tioti. It openly opposes the cultural values held by New Zealanders with those of I-Kiribati people. Tioti's statement is not only highlighted in bold but also quoted in a separate box alongside the main text to make the words stand out on the webpage. "In Kiribati we worried less about time, but in New Zealand, there is more clock watching and working to a timetable. I have to work quicker" says Tioti (New Zealand Immigration 2021c). On the one hand, one could argue that Tioti's words simply identify differences between two sets of cultural values and habits, and that they are intended as a gentle reminder for new migrant settlers. On the other, the emphasis placed on Tioti's statement can also be seen as a moral preaching for Pacific migrants to adopt or conform to the cultural values of New Zealand; to a certain extent, it serves to make them perceive their own cultural values as inferior to that of the destination country. Considering the socio-economic profiles of Kiribati and New Zealand, it is natural that the positioning of these two countries involves a hierarchical power-relation between the two. The existing hierarchical relation has made Tioti's words a rhetorical imperative. The quoted words serve to produce a general mentality for the incoming migrants, with which they are ready to

accept (or led to believe) that their cultural value or everyday habits are, as Atalas and Rajaram argue, not “up to the standard” that is commonly shared in the developed economy (i.e., working hard equals time management, efficiency, and productivity).

Pacific Climate Migration Through the Lens of Matthieu Rytz’ Eco-documentary

The above analysis outlined a number of issues with regard to international climate migration and relocation. It looked at why international migration routes may not be the ideal solution for Kiribati to tackle climate emergency issues from a socio-economic perspective. In the second half of my paper, I analyse *Anote’s Ark* (2018), an eco-documentary made with the intention of strongly defending the “migration with dignity” policy, proposed by the former president of Kiribati, Anote Tong.

As mentioned in the introduction, a decolonial reading becomes essential for us to “provincialise” the Global North climate discourse. But, it could also provide a critical angle when (re-)considering climate displacement issues in the South Pacific. Digital artworks such as eco-documentaries may have a particularly significant role in that they allow people to visualise a reality from which they are habitually disengaged. However, the downside of this medium is that it can also become a tool serving a specific political ideology, as it may exert a strong influence on viewers’ judgements and ethical stances with respect to the issues presented. This section addresses two problematic issues evoked in *Anote’s Ark*’s: 1) the “migration with dignity” policy, which I argue is a myth; and 2) the reinforcement of salvage environmentalism through a theological white colonial settler framing of Pacific climate narrative.

Summary and Narratives of the Film

The film is composed of two individual narratives, the former president, Anote Tong, and an I-Kiribati female migrant, Tiemer (Sermay) Tiare (hereafter referred to as Sermay), who is undertaking her migrant journey to New Zealand after she was selected via the lottery scheme. Acknowledging the vision and policy brought forward by Tong under his mandate between 2003 to 2016, the film presents Tong as one of the most outspoken politicians on many urgent humanitarian and economic issues related to anthropogenic climate change. The narration of Sermay’s story, on the other hand, speaks at a grassroot, individual level, presenting climate change through the lens

of an ordinary individual. The film begins with two seemingly distinct and unrelated narratives, each presenting their views on climate migration, but gradually their narratives become intertwined with each other.

The atemporal narrative constructed around Tong's character recounts his incessant efforts to advocate a "migration with dignity" policy on many occasions, including media interviews, a meeting with Pope Francis, and public speeches at the United Nations Human Rights Council and World Humanitarian Summit. Meanwhile, the film also presents Tong's visit to Japan where he explored other advanced technological solutions such as building floating islands or developing deep ocean living space. In contrast, Sermay's narrative follows a linear pattern. Beginning with her justification of the desire to move abroad as a result of negative climate impacts, the camera follows Sermay and her family's internal relocation within the country, and then her individual voyage to New Zealand as a labour migrant. The film highlights the fact that, at the initial stage of her international migration, it was impossible for the whole family to be relocated altogether, as their limited financial resources meant they could only afford for Sermay to undertake the journey alone. After six months, we finally see Sermay reuniting with her family. Her partner, after their brief reunion, had to depart to Te Puke to work on a kiwi farm on a two-year contract. The film also portrays the hardship that Sermay had to go through as a female labour migrant, showing her conversation with a doctor about giving birth to another baby without her husband. Despite all the difficulties Sermay has to overcome throughout her resettlement in New Zealand, the film offers aspiration and a sense of hope at the conclusion of her story. At the hospital, a new-born girl named Cecelia was presented to her I-Kiribati parents. When the parents discuss the future of their new-born, they comment, "[i]t's all good, we have created somebody here. [...] This girl here, she'll have a different life. She belongs to this place" (Rytz 2018). With this ending scene, the film contextualises Sermay's migration story as empirical evidence supporting Tong's advocacy of the "migration with dignity" policy.

