

ABSTRACT:

Title of Thesis: Discourse and Responsibility: Climate Change Refugees in South Asia

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Both migration and climate change are controversial topics in the 21st century. Migration is increasingly monitored due to increasing fears of national security threats brought by migrants themselves, while there is a lack of international diplomatic action concerning climate change and its effects. Thus, the recent discourse concerning ‘climate change refugees,’ or those fleeing their homes because of climate change, poses a challenge when regarded within the current international migration framework. However, much of the language used in the discourse is broad, abstract, simplistic and alarmist. Given this, the discourse impairs understanding of what is happening in diverse areas of the world because of climate change. Thus, this thesis seeks to investigate the effects, impacts and relevance of this international narrative and discourse on ‘climate change refugees’ in South Asia. Overall, the thesis argues that the ‘climate change refugee’ discourse distorts the reality of climate change migration in the South Asian region and offers few practical solutions for those displaced by environmental factors. The discourse simplifies migration and fails to take into account the varied, complex conditions in which migration occurs. These findings have significant international policy implications as intergovernmental organizations and governments tackle the new reality of climate change migration.

Discourse and Responsibility: Climate Change Refugees in South Asia

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Introduction

i.1 Global Migration Patterns and Climate Change

In 2015, the number of global international migrants, those living for one year or longer outside their country of birth, was 3.3% of the world population, or around 244 million individuals (United Nations General Assembly 2016). With increased levels of globalization, there are increased international causes for and impacts of migration. One such influence is that of climate change. While environmental migration, where individuals migrate due to natural disaster, is a historically common practice, migration due to anthropogenic climate change, or the changing of global climate patterns due to human activity, is unique to our century. In 2013, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released a report in which it had concluded with 95% certainty that recent shifts in climate and general global warming patterns are attributed to human activity, specifically stemming from greenhouse gas emission through the burning of fossil fuels for energy (Climate & Development Knowledge Network 2014). In subsequent reports, the IPCC cites the role of human activity on changing climate patterns and indicates that the likelihood of extreme climate events continues to increase as carbon dioxide and greenhouse gas (GHG) levels in the atmosphere rise (Climate Change 2014 Synthesis Report IPCC 2014). Overall, the changes brought by anthropogenic climate change have a wide range of effects on the earth's environmental and climate system.

Due to population growth and industrialization, atmospheric greenhouse gas emissions have increased tremendously the 1800s; within the last 50 years alone, the IPCC cites that CO₂ levels have increased by approximately by 100 parts per million (ppm) to 400 ppm, the highest in the past 400,000 years (Climate Change 2014 Synthesis Report IPCC 2014). Climate change directly affects ecosystems, biodiversity and large environmental orders, including regional

temperature variations, sea-level rise and water systems. Since the 1880s, global average temperature rose by 0.8 °C, with most warming occurring since 1975, while global mean sea level rose by 0.19 m from 1901 to 2010 (Climate & Development Knowledge Network 2014). Over 70% of natural disasters are the result of climate change and it is expected that this number will only increase (Pourhashemi et al. 2012). These current impacts and future predictions emphasize the severity of future climate change; one in which catastrophic climate disasters may be commonplace and severely impact social order, security and migration. Overall, these environmental changes directly affect the ability of humans and other living creatures to survive in certain places; thus, climate change may serve as a new variable in the commonly cited push-and-pull factors triggering human migration and may affect global migration patterns.

Both migration and climate change are controversial political topics in the 21st century. Migration is increasingly monitored and restricted due to increasing fears of national security threats brought by migrants themselves, while there is a lack of unified, international diplomatic action concerning climate change and its effects. Thus, the recent discourse concerning ‘climate change refugees,’ or those fleeing their homes because of climate change effects, complicates the already established international migration framework. The Norwegian Refugee Council announced in 2008 that 20 million people migrated that year due to natural disasters resulting from climate change, with most of the migrants being from developing countries (Pourhashemi et al. 2012). Currently, there is a large volume of academic literature and international media concerning ‘climate change refugees.’ However, climate and migration scholars argue that much of the language used in the discourse is broad, abstract, simplistic and alarmist. It becomes difficult to separate fact from fiction and truly understand what is happening in diverse areas of the world because of climate change. Thus, this thesis seeks to investigate the effects, impacts

and relevance of this international narrative and discourse on ‘climate change refugees’ in the South Asian region.

i.2 Why South Asia?

This thesis will focus on the South Asian region in particular. South Asia is comprised of 8 countries: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, the Maldives, Nepal, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka (Thapa 2016).¹ South Asia is a culturally, ethnically and historically diverse area that is at the center of major international political, economic and social debates. Currently, South Asia is a hotbed for political conflict and strife; Naxalite-Maoist clashes between insurgent and government groups in India, the continuing struggle against warlords and Taliban in Pakistan and Afghanistan, as well as continued clashes of Indian and Pakistani troops over the Kashmir issue have created a politically tense environment, which has significant effects on regional security and cooperation (World Politics Review 2014) (Riedel 2017). These conditions complicate discussion about the national and regional priority of the climate change issue.

South Asia has received international attention for being an extremely climate vulnerable region due to extremely high population density, high density of poverty (~700 million living on less than \$1.25 per day) and lack of resources for climate adaptation (equitybd 2010). India, Bangladesh and Pakistan were within the top twenty countries with most displacements from climate change-induced natural disasters in 2008 with 6.5 million displaced in India and 89,200 in Pakistan (Pourhashemi et al. 2012). Each country faces unique challenges; in 2016, the city of New Delhi, one of the largest in the region, was characterized as the most polluted in the world, while the country of Maldives is continually threatened with extreme sea-level rise that will

¹ As defined by the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), an economic forum established in 1985.

endanger the island nation (Griffiths 2016). An increase in extreme weather events in Pakistan, India, and Nepal threaten the livability of many areas while extreme deforestation in Afghanistan plays a significant role in national security and development. Finally, Bangladesh is threatened by all of the above, creating complex scenarios for those wishing to leave for climate reasons. Overall, climate change effects in the ecologically diverse South Asian region are manifold and complex, which are the reasons I have decided to focus my research on this area.

The aspects of regional migration and internal displacement for climate change reasons is another area of interest. From visiting South Asia in the past, I have seen that the level of internal displacement and environmental degradation has markedly increased. Revi cites that city centers have continued growing due to in-migration from other areas and climate change effects have become more and more commonplace (Revi 2008). In this thesis, I will demonstrate that creating regionally-tailored frameworks to responsibly and adequately acknowledge and protect such climate change migrants is an important component for development in the region.