"Migration with Dignity" Policy as a Myth?

My analysis aims to unveil the underlying danger of contemporary eco-documentaries, which are so often aligned with a particular political discourse. Eco-documentaries like *Anote's Ark* ultimately assist in reinforcing a Eurocentric set of values based on the principles of human rights and free labour mobility. This Eurocentric or Global North perspective is problematic because it not only excludes other viewpoints arising in a non-European

regional context, but it also assumes that a certain “universality” is inherent in its climate narrative. Contrary to what the film asserts, I argue that the ideology of *Anote’s Ark* has a serious drawback. The realisation of Tong’s policy could only foster an acceleration of the neoliberal economic circulation of human capital and further escalate the unequal power relation within the hierarchical structure produced by the capitalist system. The aftermath of this acceleration will also lead to the widening of the class divide between proprietors and labourers. Most importantly, it conditions the pacific climate migrants to accept the role of “unfree labour”, as Sébastien Rioux and his colleagues pointed out in their post-Marxist’s critique (Rioux et al. 2020).

Rioux et al. argue that in today’s capitalist system, a labourer can never be truly “free” in the sense of the Enlightenment philosophers, who saw each individual human being as possessing a basic and natural right to enjoy their “freedom”. The labourer is conditioned by the capitalist system and cannot exercise his/her free will against it. Citing Jairus Banaji, Rioux et al. explains, “the only real freedom workers possess under capitalism or any system of domination is their power of resistance”, but in most conditions workers are subjected to the system as its logic of dispossession continues to apply (Banaji 2003: 91 as cited in Rioux et al. 2020: 726). In more explicit terms, they add:

[W]ithin a free [labour] market[,] the worker is not only free in the sense that ‘he can dispose of his labour-power as his own commodity’, but also in that he is ‘free’ from other sources of sustenance and ‘has no other commodity for sale’. The worker is therefore ‘free to starve’ if he does not enter into a ‘free’ [labour] contract (Marx 1990: 272; Fraser and Jaeggi 2018, 16; re-quoted and paraphrased in Rioux et al. 2020: 713).

In line with this, I argue that the “migration with dignity” policy, in the current context of what has been offered so far to Kiribati by its developed counterparts in the region, remains a myth. The truth is that no genuine “dignity” comes along with the current migration schemes proposed, as the actual process of migration automatically converts the I-Kiribati climate migrants into unfree labourers subjected to the exploitation of New Zealand or Australian neoliberal markets. In Kiribati, the significant lack of educational infrastructure remains highly problematic, and the general level of literacy, English communication skills, and other professional skills are all far below the standard of other developing or developed countries⁹ (Webber 2013: 2724; Allgood and McNamara 2017: 375). Furthermore, Kiribati’s economy remains largely a subsistence economy, which means that the general population continues

to rely on natural resources to provide their basic needs (i.e., fishing and agriculture) and has little access to the monetary system. Subsequently, a high degree of dependence on remittances provided by other I-Kiribati citizens working abroad has become common. In many respects, the combination of this economic set-up and the lack of education almost pre-conditions the Kiribati migrants to become only unfree labourers in low-skill industries in New Zealand and Australia. This also reflects what Rioux et al. point out: the unfree labourers are mainly “concentrated in the agricultural, construction, manufacturing and mining industries, as well as sex and domestic work” (Rioux et al. 2020: 710).

In the documentary, we see that Sermay, being the first and only family member to undertake a journey of international migration, is destined to work as a migrant labourer in the agriculture sector. Once she was notified of her successful application for the lottery migration scheme, she was obliged to first secure employment in New Zealand. Upon her arrival, her I-Kiribati childhood friend, Ngeangea, in Auckland, came to pick her up at the airport, and had a few conversational exchanges in the car.

Sermay: My little one kept crying.

Ngeangea: Right.

Sermay: I said look – I am going to work as many jobs as possible.

Ngeangea: Try not to think of them too much. Focus on laughing.