Finally, South Asia is already one of regions of the world with high levels of human mobility (Ghosh 2004). The region is characterized by porous state borders as well as high levels of movement to the West, Middle East or Southeast Asia for asylum, education or work. South Asia also produces and hosts a significant number of refugees. Afghanistan is one of the three largest refugee-producing nations in the world (produced 2.7 million refugees in 2015), while Pakistan hosts the second largest number of refugees in the world (1.6 million refugees received mostly from Afghanistan in 2015) (UNHCR 1999). India also hosts a significant number of refugees from Tibet, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Iran and Iraq. Despite the large number of refugees, all South Asian countries, excluding Afghanistan, have not ratified important international conventions regarding forced migration and refugees (Office of the United Nations High

Commissioner For Refugees 2015). Since South Asian countries have not taken the first steps to address forced migration and its causes through ratifying these conventions, as climate change effects on migration patterns become more distinctive, there is an opportunity for new models and conversations to arise around forced displacement and such ‘climate change refugees’ in the South Asian context.

i.4 Research Question, Methodology and Arguments

This thesis will investigate the recent discourses on ‘climate change refugees’ and how they have been defended and adopted internationally as well as within South Asia. A major component of this thesis will be in investigating the validity and applicability of such discourses in South Asia. It will specifically examine how ‘climate change refugee’ discourses are perceived as relevant and alarmist regarding migration in South Asia. To do so, the thesis will combine academic theoretical analyses, data from reports by international agencies and organizations, as well as news media and print articles to highlight the different use of narrative and representation of environmental migrants or ‘climate change refugees.’ Throughout the 5 chapters, it will analyze current international and regional laws and policies and how this has affected perceptions of and attitudes toward both climate change and migration.

Overall, the thesis will answer the research question, how has the ‘climate change refugee’ discourse been articulated, defended, and adopted internationally and within South Asia and how appropriate are the solutions and recommendations offered by such a discourse? I argue that the ‘climate change refugee’ discourse offers a limited perspective of the climate migration problem and relies on alarmist narratives which ultimately disenfranchise migrants themselves. Thus, the solutions offered by such a discourse are limited in scope and impractical given the complexity behind climate-induced migration. The first chapter of the thesis will outline the

changing refugee discourse and introduce the concept of ‘climate change refugee’ in the broader climate migration and refugee agenda. It will also broadly outline how this discourse has been imagined under humanitarian and human rights perspectives and adopted and enacted in international and regional spheres using theoretical arguments by academics and the practical applications of inter-governmental organizations including the United Nations (UN) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The second chapter will focus on the status of migration in South Asia, offering insights into the history of migration and current challenges concerning climate change and development. Overall, this chapter will serve to demonstrate the complexity of climate change migration in the region using theories of how migration decisions occur as well as concrete data of climate change migration patterns around the region. The third chapter will demonstrate how the ‘climate change refugee’ discourse is understood and projected by both media and academic journal sources to highlight the complexity in perspective in the region regarding climate change migration. The fourth chapter will offer critiques of the ‘climate change refugee’ narrative in the South Asian context to highlight gaps and inconsistencies, especially regarding the link between climate change and development, that must be addressed. Finally, the fifth chapter will summarize major points of the thesis as well as highlight future directions and recommendations for South Asia in protecting those who move for environmental reasons and how the climate vulnerable region can develop an effective framework for addressing such migration.

The thesis will have two conclusions. The first being, that even though there is considerable literature surrounding ‘climate change refugees,’ there has been little diplomatic action in international spheres and even less in climate vulnerable region of South Asia due to lack of international engagement with and responsibility for climate change effects and national

agendas that prioritize economic and industrial development. While the challenges and dangers climate change presents to the South Asian region are well-defined and researched, there is a lack of an international and regional response to the issue. This presents a multitude of problems regarding the protection of various migrant groups under international human rights and humanitarian conventions and must be addressed as soon as possible through effective, practical and appropriate diplomatic action.

The second conclusion is that while climate change is a significant factor in migration decisions for many groups, the solution offered by the international discourse of ‘climate change refugees’ and its media representation can be perceived as alarmist, isolating, and not wholly representative of migration in the South Asian region. Theories around migration demonstrate that pin-pointing an individual’s choice to move solely on climate change or environment is extremely difficult and does not consider other factors such as socio-economic status and cultural or political context. While migration is an effective adaptation strategy for climate change effects, it should not be thought of as the primary or only solution. In addition to creating international and regional infrastructures to facilitate climate change migration, climate change migration discourses should also include efforts to implement effective adaptation and mitigation strategies in this climate vulnerable region. Using this argumentation, the thesis will conclude that the ‘climate change refugee’ discourse needs to be reframed to create more positive and effective solutions for the problem of climate change-induced displacement.

Overall, this thesis will broadly survey how attitudes to both climate change and migration shape international diplomacy and discourse. While it will demonstrate that migration due to environmental disaster/degradation is not new, in its conclusion, it will emphasize that discourse surrounding migration must be re-considered and re-framed in a more positive way.

While the feasibility of this is debatable, it is an attempt to address the negativity and hostility with which many migrants, regardless of their official status, are faced. Finally, this thesis will also demonstrate the extreme need for climate change to be both recognized as an international issue and implemented in international, regional and national institutions. The conflicting agendas concerning climate change pose an enormous problem in addressing the diverse issues and creating adequate infrastructures to combat climate change's varying effects and severity across countries.

Chapter 1 – The 21st Century Migrant: Changing Refugee Discourses

1.1 Chapter Objectives

In this chapter, I will introduce the international discourse around ‘climate change refugees,’ including commonly cited human rights and humanitarian defenses for protecting such migrants. Currently, the discourse surrounding this migrant group is layered with different perceptions, agendas and levels of political engagement. There is no single unified definition of a ‘climate change refugee,’ which poses significant challenges in the creation of a framework to protect such migrants. Additionally, I will also discuss common critiques of the ‘climate change refugee’ discourse and how international scholars envision institutions and frameworks set up for the protection of such migrants. Finally, the chapter will conclude with a discussion of how such academic ideas have been instituted in international and regional settings. Overall, this chapter will provide an overview of the discourse on ‘climate change refugees’ that is the main subject of this thesis.

1.2 The ‘Climate Change Refugee’ Discourse: A Global Responsibility

Anthropogenic climate change is a global phenomenon that has been increasingly investigated for its widespread impacts on human life, politics, and economy. Climate change has had significant impacts on global migration patterns as it contributes to and exacerbates many of the push-or-pull factors regarding movement, which has severe implications for global security (Munslow and Dempsey 2010). Sea-level rise, as well as increased severity and frequency of extreme weather events like droughts, floods are some of the effects of climate change (Brown 2015). These effects can compromise food and water security and change agricultural mechanisms in communities, translating into poverty and domestic or international relocation to urban areas. This internal and international displacement may affect political

networks and agendas and contribute to the rise in complex humanitarian emergencies (Munslow and Dempsey 2010). For example, many academics, although unremarked upon in the mainstream press, attribute the recent Syrian refugee crisis in Europe on a civil war heavily influenced by drought and internal displacement caused by climate change (Lieberman 2016).

With the continued emission of greenhouse gases and lack of international consensus on how to approach and handle climate change on a global scale, the problem of climate change induced displacement will only continue and worsen. By 2050, it has been estimated globally that between 250 million and 1 billion people will be displaced for environmental reasons (Tacoli 2009). The low-estimate of the number of ‘climate change refugees’ is 5 times the number the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees currently handles in total. However, experts on climate change, like Sir Nicholas Stern, consider these under-estimates at best (Albrecht and Plewa 2015).

Currently, the international community lacks both a universally accepted definition of ‘climate change refugee’ and the international policies necessary to protect these migrants. The former United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has conceded the international community’s failure to address climate change in an effective manner. The UNHCHR has asserted that this failure results from the relatively weak political and cooperative will among states to reduce the negative impact of climate change and recognize migration stimulated by environmental factors as valid (UNHCR 2011). The dichotomy between the reality of climate change induced migration and the lack of substantial international agency to protect these individuals needs to be addressed on a global scale.

To begin, currently, there are many perspectives on what an environmental migrant is and how it is defined; this terminology ranges from “environmentally induced migrant,” to

“environmental refugee” to the more recent “climate change refugee” (Biermann and Boas 2010). Each definition carries with it a specific connotation, and there is no universally established categorization of such people who leave their homelands because of human-induced environmental degradation (Brown 2015). Thus, the lack of consensus complicates defining ‘climate change refugee’ under this discourse and the context to which it fits within this thesis. Therefore, in this thesis, ‘climate change refugee’ will refer to an individual forced to flee his or her home and relocate permanently to a new country as a result of sudden or gradual environmental disruptions resulting from anthropogenic or human-induced climate change that has made their homeland uninhabitable (Albrecht and Plewa 2015). This definition does not differentiate between forced or voluntary or internal or external migration given the moral, ethical and human rights framework discussed later in the chapter. This definition generally does not discriminate based on type or cause of migration, but emphasizes adverse effects of climate change on livelihood, which results in a humanitarian imperative, albeit debated, to act and protect those affected. Finally, in order to distinguish between anthropogenic changes in the global ecosystem and other environmental disasters, in this definition, relevant climate change events will only include scientifically proven sea-level rise and increased severity and frequency of extreme weather events like floods, droughts, and storms (Albrecht and Plewa 2015).

1.21 Humanitarian Defense for Climate Change Refugees

Munslow and O’Dempsey argue that the moral and ethical framework for international organizations to add ‘climate change refugees’ to the global regime lies within the foundations of humanitarianism (2010). Humanitarianism is a global concept that has roots in many world religions and emphasizes the innate obligation to alleviate suffering and its causes through many forms of aid and assistance (Munslow and Dempsey 2010). Generally, the humanitarianism

central to our modern world is based on notions of goodwill and morality and emphasizes helping those in need. As the former United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Antonio Guterres stated, humanitarian activity has the “goal of enabling people to live peaceful, productive and prosperous lives” (UNHCR 2011, 1). However, given the goals of humanitarianism, academics and scholars continue to debate on the ideal breadth and scope of humanitarian action.

Climate change has the potential to severely degrade the environment to a point of inhabitability in many regions of the world; this level of suffering and displacement warrants, yet, does not receive adequate humanitarian action. The 200,000 Bangladeshis who become homeless every year due to river erosion are in a similar situation as the many that are trapped in sinking island states in the Pacific, specifically Kiribati, Tuvalu and Nauru. These individuals cannot appeal to international organizations for refugee status or resettlement (Lieberman 2016). Those who decide to stay will be plagued by harsh storms, inaccessibility to basic resources like food and water, and possibly death (Win 2012). Significant portions of the populations of other countries, like Pakistan and India, are in a precarious situation, caused by sea-level rise, desertification and other climate change related effects that not only pose a direct threat to life, but also threaten to undermine and ruin traditional agricultural systems, resulting in greater levels of food and water insecurity (Warner et al. 2010). Generally, these individuals will physically suffer if they remain in these environmentally-compromised regions, prompting migration and greater flows of climate change refugees. Those individuals who have physically and mentally suffered from man-made environmental change and denied the ability live in their cultural and historical homelands should be recognized and aided by such organizations given the moral/ethical framework from which humanitarianism stems.

In addition to emphasizing the severe mortality caused by flooding, droughts and sea-level rise, The United States Pentagon has also demonstrated that climate change related effects like drought have the possibility to act as ‘threat multipliers’ (Baker 2015). Climate change related events will exacerbate existing social, ethnic and political tensions, which may contribute to or even instigate armed conflict and forms of persecution as fights over scarce resources appear (Munslow and Dempsey 2010). All of these conflicts may add to traditional internal or transboundary refugee flows. Thus, the potential suffering faced by many of these climate affected individual’s commands humanitarian action in the purest moral and ethical sense. As humanitarians have an obligation to alleviate suffering, they should and they do work to provide aid to such populations.

However, the aid they do give is not consistent across types of migrants. For example, following the 2001 floods of the Zambezi River in central Mozambique, many international humanitarian organizations sent resources and assistance to populations forced to move from these low lying river areas to government-established resettlement locations (Warner et al. 2010). While these internally displaced people (IDPs) are domestically and internationally protected under government and international humanitarian law, if they had crossed international borders in an effort to escape a severe environmental threat, there would be few legal international mechanisms offering adequate recognition and protections (Carminati 2013). Tuvaluan migrants who fled to Australia and New Zealand were forcibly deported back to Tuvalu even though they were fleeing similar environmental threats of sea-level rise and food/water insecurity (Duong 2010). Unlike those from Mozambique, their entire island was threatened by this environmental degradation, forcing them to cross international borders. This protection gap by international inter-governmental aid organizations based on the border-crossing status of ‘climate change

induced migrants,' is confounding. Both migrants from Mozambique and Tuvalu will suffer if they stay in the regions from which they came, and are victims of a global man-made phenomenon, climate change (Albrecht and Plewa 2015). Thus, both should receive the same level of international attention and safety especially since humanitarianism is categorized as a philosophy that should benefit all people, regardless of political impartiality (Walker 2010).

The inconsistencies in the current treatment of those affected by environmental degradation demonstrates that the humanitarian moral imperative must go beyond simply providing aid to affected populations to legally allowing them the ability to relocate across international borders if necessary. Climate change is scientifically considered permanent; mitigation and adaptation strategies may help alleviate the symptoms, but will never reverse the effects (Duong 2010). Therefore, while aid and assistance may help populations survive for a short period of time, it does not erase the future certainty that these people may have to relocate, whether domestic or internationally. This uncertainty brings about another moral and ethical perspective to the necessity of recognizing climate change refugees in a global sense; while some governments may have the funds and resources to mitigate or adapt to climate change, others are not afforded this privilege (Biermann and Boas 2010). Many governments may not have the money to invest in adaptation or mitigation strategies, and are unable to protect their citizens from the negative effects of climate change. Thus, this discourse emphasizes that international mechanisms must be set into place to confer some level of protection to these migrants.