(Rytz 2018)

On the camera, we see that Sermay and her friend appear to be jovial and teasing each other in a humorous way, but the heaviness of emotion lingering behind Sermay’s tears already implies an expectation of hardship for her “underclass” migrant life ahead. For several years that followed, Sermay was unable to return home, but could only use her limited income to bring some of her family members to New Zealand. Moreover, at the hospital after Sermay went into labour, she immediately expresses her concern for not being in the job market. Her conversation with her husband reveals her anxiety about not being able to secure a sustainable income. Ambiguous as it may sound, Sermay’s statement obliquely suggests that her contract on the kiwi farm was terminated alongside the birth of her child. The “replaceability” of the migrant labour force can be extrapolated from what is left unsaid. Sermay’s migration journey thus demonstrates perfectly the absorption of climate migrant into the developed nation’s neoliberal economy.

The Shaping of Political Narrative on Pacific Climate Change via Eco-documentaries

Both Elizabeth DeLoughrey (2018) and Simon Troon (2021) have identified a sudden rise of Pacific eco-documentary productions occurring since 2000. Amongst these eco-documentaries about sea-level rising problems in places such as Tuvalu, Papua New Guinea, and Kiribati, one notices that human displacement became a more prominent issue in those produced after 2010, notably Briar March's *There Once was an Island* (2010), Tom Zubrycki's *The Hungry Tide* (2011) and Rytz's *Anote's Ark* (2018). These documentaries further become a forceful agent and a powerful tool in shaping today's political narrative on climate displacement in the Pacific. And they are particularly appreciated, but also shaped, by the so-called "Western" or Global North moral actors. Reflecting on urgent environmental issues we confront in the age of Anthropocene, the political narrative generally presented in these eco-documentaries boils down to a focus on human survival. Unconsciously, the ensemble effect of these documentaries redirects the climate debate towards human rights consideration, placing an emphasis solely on the framework of climate justice.¹⁰ I am therefore critical of how the socio-political function of these eco-documentaries ultimately appropriates Pacific climate issues in such a way that the problem is only about the issue of human survival.

On this subject, one could ask the following question: is climate justice the most appropriate or applicable approach in solving global or regional issues related to anthropogenic climate change? To a large extent, climate justice approaches proposed by organisations in civil society or scholars mainly concentrate on human rights. Historically speaking, the origin of climate justice discourse can be indirectly linked to the period of the 1970s and 1980s in North America, when the "environmental justice movement" arose to fight against environmental racism or classism (Martinez-Alier 2015: 385). These movements highlighted the importance of social injustice and economic inequalities in the context of environmental degradation. The development of the climate justice framework follows the same logic, and often leads to an "anthropocentric" position by default. As Mary Robinson, the founder of the Mary Robinson Foundation - Climate Justice, firmly states in an interview, "Climate change is often framed as an environment issue... [and] primarily a technical issue, a scientific issue. Climate justice, with its foundations in human rights and development, takes a different approach. Climate justice makes climate change an issue about people" (Gearty 2014: 18). Drawing on some other contemporary scholars' critiques of anthropocentrism in relation

to environmental ethics, one can also question if it is useful for the climate justice framework to move far away from eco- or bio-centric positions and to rely mainly on anthropocentric moral values (Katz and Oechsli 1993: 49). As Dipesh Chakrabarty affirms, “the humanities’ longstanding focus on human welfare and on the problems of justice between humans – a strictly anthropocentric justice – will be inadequate in the era of climate change” (2020: 48). One may also ask: are we constantly *seeking a paradox, that is, an anthropocentric answer in a hope to respond to a crisis that is originally caused precisely by human selfishness*? If this is the central issue of the climate justice framework, then one should query whether the political narrative of Pacific climate change has been “hijacked” by anthropocentrism, and whether it gives rise to the danger that future eco-documentaries may continue reinforcing such human-centric ideology.