Another facet of the moral and ethical imperative is that many of the people most affected by and the least capable to adapt to climate change have contributed the least to this global phenomenon (Biermann and Boas 2010). The common theme established at the Rio Declaration on the Environment and Development that 'the polluter should bear the cost of the

pollution' demonstrates that developed countries and their governments, as well as humanitarian organizations which have a global responsibility to protect, have an obligation to help those negatively and severely impacted by a phenomenon to which they contributed (Biermann and Boas 2010). Populations in low-income countries affected by environmental degradation are increasingly vulnerable to climate change related disaster that may take their lives, or force them to migrate. While funds and resources should be invested at a state level in adaptation and mitigation strategies in at-risk countries, the international humanitarian community must recognize the logistical impossibility of controlling climate change in many affected regions. Migration might just be the ultimate adaptation strategy for many affected populations due to the lack of money and adequate resources in these low-income areas (Gemenne 2015). The humanitarian sphere has a duty to facilitate movement to save lives, and therefore must recognize the legality of climate change migrants.

However, scholars debate that, while there is moral imperative to help those who suffer, it may be too extreme to include 'climate change refugees' in the moral and ethical responsibilities of humanitarianism (Fernández 2015). For example, those who suffer from extreme poverty are not included in the international refugee frameworks based on humanitarian ideals. However, while this claim has some validity, the global causes of climate-change migration that lie with the actions of countries that did and continue to emit high levels of greenhouse gases complicates this assertion. Climate change induced effects, like sea-level rise and increased frequency and severity of extreme weather events, have been scientifically shown to be man-made and preventable, and caused by the actions of the international community (Warner et al. 2010). To conclude, recognizing and protecting climate change migrants is not just to alleviate suffering, but also to demonstrate a global responsibility and accountability to those

affected by climate change. While it may be difficult to establish a universal definition and framework to offer protection to these uprooted populations, under this international humanitarian perspective, it is morally and ethically unjust to ignore the effects of climate change and continue to allow these protection gaps to exist.

Additionally, there is a common rhetoric that emphasizes since climate change is gradual in nature and often causes slow-onset disasters, governments and populations have the ability to preemptively make migratory and resettlement decisions (Brown 2015). In a sense, these scholars distinguish between voluntary and forced migration; if people leave before the crisis hits, international humanitarian communities, like the UN, do not have a moral or ethical imperative to recognize and protect them (Gemenne 2015). However, this argument is morally dubious as even though migration may seem voluntary, the fact remains that these individuals are being unjustly displaced, most likely permanently, by a human-caused change that disproportionately impacts them (Gemenne 2015). Scholar James Hathaway emphasizes the need to acknowledge the social disenfranchisement that impacts both those who voluntarily migrate and those who are forced (Hathaway 2007). In this sense, the distinction between forced and voluntary migration is blurred. As so, climate change at its core is rooted in inequalities and inequities between the rich and poor. Developed countries have contributed the most to the phenomena and remain the least affected due to the ability to implement adaptation and mitigation strategies, while developing countries bear the brunt of climate change affects and have little developed infrastructure to deal with the threat. Since primary contributors to climate change are the least affected, they are more likely to reject the urgency of climate change and be morally distanced from helping those affected (Duong 2010). However, this does not diminish the reality of the climate change threat, and not only reasserts the global inequality faced by

climate change victims, but also emphasizes the moral necessity to globally recognize and protect climate change migrants.

1.22 Human Rights Defense of Climate Change Refugees

The second major framework for discussing the obligation of the humanitarian community to climate change refugees is that of human rights. In recent years, humanitarian organizations have adopted a human rights agenda in their mission to alleviate suffering; that is, violations of human rights command humanitarian action (Munslow and Dempsey 2010). While migrants forced to move due to climate change impacts can appeal to human rights law for legal recognition and protection, no true frameworks have been developed or used in current times on a global scale (Duong 2010). Those affected most by climate change are more likely to live in low-income countries with few mitigation/adaptation strategies and belong to groups whose rights protections are already at-risk (Albrecht and Plewa 2015). Therefore, since nations that continue to contribute through large levels of greenhouse gas emissions to climate change do infringe on the basic rights outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), those affected need to reassert these rights and call for accountability and protection on the part of responsible nations and humanitarian organizations, whose duty lies to aid global sufferers (Albrecht and Plewa 2015).

Before discussing the rights-based defense of ‘climate change refugees,’ a discussion of the fundamental conceptualization and hierarchy of human rights is required. Rights are often treated as both standardized and absolute; however, given different contexts, this may not always be the case. While rights can command action and positive duties (positive rights), they may also have to be claimed and require abstaining from action or inaction (negative rights). Hugh Breakey acknowledges that creating any rights-based positive duty agenda may in fact

compromise the fundamental nature of rights themselves (Breakey 2015). Thus, the language used around rights' adoption and defense adds complexity to the 'climate change refugee' discourse use of a human rights-based agenda. Additionally, in the 1970s, Karel Vasak introduced the concept of 'generation of rights,' in which the first generation (blue) corresponds to civil and political rights, the second to economic and cultural rights, and the third to developmental and ecological rights. While the first generation, at its core, corresponds to fundamental rights to life, the second and third generation become more abstracted, and academics like Koopman and Vorster demonstrate that in certain contexts, such rights may not be able to be either fulfilled or defended (Koopman 2012) (Vorster 2004). Thus, Vorster argues that the second-generation rights may be limited in extreme situations where states or institutions do not have the economic capacity to defend them (Vorster 2004). Thus, the complexity of the human rights argument plays an important role in finding consensus in and validating the rights-based defense of 'climate change refugees.'

Concerning climate migration, the 'climate change refugee discourse' demonstrates that many individual rights are at risk of being violated in regards to climate change. These include the right to life, the right to health, the right to food and water, the right to property and the right to self-determination and cultural expression (Duong 2010). The first basic human right which is violated by climate change is the right to life; intense storms, droughts and floods may and have killed many individuals. Since climate change, a human created occurrence, threatens the existence of many, it is valid for those affected to appeal to international organizations for the protection of this right. The right to food and water is also directly violated by climate change. Climate change can directly threaten access to clean water as well as agriculture. Subtler are the right to health, self-determination and cultural expression. Given that the UDHR asserts that all

individuals deserve a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of oneself, climate change infringes on this right of many. Climate change will undoubtedly negatively affect the livelihoods and quality of life of thousands (Duong 2010). Increasing water tables will make low-lying areas uninhabitable and increased flooding has had severe impacts on infrastructure. The violation to the right to self-determination and cultural expression is based in the idea that the existence and culture of many are intimately linked to the environment (Duong 2010). Pacific Islands and low-lying regions of countries like Bangladesh and India may be lost entirely; this may signal the loss of history, culture and traditional way of life (Win 2012). Moreover, the physical loss of a nation may culminate in loss of sovereignty and statelessness, as well as loss of right to property. Due to climate change, many will lose not just historically and culturally significant edifices, but also their homes and community buildings (Duong 2010). Climate change impacts the ability of many to express themselves and their culture, and the ability of nations to express their sovereignty. Given this, international mechanisms must be put into place protect those refugees who migrate to adapt to the human rights violations created by climate change.