Apart from this critical reflection on an “anthropocentric” perspective of Pacific climate change problem, another point worth considering, particular in relation to Matthieu Rytz’s eco-documentary, is the appropriation of the colonial gaze through the film’s theological narrative building and allegorical association. In this section, I bring together both DeLoughrey’s decolonial criticism of the Pacific eco-documentaries and Malcom Ferdinand’s critique of the theological aspect of climate discourse (i.e., Noah’s ark’s allegorical meaning in global ecological crisis). Prior to her publication of *Allegories of the Anthropocene* (2019), DeLoughrey had already pointed out that Pacific eco-documentaries are mostly filmed and produced by “white colonial settler cultures” in North America, Australia, and New Zealand, and that they embrace what she terms “salvage environmentalism” (2018: 188–189). As noted above, DeLoughrey is highly critical of this “salvage environmentalism”, since the approach is inevitably linked to the traditions of salvage anthropology (2018: 189; Troon 2021). For DeLoughrey, filmmakers utilising the realism of documentary to recover the “vanishing natives” in their works or portray a kind of mourning of the lost pristine nature in the South Pacific “paradise” evokes a sense of “imperialist nostalgia”. This filming technique, in her opinion, epitomises the same approach when anthropologists conducted their research on the “natives/salvages” in the colonial era. Salvage environmentalism, in this sense, emerges in a context where environmental documentaries depict or reiterate the vanishing South Pacific indigenous “paradise” and the lost culture associated with it. Drawing on DeLoughrey’s critical analysis, I argue that Rytz’s *Anote’s Ark* re-enacts this “salvage environmentalism”. Firstly, as we see in the film, the agency of the islanders was not fully exhibited because the stories narrated by the islanders are carefully selected to conform to the

metanarrative decided by the director. Although Rytz is completely absent from the documentary framing, his underlying climate discourse is fully embedded in the film. His political ideology, which assumes the perspective of a white colonial settler, is successfully transmitted to his audience via the insertion of Tong's voice-over commentaries. These commentaries about global climate change are thrown in during various long shots of aerial or panoramic views, which highlight the pristine beauty of the tropical Kiribati islets, emphasise the laborious process of building seawalls, and dramatize the visual effect of melting glaciers. The simultaneous employment of this voice-over and shooting technique immediately put the audience in line with this third person omniscient position, and it predetermines and fixates the angle of the viewers on the issue. Amongst the two main protagonists, Tong, the former president, occasionally speaks of his view on migration issues directly to the interviewing camera. There is, however, no open "dialogue" on the issue, only the leader of the country revealing his proposed plan for the people. In addition, the shots that accompany Sermay's narrative show little of her agency and do not directly show her responses to the complex issue of migration. As viewers, we only perceive Sermay's thoughts passively from her interactions with friends and family members. Not only is her agency on the climate migration issue perceived as being limited, but what she might have to say about it is at best something the audience is left to speculate on, the result being that she is also denied a "voice" on the issue. Secondly, the documentary's metanarrative also relies heavily on the Christian idea of exodus. Again, this theological framing reaffirms DeLoughrey's postcolonial critique of the colonial settlers' "salvage environmentalism". The likening of Aote Tong to the biblical figure of Noah will be recognised by the audience from the film's title. Directly drawing a biblical reference to Noah gives a sense of divine weight to the film's central character. But one can argue that this does not simply reflect a choice to praise Tong's moral leadership. Through the title, a layer of the Pacific's colonial history and its civilising project (i.e., Christianising the "uncivilised" indigenous people) is revealed. If Noah is the acknowledged righteous man, who has found "favour in the sight of the LORD" (The Holy See 2022), then we can argue that Tong, representing this patriarchal figure who shall lead his people to find refuge in Lord's benevolence, was also selected by an invisible "Lord"—that is, the filmmaker and what he represents in the colonial settler's cultural context.

Expanding beyond the decolonial thought of DeLoughrey, Malcolm Ferdinand's critique of Noah's allegorical meaning in the age of Anthropocene is not only useful but in fact becomes necessary for us to understand how Rytz's

eco-documentary ties into a deeper level of “climate (neo-)colonialism”. Drawing on the biblical reference of Noah’s ark, Ferdinand reminds us that all contemporary environmental or climate discourses begin with this particular allegory (2022: 78). As he notes, influential environmental works published by James Lovelock and Paul Crutzen both evoke the image of a ship when referring to the Earth (Gaia in Lovelock’s terminology and the Earth System in Crutzen’s) and they see humans enacting the role of stewards of the ship (Ferdinand 2022: 78). In the eyes of these canonical environmental figures, the earth is regarded as a “vessel that contains humans and non-humans in a self-regulating state of living” (Ferdinand 2022: 78). In this light, Noah’s ark becomes an essential ideological embodiment in the climate discourse, and in the meanwhile, it also serves as a political metaphor, as “it sets the stage for possible ways of thinking socially and politically about how to deal with the ecological crisis” (Ferdinand 2022: 79). Ferdinand further argues that to board this ark there are some established prerequisites or conditions, and one of them is to accept the survival of some humans and some nonhumans as a principle of socio-political organisation. In Ferdinand’s view, this acceptance also becomes dangerous and discriminatory as it leads us to legitimising an act of violence in that process of boarding selection (2022: 79). Reading Rytz’s *Anote’s Ark* from this decolonial perspective, we can conclude that the theological allegory of Noah’s ark transfers its own political meaning into a contemporary (neo-)colonial climate/humanitarian project. Under the guise of good intentions to save both humanity and the Earth at a time of ecological crisis, this (neo-)colonial project is inherently violent, as Ferdinand points out, for it “reproduces the mechanisms of enslavement and domination between those who enter the ark and those who do not, between the chosen and the excluded” (2022: 83).

Alongside his theoretical concept, Ferdinand also underlines that the ecological allegory of Noah’s ark generates a set of political figures, namely the “five figures of the world’s refusal”—i.e., the unconcerned one, the xenowarrior, the sacrifice, the master-patriarch, and the world devourer (2022: 84–86). These figures represent different ways of implementing the politics of boarding, and to align my analysis of Rytz’s film with Ferdinand’s idea, here I choose to further elaborate on the figure of “the master-patriarch”. Ferdinand asserts strongly, “[n]othing prevents Noah’s ark from taking the form of a slave ship” (2022: 85). In his view, the “master-patriarchs” are the ones who turn the people on board into their slaves. Moreover, he suggests, “[t]he ‘slaves’ will be admitted on board only on the condition that they are kept out of sight of the world” (2022: 85). This “figure of the world’s refusal” corresponds

exactly to what I have analysed so far with regard to Kiribati people being the “underclass” climate migrants. On the one hand, one can argue that both New Zealand and Australian governments enact the role of this “master-patriarch”. Through their climate migration work schemes, especially their SWPs, both governments “enslave” these climate/labour migrants in their neoliberal system. As Ferdinand states, they are allowed to be on board, but “need to be kept out of sight”. Hence, low-skilled labour works on fruit-picking farms or other agricultural industries, which become their hosting sites. On the other hand, one can even go further to argue that this “master-patriarch” figure also applies to Anote Tong or the director Matthieu Rytz, who has assumed this role and traded the I-Kiribati migrant “slaves” under this (neo-)colonial climate discourse without recognising their true identity.

CONCLUSION

To summarise, this paper critically assesses the current climate justice approach that is highly influenced by the Global North perspective. The paper draws attention to the case study of Kiribati’s climate displacement in the South Pacific and further uses it to demonstrate that the exploitation of economic surplus value of migrant labourers can be accelerated by the implementation of our current climate justice approach, which promotes the free flow of human labourer capital. In the first section, the paper offers decolonial theories and applies a post-Marxist reading of their theories in relation to the Pacific climate displacement. With DeLoughrey’s “salvage environmentalism” concept, we understand that media intervention does not necessarily bridge the gap between the First and the Third Worlds as far as their understanding of the climate crisis is concerned. In fact, it “decouples” them, especially when we consider the complex historical and colonial ties within those places. This decoupling becomes evident when the paper later presents an analysis of Rytz’s *Anote’s Ark*. Furthermore, following Rajaram’s argument, we know that regardless of the status of being migrants or refugees, both categorisations could not prevent the persons in question from being subjected to economic exploitation in the capitalist system of their new destinations. One can rightfully assume that these climate migrants or refugees would be converted as remainders of a homogenous society in their host country, and, by and large, could also suffer from potential socio-political discrimination.

The second part of the paper provides an overview of Kiribati’s socio-economic profile as well as a more detailed assessment of New Zealand and

Australia's so-called "humanitarian actions". The finding shows that these humanitarian assistances offer only lip service and do not count as genuine efforts. The final section focusses on an analysis of Rytz's eco-documentary. The paper challenges the fundamental idea of the "migration with dignity" policy and considers the policy to result in speeding up the process of turning (I-Kiribati) climate migrants into unfree labourers. The paper also suggests that this type of eco-documentary, which steers anthropogenic climate debate toward a sole concern with a political narrative of human survival, could be problematic. Applying DeLoughrey and Ferdinand's reading, the paper points out Rytz's eco-documentary not only trades on "salvage environmentalism", but, to a large extent, it also legitimises the climate (neo-)colonialism and the inherent violence of its contemporary "salve ship" in disguise.