While many may concede that the basic rights of those displaced are violated by climate change, others argue that, since most climate change migration occurs domestically, it can be assumed that rights' protections lie with the government involved, releasing humanitarian organizations from a human rights obligation to these migrants (Brown 2015). However, this perspective is inadequate in many ways. It assumes that these governments are able and willing to protect these rights of their citizens. As discussed above, due to limited funds, many nations may simply not be able to afford mitigation and adaptation strategies to protect its citizens from right violations caused by climate change. Additionally, given the situation in places like Tuvalu,

even if such strategies were put in place, the government could still not and should not protect these rights singlehandedly (Duong 2010). Since the causes of climate change, in many cases, lie beyond borders, global initiatives should be adopted to proactively protect the rights of people affected by climate change. Climate change is a *global* phenomenon, all nations of the world have contributed (Duong 2010). Therefore, even if displacement is internal, all emitting nations have contributed to the human rights violations that caused it. This discourse reasserts the need for a global humanitarian mechanism to support and aid climate change refugees.

1.3 International Defense and Adoption

1.31 United Nations (UN)

Despite the strong moral, ethical and human rights imperatives highlighted above to recognize and protect climate change refugees, there is still relatively little legal international mechanisms of doing so. Perhaps the most influential refugee organization, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) set a human rights standard for international refugee law when it ratified its first multilateral treaty, the Convention Relating the Status of Refugees, on July 28, 1951 by 26 countries (Sharma 2015). However, climate change refugees are not recognized under this Convention, which is critiqued as only recognizing a limited, political-persecution based and Euro-centric approach to defining 'refugee' (Duong 2010) (Sharma 2015).

The treaty was conceptualized in a post-World War II context in which the nations of Europe were participating in relief programs aimed at rebuilding populations and resettling victims of extreme violence and human rights violations. The Convention defined a refugee as:

Any person who as a result of events occurring before 1 January 1951 an owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, unwilling to avail himself to the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country

of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable, or owing to such fear, unwilling to return to it (Sharma 2015). According to the UNHCR, this Convention was written in a Euro-centric context which limited the concept of refugee both temporally to the post-WWII period and geographically to Europe. However, as Bonita Sharma notes, during the same period of time, there were global atrocities and mass displacements occurring outside of Europe which were excluded from protection under this convention. For example, during the Partition of British India in 1947, these international governing bodies provided little to no aid relief to the millions affected and resulted in forced displacement and genocide of over 14 million (Sharma 2015). Given the limited scope of the Convention, in 1967 a Protocol was signed by 146 countries that omitted these temporal and geographical conditions (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner For Refugees 2015).

Academic scholars like Karen Musalo assert that the definition of refugee put forward by the United Nations (UN), which was created in a post-war atmosphere for the resettlement of European refugees, is limited to a western perspective of persecution and excludes third world refugees, whose “flight is more often prompted by a natural disaster, war or broadly based political and economic turmoil” (Duong 2010) (Musalo, Moore, and Boswell 2011). The UNHCR does recognize internally displaced people affected by environmental change as environmentally displaced people; however, this does not protect those who are internationally displaced and has several shortcomings (Biermann & Boas, 2010) (Duong 2010) (Fernández 2015). For example, the term environmentally displaced people is only a descriptive term, and does little to command obligation and action (Biermann & Boas, 2010). One option to expand legal protections provided to environmental migrants is to adapt the UNHCR definition of ‘refugee’ to include climate change victims, (Kolmannskog 2012). While the UNHCR is often times considered the benchmark for refugee law, this does not mean that migration or refugee

status will not undergo a transformation or change. This is evidenced by other international migration organizations and mechanisms that have drastically changed their outlook to and treatment of different types of migrants. Additionally, the UN itself seems to be in a transitory phase in which they are trying to create and recognize a unified discourse on those affected by other factors including climate change displacement. In 2011, the former High Commissioner of the UNHCR, Antonio Guterres acknowledged that “patterns of movement are changing” and that “the traditional distinction between migrants who cross borders in search of a better life and refugees who are forced to flee persecution and conflict, has become blurred” (Guterres 2011). He also specifically mentioned climate change refugees and conceded the international community’s failure to address climate change in an effective manner because of its weak political and cooperative will to reduce the negative impact of climate change and recognize migration stimulated by environmental factors as valid (UNHCR 2011). Additionally, on September 19th 2016, at the UN Summit for Refugees and Migrants, the New York Declaration was signed, acknowledging the complex and nuanced link between climate change and migration, and its various effects (United Nations 2016). This slight yet novel institutional shift demonstrates that the forced migration discourse is constantly adapting to different contexts and situations; the lack of a unifying stance regarding climate change migration does not disqualify or invalidate the migrants themselves, but instead points to a changing world in which organizations and people must adapt policy and discourse consistently.

1.32 International Organization for Migration (IOM)

Although the intergovernmental institution, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) does not exclusively recognize migrants fleeing the 21st century effects of anthropogenic climate change, in 2007, they expanded their definition of “environmental migrants.”

“Environmental migrant: In the absence of an international consensus, IOM has proposed a working definition of ‘environmental migrants’ as ‘persons or groups of persons who, for reasons of sudden or progressive changes in the environment that adversely affect their lives or living conditions, are obliged to leave their habitual homes, or choose to do so, either temporarily or permanently, and who move either within their country or abroad’ (IOM 2015).

This definition evokes a human rights framework, similar to the one used to defend climate change migration, by providing protections to those displaced by factors outside of their control. Thus, the IOM recognizes that displacement due to environmental factors violates basic human rights, and recognizes that groups affected by such displacement should be afforded international protection. In doing so, the IOM is beginning to develop an international regime for environmental migrants. Overall, the IOM has put climate change and environmental migration on the international agenda; they have included migration for environmentally induced reasons in a number of United Nations Framework on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Protocols and have prioritized increasing awareness of climate change and creating a legal mechanism for ensuring the rights of and protecting environmental/climate change induced migrants (IOM 2015).

1.33 Other International Institutions

The Nansen Initiative is a state-led process led by the Governments of Switzerland and Norway started in 2012 that seeks to build consensus and a unified discourse on environmentally induced migration, whether it is caused by acute natural disasters or long-term climate change. The organization mainly works by consulting affected nations and communities on how to build an adequate response to the threat of cross-border displacement. The Nansen Initiative is the first of its kind to recognize the threat of climate change migration as legitimate and to offer policy recommendations to affected countries on how to build strategic plans to confront the issue of climate change migration (Kälin 2015).

While no international consensus has been reached on the recognition and protection of climate change refugees, there are many regional and transboundary versions of a legitimate ‘climate change migrant’ that serve to emphasize the need for such global institutions. These regional consensus do recognize the legitimacy of climate change induced displacement. The 1969 Convention Governing Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa held by the Organization of African Unity drafted in response to environmental crises and desertification in the continent as well as the 1984 Cartagena Declaration on Refugees both aim to recognize, protect, and resettle those fleeing from events seriously disturbing public order, of which climate change induced migration is a recognized as legitimate (Brown 2015). Additionally, governments, like that of Sweden, legally do recognize environmental factors as reasons to be granted asylum (Albrecht and Plewa 2015). Overall, these modern mechanisms demonstrate that many organizations and institutions have realized the humanitarian and international imperative to acknowledge and aid climate change or environmental refugees.

1.4 Chapter Conclusion

Overall, this chapter highlights two major points regarding the ‘climate change refugee discourse.’ Firstly, it is a relatively new concept rooted in human rights and humanitarian discourses that has gained much academic attention, and mostly adopted by Western institutions and intergovernmental organizations. Secondly, the discourse focuses primarily on the future mass displacement of vulnerable populations and advocates for their international protection; it assumes environment and climate change are unilinear vectors that prompt forced migration and create ‘refugees’ (Farbotko and Lazrus 2012). There are debates within the discourse itself of what a ‘climate change refugee’ is and the current protection afforded by various institutions is not global in nature.

However, within the broader academic literature, there have been arguments that this 'climate change refugee' discourse is one that is abstract, broad, and overly simplistic. Academic articles are increasingly skeptical of the assumption that climate change itself will result in increased migration and critical of the apocalyptic narrative of "massive, abrupt and unavoidable flows of climate migrants" paraded by this discourse (Bettini 2013). By focusing on South Asia, I will apply a relatively broad and abstract internationally accepted concept to a region of the world considered climate vulnerable with the potential to produce the migrants this discourse expects.

Chapter 2 - Migration in South Asia: Past and Present

2.1 Chapter Objectives

This chapter will approach historical and current migration patterns in South Asia using the ‘climate change’ refugee discourse highlighted above. To begin, this chapter will discuss migration theory, or why and how individuals, families and groups choose to move, and the international and regional protections that exist if they should. Then, it will segue into a brief discussion of how South Asians in the past have moved and how this has changed in present times. The chapter will also discuss the complexity of migration in South Asia, especially in regards to climate change and development; a feature often muted by the ‘climate change refugee’ discourse, which focuses mostly on protecting climate-displaced migrants, highlighted above. Overall, this chapter will demonstrate the complexity regarding migration in the South Asia, as well as important features of migration in this subcontinent to help draft a robust critique of the international ‘climate change refugee’ discourse.

2.2 Migration Theory and Climate Change

For millennia, there have been significant flows of individuals and families throughout the South Asian region. Sometimes, these migrations are temporary, voluntary or seasonal, while in other cases, entire families and clans have been uprooted and displaced to new homes (Ghosh 2004). These mass migrations have been triggered by a multitude of factors; war, famine, environmental disaster or the hope for a better life or improved economic and social prospects. Overall, migration is a significant social occurrence that has important effects not only on history and culture of societies, but also the well-being, mental, psychological and physical state, as well as the psyche of migrants themselves (Chari, Joseph, and Chandran 2003).

Migration is a complex trade-off for those choosing to move; they must assess what they will gain, and what they will lose. In simplest terms, migration is governed by the relationship between push- and pull factors. Push factors, like persecution, environmental disaster, war, and poverty, among others, often forcefully, trigger migrants to leave, while pull-factors, like economic opportunity and better prospects serve as less severe reasons to relocate to a new home. When one or both of these factors outweigh reasons to stay, basic theory suggests that migration will occur.

In addition to these push-pull factors, scholars like Douglas Massey emphasize the importance of social or family networks in both facilitating and preventing migration (Massey, Axinn, and Ghimire 2016). These social or family networks bring with them a sense of belonging to a certain place and shared history, culture and common origin. While these networks can serve to create strong community, economic, and political bonds, thereby discouraging migration, they can ease migration by lowering costs of and risks associated with movement and providing an already existing source of social and economic capital for newer migrants (Massey, Axinn, and Ghimire 2016). Overall, the existence and importance of such networks tend to complicate migration decisions.

When talking about environmental or climate change refugees, the migration literature often refers to distress migration patterns, which are triggered by drastic changes in the environment that compromises the resources necessary for survival or a place's general inhabitability. In the past, migration due to environmental reasons, which was first brought to international attention by Essam El-Hinnawi of the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) in the 1980s, was placed into three main categories; migration that was temporary and due to a natural or anthropogenic natural hazard, permanent displacement due to drastic

environmental degradation, and displacement, whether temporary or permanently to slow onset environmental deterioration (climate change) (Naser 2011).

However, even in these environmental displacement situations, individuals, families and societies still evaluate and assess major push and pull factors before making migration decisions. Distress migration is not only shaped by environmental conditions, but also local and external institutions (Raleigh, Jordan, and Salehyan 2008). In short, environmental change or destruction is not the only factor influencing migration. Scholars have noted that a person's decision to migrate is influenced by many factors; including financial capital, social capital, conditions or prospects at home, and conditions or prospects in the future destination (Raleigh, Jordan, and Salehyan 2008) (Naser 2011). Additionally, social capital networks influences distress migration; individuals use their involvement in such networks to guide migration decisions (Douglas S. Massey, Joaquín Arango 2006). Often times, lack of social networks may stimulate migration, whereas strong community social and economic ties may abate migration. Overall, distress migrations are complex and variable in nature. It becomes difficult to pinpoint exact reasons for migration between individuals even from the same community.

Distress migration literature has often demonstrated that temporary or permanent migration due to environmental threats is most likely to be local or internal in nature. While rural-to-urban migration is thought of as common due to deteriorating environmental conditions, there are significant numbers of people who participate in rural-to-rural migration in response to environmental change or disaster (Revi 2008) (Raleigh, Jordan, and Salehyan 2008). In distress migration situations, migrant flows may be different depending on the context. It is often theorized that in migration due to slow onset environmental deterioration situations, first individuals without dependents leave, then older men and then families, with those who are most

reliant on the community's cultural and historical roots most likely to resist any form of relocation (Raleigh, Jordan, and Salehyan 2008). Additionally, Naser and Raleigh et al. cite that in most forms of distress migration, including famine, flood and drought, distress migrants tend to return to their homes after the environmental threat disappears (Naser 2011) (Raleigh, Jordan, and Salehyan 2008).

Permanent migration as a result of an environmental disaster or climate change signaled a state-deficient response or failure on part of the particular nation-state to rebuild and rehabilitate communities (Tacoli 2009). However, in more recent literature, especially in the context of irreversible climate change, migration is being seen more and more as a pre-cautionary adaptation strategy to severe climate change threats (Tacoli 2009). However, as climate researchers in Bangladesh have noted, while many locals see migration as an effective climate change or environmental disaster adaptation strategy, it is not used exclusively (Stojanov et al. 2016). Instead, these migration or non-migration decisions take place amongst multiple competing conditions, such as poverty, population density, governance, and economic condition. Additionally, migration itself serves as an adaption practice, not just for climate change induced environmental degradation, but also to mitigate poverty, unemployment and other socioeconomic conditions. Migration in general has potential impacts on human and economic development, security and environment as well with influxes and camp settlement of migrants changing host landscapes and ecosystems.

As environmental threats increase in severity and frequency due to anthropogenic climate change, the applicability and appropriateness of previous interpretations of how migration decisions occur may change. Climate change has the ability to impact other factors in migration decisions, such as poverty, unemployment, and conflict; thus, even if environmental degradation

itself is not a primary driver for migration, it continues to play a significant role in the overall context within which migration decisions occur. As South Asia demonstrates complex migration flows, these migrant fluxes may change drastically due to changing climates and environments.