The ultimate goal of this paper has been to pursue a deeper reflection on our current climate discourse and political narratives, from a decolonial perspective. The generally accepted Global North climate migration approach will only exacerbate the functioning of global economic exploitations of the unfree labourers from the margin of the world, and, in a way, this can also be identified as in continuity with neocolonial domination. Last but not least, regarding the making of eco-documentaries specifically in the Pacific context, an attempt to engage a decolonial dialectics in its producing process should be considered essential, especially given that all Pacific Island states share complex colonial experiences in their past and present. As argued in the film analysis, the deliberate juxtaposition of Anote Tong with the biblical figure, Noah, draws allusion to the (Western) colonial/divine father and perpetuates the reappropriation of this (in-)visible figure. Furthermore, the emphasis of a Christian ethical approach as the most justifiable response to the climate/humanitarian crisis also assumes that only the colonial settler's Christian model could provide an answer to our current climate crisis. This reinforces the fundamental ideal of the colonial legacy and reductively view the Pacific indigenous through a colonial lens.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The author certifies that she has no affiliation with or involvement in any organisation or entity with any financial interest or non-financial interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research project on Pacific climate migration was supported by the Centre of Austronesian Studies (COAST) and the Centre for Migration, Diaspora and Exile (MIDEX) at the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan).

NOTES

- * Ti-Han Chang is a lecturer (assistant professor) in Asia Pacific Studies at the University of Central Lancashire. Her research focusses on the contemporary eco-literature in Taiwan and its implication in the Asia Pacific region. Ti-Han is particularly interested in postcolonial ecocriticism, which draws her attention to topics such as non-human agency, borders and nations, climate change and migration. Since 2019, she is engaged with multiple research projects which investigate the Pacific climate migrants and the narratives of the displaced. Currently, she is preparing her monograph on contemporary eco-writings in Taiwan and two co-edited volumes, *Identities on the Move: A Transdisciplinary Studies of Global Displacement* and *Taiwan as Ocean*.
- ¹ The original publication in German came out in 2007. The English translated version was published in 2009. As the main reference for this article is based on its English translation, the in-text cited publishing year is 2009.
- ² See Tong (2014).
- ³ Liquid modernity is coined by the Polish-British sociologist, Zygmunt Bauman. The concept refers to today's highly developed and globalised societies and it sees this feature as the continuation of modernity rather than as an element of the succeeding era known as postmodernity, or the postmodern. Bauman's liquid modernity is particularly marked by the global capitalist economies with the increasing privatisation of services and by the information revolution.
- ⁴ It is important to note that my article follows Rajaram's reasoning and intentionally chooses not to make an explicit distinction between the status of refugees and migrants. Rajaram does point out that some may object to the idea that refugees and migrants are mixed together for analysis, given that their legal definitions are completely different. In the existing literature, there is no coherent usage or interpretation for terminologies like climate migrants or climate refugees. Scholars in the field, such as Walter Kälin, insist on distinguishing the two terms and establishing agreed meanings, as he sees unclarified usage of the terms as the main barrier to advancing concrete measures for climate migration issues. For Kälin (2021: 86, 96), people moving across national borders by the effects of climate change, although they fulfil the criterion of being outside their country of origin, are not qualified as refugees in any legal sense, unless extreme scenarios such as social unrest, violence and armed conflicts are triggered by the significant decrease in essential resources that is directly related to climate change. My paper, however, does not follow Kälin's reasoning. Instead, it agrees with Rajaram (2018: 629) when he argues, "[t]he term 'refugee' is ultimately a legal construct that privileges a certain idea of what constitutes persecution. Migrants, working-class migrants, excluded or impoverished by global capitalist structures, and refugees are

marginalised in similar ways. When we take the legal language out, there is little social, economic or political reason to maintain a strict differentiation between refugees and working-class migrants”.

- ⁵ I have offered an analysis of New Zealand’s PAC Scheme in a co-authored book chapter, see Chang and Collie (2022: 61–87).
- ⁶ The discussion of climate justice will be further elaborated in the below section, “The Shaping of Political Narrative on Pacific Climate Change via Eco-documentaries”.
- ⁷ In Voigt-Graft and Kagan’s research, it is documented that a total number of 84 students participated in the programme. But in the MA dissertation of Lara O’Brien (2013: 61), the author indicates that there were three cohorts of students (2007 – 29 students; 2008 – 32 students; 2009 – 26 students) which added up to a total figure of 87 I-Kiribati students. I have chosen to use the figure presented in O’Brien’s research seeing that she had been in direct contact with officer and staff of the KANI programme for arranging her field works with the KANI programme participants. With respect to this, O’Brien’s provided figure is more likely to be accurate.
- ⁸ The date here does not take into account year 2020 and 2021, as the outbreak of the COVID pandemic has significantly affected the global economy and subsequently introduced a temporary change of pattern with regard the global GHG emissions.
- ⁹ Allgood and McNamara (2017: 374–375) shows that, from their interviews with 60 households on Tawara (c. 600 people), the highest level of education obtained for 60% of respondents was secondary education, followed by primary school (25%).
- ¹⁰ For climate justice approaches, see Shue’s *Climate Justice: Vulnerability and Protection* (2014).

REFERENCES

- Alatas, S. H. 2010. *The myth of the lazy native: A study of the image of Malays, Filipinos and Javanese from the 16th to the 20th century and its function in the ideology of colonial capitalism*. London: Routledge.
- Allgood, L. and McNamara, K. E. 2017. Climate-induced migration: Exploring local perspectives in Kiribati. *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 38 (3): 370–385. <https://doi.org/10.1111/sjtg.12202>
- Banaji, J. 2003. The fictions of free labour: Contract, coercion, and so-called unfree labour. *Historical Materialism* 11 (3): 69–95. <https://doi.org/10.1163/156920603770678319>
- Beck, U. 2009. *World at risk*. Trans. Cronin, C. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Chakrabarty, D. 2020. The human sciences and climate change. *Science and Culture* 86 (1–2): 46–48. https://doi.org/10.36094/sc.v86.2020.Climate_Change.Chakrabarty.46
- Chang, T. H. and Collie, L. 2022. New Zealand’s political responses to climate change and migration in the Pacific: A perspective from the South. In *Pacific voices and climate change*, ed. Alsford, N. J. P., 61–87. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-98460-1_4
- DeLoughrey, E. 2019. *Allegories of the Anthropocene*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

- _____. 2018. The sea is rising: Visualising climate change in the Pacific Islands. *Pacific Dynamics: Journal of Interdisciplinary Research* 2 (2): 185–197.
- Dempster, H. and Ober, K. 2020. New Zealand’s “climate refugee” visas: Lessons for the rest of the world. *DEVPOLICY BLOG*, 31 January 2020. <https://devpolicy.org/new-zealands-climate-refugee-visas-lessons-for-the-rest-of-the-world-20200131/> (accessed 19 June 2020).
- Ferdinand, M. 2022. *Decolonial ecology: Thinking from the Caribbean world*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.
- Fraser, N. and Jaeggi, R. 2018. *Capitalism: A conversation in critical theory*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Gearty, C. 2014. An interview with Mary Robinson, President of The Mary Robinson Foundation – Climate Justice. *Journal of Human Rights and The Environment* 5: 18–21. <https://doi.org/10.4337/jhre.2014.02.03>
- Holdgate, M. W., Bruce, J., Desai, N., Mascarenhas, O., Shibab, H., Camacho, R. F., Mahtab, F. U., Maunder, W. J. and Tewungwa, S. 1989. *Climate change: Meeting the challenge – Report by a Commonwealth Group of Experts*. London: Commonwealth Secretariat.
- Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). 2022. Climate change 2022: Impacts, adaptation and vulnerability. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/> (accessed 9 September 2022).
- Kälin, W. 2021. Conceptualising climate-induced displacement. In *Climate change and displacement*, ed. McAdam, J., 81–103. Oxford, UK: Hart Publishing.
- Katz, E. and Oechsli, L. 1993. Moving beyond anthropocentrism. *Environmental Ethics* 15 (1): 49–59. <https://doi.org/10.5840/enviroethics199315139>
- March, B. 2010. *There Once was an Island: Te Henua e Nnoho*. Amazon Prime Video. New Zealand: On the Level Productions.
- Martinez-Alier, J. 2015. Review essay - Climate justice. *Development and Change* 46 (2): 381–386. <https://doi.org/10.1111/dech.12150>
- Marx, K. 1990. *Capital*, vol. 1. Trans. Fowkes, B. London: Penguin Books.
- Ministry for the Environment. 2021. New Zealand’s interactive emissions tracker. <https://emissionstracker.mfe.govt.nz/#NrAMBoEYF12TwCIByBTALo2wBM4eiQCC2AHEltEA> (accessed 3 December 2021).
- Ministry of Finance and Economic Development. 2012. Report on The Kiribati 2010 Census of Population and Housing, vol 1: Basic information and tables. <https://www.mfed.gov.ki/publications/census-report-2010-volume-i> (accessed 3 March 2022).
- New Zealand Immigration. 2021a. Information about: Pacific Access Category Resident Visa. <https://www.immigration.govt.nz/new-zealand-visas/apply-for-a-visa/about-visa/pacific-access-category-resident-visa> (accessed 3 December 2021).
- _____. 2021b. Moving to New Zealand with a Pacific Access Category (PAC) Resident Visa. <https://www.newzealandnow.govt.nz/choose-new-zealand/compare-new-zealand/moving-from-the-pacific-islands/moving-with-a-pacific-access> (accessed 3 December 2021).
- _____. 2021c. Long path for nurse and family. <https://www.newzealandnow.govt.nz/resources/long-path-for-nurse-and-family> (accessed 3 December 2021).
- Nixon, R. 2013. *Slow violence and the environmentalism of the poor*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