2.3 Brief History of Migration Patterns in South Asia

South Asia poses an interesting migration case study. The region has been a meeting point for different cultures, civilizations and religions throughout its history. In the past 100 years, most migration within the region has been provoked by political persecution, lack of economic opportunity and the search for improved livelihoods. In 1947, the largest migration within South Asia occurred with the Partition of British India into the modern countries of India and Pakistan (Chari, Joseph, and Chandran 2003). Almost 14 million Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs of majority Bengali and Punjabi backgrounds were displaced and forced to make new homes in newly created countries. Since then, political, religious, and ethnic persecution stemming from conflict has contributed to major refugee flows of: ~1 million Sri Lankan Tamils from Sri Lanka to India since 1954, ~10 million Bangladeshis to India in 1971, ~3 million+ Afghans from Afghanistan to Pakistan since 1978, which continues today, ~100,000+ Tibetans to India from 1958, and ~600,000 Bhutanese of Nepali origin from Bhutan to Nepal since 1990 (Ghosh 2004). Controversial on-going migrant flows from Afghanistan to Pakistan, Nepal to India, and Bangladesh to Assam, India have caused considerable discussion around migration and national/regional security in the subcontinent (Chari, Joseph, and Chandran 2003). Additionally, South Asia produces a significant amount of labor migrants to Southeast Asia and the Middle East who seek employment opportunities and better economic prospects than those they can find at home (Asian Development Bank 2012).

While every country in South Asia has produced or hosted refugees except the Maldives, it is concerning that out of the South Asian countries, only Afghanistan has signatory status to the 1951 Convention and has ratified the 1967 Protocol (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner For Refugees 2015). The other South Asian countries allow UNHCR to host certain programs within their nations, but there is no formal recognition of the terms and conditions outlined by the Convention or Protocol regarding refugee rights, treatment, or organizations (Sharma 2015).

South Asian non-signatories point to multiple reasons for not acknowledging this important international convention concerning migration. By signing the Convention, these nations in South Asia would lose their ability to evaluate and confront refugee crises on an *ad hoc* basis. The Ministry of External Affairs of India considered the Convention and Protocol “a partial regime for refugee protection drafted in a Euro-centric context” even after India became a member of the UNHCR Executive Committee (Chari, Joseph, and Chandran 2003).

Additionally, many South Asian nations have less infrastructure, lower quality of living and less money to set aside for relief and refugee programs than many of the developed countries who recognize these treaties. The question of burden-sharing and economic cost is relevant in this context since the financing of refugee support is not addressed by the terms of the Convention. Academic V. Suryanarayanan indicates that the UNHCR resorts to “burden-shifting” in which receiving or host countries must pay the economic, social and environmental costs of taking in refugees, while refugee-producing countries have no further obligation or responsibility to these displaced peoples (Suryanarayanan 2003). Overall, the lack of engagement with international migration conventions demonstrates that perhaps South Asia is unique in its migration patterns and ability to absorb and deal with migrants.

The ease in crossing borders, whether they are internal or international, contributes to the unique pattern of migration in the region. Historically, many tribal, ethnic and traditional groups traversed the different regions of the subcontinent seasonally in search of land and employment. The shared history, culture, ethnic identity and language throughout the border areas of many South Asian countries have contributed to national borders being relatively permeable as well as a marked difficulty in determining if someone is a non-citizen after an international border-crossing event. For example, open borders currently exist between Nepal and India under the Treaty of Peace and Friendship ratified in 1951, while Bangladeshi populations have crossed relatively easily into the Indian state of Assam in search of employment and to avert significant environmental coastline degradation in Bangladesh (Chari, Joseph, and Chandran 2003).

However, while the multicultural and multi-ethnic nature of many South Asian countries has contributed to the region being more welcoming to migrants, this has also contributed to intercommunity strife that in turn produces migrant flows. Perhaps one of the most unique features of migration in South Asia is that most migration is either confined internally or at least within the South Asian region. South Asia produces a high number of Internally Displaced Peoples (IDPs), who move from their homes to different parts of their country for a wide variety of issues stemming from poverty, environmental degradation or communal tensions (Chari, Joseph, and Chandran 2003). Most commonly, rural-to-urban migration occurs, resulting in overpopulation and other concerns in megacities like Mumbai, Karachi, Delhi, Dhaka, and Kolkata. The creation and maintenance of slums and poor, underdeveloped communities for rural migrants in cities is common and makes the region as a whole more vulnerable to climate change impacts (Werz and Hoffman 2015) (Revi 2008).

Overall, the history of migration and migration policy in South Asia is multi-faceted and complex. Various factors contribute to individuals' and families' decisions to migrate. As stated previously, it will be important to quantify how climate change will factor into risk assessments and decisions regarding migration and how these affect South Asian migration patterns.

2.4 Climate Change Migration Patterns in South Asia

Climate change impacts in different regions of the world depend on three factors; sensitivity, adaptability and vulnerability (Fritz 2010). Sensitivity refers to the degree populations are affected by climate change and its environmental consequences; climate change may either improve living conditions or disrupt them to varying degrees. Adaptive capacity, or adaptability and vulnerability refer to the ability of a region to adapt to climate change effects and how vulnerable such a region is to the negative impacts of climate change. These three factors all interface and affect migration decisions and patterns (Fritz 2010). Overall, many proponents of the 'climate change refugee' discourse often use South Asia an example of a place where out-migration due to climate change impacts induced environmental degradation will be common. This section will investigate how climate change conditions in the South Asian nations are affecting migration patterns in South Asia to draft a more realistic and concise perspective of what is happening in this climate vulnerable region.

2.41 Afghanistan and Pakistan

As noted previously in the chapter, both Afghanistan and Pakistan have seen significant migration flows due to complex factors including war and conflict, persecution, and poverty. However, both regions will be affected by climate change in a range of ways that will affect people's ability to live, and this will have an important interaction with existing push-and-pull factors regarding migration. To begin, Pakistan is slated to experience a wide variety of climate

change effects. Coastal cities as well as islands off the coast of southern Pakistan are expected to experience significant sea-level rise and an increase in severity and frequency of cyclones (Asian Development Bank 2011). Already, people have begun leaving these islands for other coastal cities or regions of Pakistan. In addition, other climate change effects will include salination of drinking water and polluting of water and agricultural resources. Additionally, central Pakistan including the Punjab and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa regions have already seen an increase in the frequency and severity of droughts and floods, which have had significant impacts on agricultural output and livelihoods, especially for poorer families (Abid et al. 2016).

Similarly, in Afghanistan, it has been estimated that only 6-15% of land is usable due to anthropogenic environmental degradation from use of war machinery and chemicals coupled with climate change. In the past, Afghanistan boasted natural forests that now face severe degradation, loss of vegetation and soil erosion, which contributes to producing an even more arid, uninhabitable climate. Overall, the climate academic Daud Saba asserts that Afghanistan is undergoing an uncontrollable environmental crisis that has not received adequate international, regional or national attention and is unprecedented in history (Saba 2001).