- O'Brien, L. 2013. "Migrating with dignity": A study of The Kiribati-Australia Nursing Initiative (KANI). MA diss., University of Kansas, US.
- Oakes, R., Milan, A. and Campbell, J. 2016. Kiribati: Climate change and migration – Relationships between household vulnerability, human mobility and climate change, report no. 20. Bonn, Germany: United Nations University Institute for Environment and Human Security (UNU-EHS). https://collections.unu.edu/eserv/UNU:5903/Online_No_20_Kiribati_Report_161207.pdf (accessed 19 January 2022).
- Opeskin, B. and MacDermott, T. 2009. Resources, population and migration in the Pacific: Connecting islands and rim. *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* 50 (3): 353–373. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8373.2009.01407.x>
- Pugh, J. and Chandler, D. 2021. *Anthropocene islands: Entangled worlds*. London: University of Westminster Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1v3gqxp>
- Quammen, D. 2018. *The tangled tree: A radical new history of life*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Rajaram, P. K. 2018. Refugees as surplus population: Race, migration and capitalist value regimes. *New Political Economy* 23 (5): 627–639. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13563467.2017.1417372>
- Rioux, S., LeBaron, G. and Verovšek, P. J. 2020. Capitalism and unfree labor: A review of Marxist perspectives on modern slavery. *Review of International Political Economy* 27 (3): 709–731. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09692290.2019.1650094>
- Roland, H. B. and Curtis, K. J. 2020. The differential influence of geographic isolation on environmental migration: A study of internal migration amidst degrading conditions in the Central Pacific. *Population and Environment* 42 (2): 161–182. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11111-020-00357-3>
- Rytz, M. 2018. *Anote's Ark*. DVD. Canada: EyeSteelFilm.
- Shaw, L., Edwards, M. and Rimon, A. 2014. KANI Independent Review: AidWorks Initiatives Number: ING466 – Review Report. <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/kiribati-australia-nursing-initiative-independent-report.pdf> (accessed 29 June 2020).
- Shue, H. 2014. *Climate justice: Vulnerability and protection*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- The Holy See. 2022. The Book of Genesis. https://www.vatican.va/archive/bible/genesis/documents/bible_genesis_en.html (accessed 19 January 2022).
- The World Bank. 2021a. GDP per capita (current US\$) – Kiribati. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD?locations=KI> (accessed 2 February 2021).
- _____. 2021b. Population, total - Kiribati. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=KI> (accessed 02 February 2021).
- Tong, A. 2014. Statement by H. E. President Anote Tong. Transcript of speech delivered at the 69th United Nations General Assembly, New York, 26 September 2014. https://www.un.org/en/ga/69/meetings/gadebate/pdf/KI_en.pdf (accessed 20 January 2022).
- Troon, S. R. 2021. The view from a body of water: Representing flooding and sea level rise in the South Pacific. *Studies in Documentary Film* 15 (1): 75–88. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17503280.2020.1725995>

- Voigt-Graf, C. and Kagan, S. 2017. Migration and labour mobility from Kiribati. *Development Policy Centre Discussion Paper* no. 56. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2937416>
- Webb, J. 2020. Kiribati economic survey: Oceans of opportunity. *Asia & The Pacific Policy Studies* 7 (1): 5–26. <https://doi.org/10.1002/app5.297>
- Webber, S. 2013. Performative vulnerability: Climate change adaptation policies and financing in Kiribati. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 45 (11): 2717–2733. <https://doi.org/10.1068/a45311>
- Zubrycki, T. 2011. *The Hungry Tide*. Amazon Prime Video. Australia: Jotz Productions.