In both nations, there has been a marked increase in migration from rural to urban settings; Lahore, Karachi and Islamabad have swelling populations and all three are expected to become megacities in the next 50 years. However, it is difficult to pinpoint the exact reasons for migration as they range from economic despair, to environmental degradation, to political, ethnic or religious persecution, or combinations of multiple factors (Chari, Joseph, and Chandran 2003). Additionally, the higher level of rural-to-urban migration is putting severe constraints on urban resources to provide for growing populations. This, in turn, affects urban environmental health and will have significant impacts if continued unchecked. Finally, while most migration occurs

either within national borders or between the countries, there are increasing numbers of Afghans, Pakistanis and Bangladeshi migrants making up global migrant/refugee flows. In the past 10 years, South Asians have made up a significant portion of international asylees and migrants for a variety of reasons, including environmental degradation (Chari, Joseph, and Chandran 2003).

2.42 India and Bangladesh

India, due to its size and population, is also expected to witness a wide range of climate change consequences. In general, coastal regions are threatened by sea-level rise and tropical storms, while land locked areas have seen an increase in the severity and frequency of drought, floods. Like Pakistan and Afghanistan, internal migration is commonplace, with factors prompting migration being complex and intertwined. In its international report, the IPCC reported that sea levels in India are rising 2.4 mm per year; by 2050, there will be a 38 cm rise in sea level that will disproportionately affect low lying coastal areas and islands, potentially displacing thousands (Asian Development Bank 2011). Additionally, the Asian Development Bank predicts that by 2050, 1.4 billion Indians will be living in areas experiencing negative climate change impacts (Asian Development Bank 2011). Overall, the changing weather patterns in the country particularly affect the already poor and marginalized as rural areas most impacted have the least resources to adapt to climate change, thus influencing migration patterns.

Most Indians migrate internally, with rural-to-urban migration being the most common; around 10-25% of displaced populations move to urban centers and form part of squatter settlements. These urban migrants cite economic factors, employment opportunities and environmental degradation as reasons for relocating. However, rural-to-rural migration is significant with a large number of displaced peoples moving to equally vulnerable nearby villages and towns instead of massive urban centers. Authors also cite that migration due to

environmental factors has not been consistent in India; for example, in 1983 and 1994-5, migration in response to drought only occurred in 2% of affected Indian households (Raleigh, Jordan, and Salehyan 2008). This may be because drought was not severe enough to instigate migration; however, other scholars emphasize that remittances from labor migrants from affected regions gave families economic support to continue living in those droughts affected areas (Warner et al. 2010) (Black et al. 2011). In October 2013, in response to Cyclone Phailin in the state of Orissa, there were large-scale migrations of the affected fishing community, and severe flash floods in the Himalayas in 2013 led to increased migration to urban settings due to extreme effects on people's livelihoods (Lal 2016).

Overall, India has received an enormous number of Bangladeshi migrants who mostly migrate to the Indian states of Assam, West Bengal and sometimes the Union territory of New Delhi. Bangladesh is one of the poorest countries in the world and has the least resources to adapt to climate change. The country has already seen severe and frequent floods, tropical cyclones and storm surges due to climate change, which have significant impacts on Bangladesh's coastal population. The Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina, estimates that 30 million people will become climate migrants by 2050 (Lal 2016). Additionally, low-lying coastal areas of the country are severely threatened by sea-level rise. While research shows that most disaster displaced Bangladeshis only travel an average of 2 miles away from their homes, the number of Bangladeshis crossing international borders illegally has increased significantly (Asian Development Bank 2012).

The regions most affected are the ecologically diverse Sundarbans of India and Bangladesh. Here, sea levels are rising twice as fast as the global average and climate scientists estimate that much of the delta could be completely submerged in the next half-century. Climate

expert Abhinav Mohapatra concludes that this could cause and as already started a mass exodus from the region where 13 million Indians and Bangladeshis already live (Lal 2016). Already, displacement from coast to coast or island to island between India and Bangladesh is common, usually among the most marginalized agricultural laborers known locally as *Adivasi* (Lal 2016). Overall, illegal migration in the Sundarbans and from Bangladesh to India has become a tense political issue between the two nations with India claiming national security threats due to the higher and higher numbers of illegal migrants. Because of increased internal and regional migration, there have been increased pressures on land and economic resources in both nations. Especially coupled with urbanization, cities and city slums are becoming inundated with marginalized and impoverished migrants who continue to strain civic services and urban infrastructures. The Center for American Progress continues to emphasize the critical impact climate change will have on migration patterns and already tense security protocols between the two nations (Werz and Hoffman 2015).

Overall, in countries like India and Bangladesh, climate change and environmental disasters cause varied migration responses. While the rising sea levels in the Sundarbans and coastal regions have prompted significant out-migration, this may not be the case in other areas of the country. Research analyses of individuals' decision making strategies during the 1988 Bangladeshi floods demonstrate that if disaster aid to affected regions ran smoothly, people did not move from the affected area (Raleigh, Jordan, and Salehyan 2008). Thus, disaster aid and development play significant roles in instigating or preventing migration flows.

2.43 Bhutan, Nepal and Sri Lanka

According to the Asian Development Bank, Bhutan has not displayed and is not predicted to experience severe climate change effects and/or migration due to such effects (Asian

Development Bank 2011). Coastal areas of Sri Lanka are threatened by sea-level rise while tropical and sub-tropical areas of the country are slated to experience increasing temperatures, which will affect livability and agricultural output. Additionally, flash floods have become frequent throughout the country, with the most recent in 2011 impacting around 1 million people.

Nepal, which shares an open border with India, has already undergone severe climate change consequences, and with the open borders with India, it is hard to estimate just how many Nepalis have been displaced and have migrated to India and for what reasons. Similar to the rest of South Asia, Nepal has already seen severe effects of climate change. More extreme monsoon rainfall, landslides and floods are expected to affect the livelihoods of Nepalis in hills, mountains and cities in the Himalayan ranges. Additionally, there has been a significant increase in rural-to-urban migration to Kathmandu, especially due to the recent earthquake that has paralyzed the country.

Similar to India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, Nepal is a major exporter of temporary unskilled labor to Gulf States and other areas around the world. The remittances sent by these labor migrants to their families in cities or villages in Nepal are extremely important for their day-to-day lives and plays a role in how they continue to live in an environmentally deteriorating state (Asian Development Bank 2011).

2.44 The Maldives

The Maldives are characterized as a small island state and are a low-lying archipelago nation which is comprised of 1190 islands and 26 coastal coral reef atolls and that has a population of ~350,000. Around 80% of the Maldives' land is less than 1 meter above sea level (Arnall and Kothari 2015). The Maldivian former president brought to the public eye the climate change consequences of sea-level rise on the Maldives when he held a cabinet meeting

underwater complete with wetsuits before the Copenhagen Climate Summit in 2009 to showcase the bleak future of the island nation (Arnall and Kothari 2015)(Kothari 2014). According to a 2007 IPCC report, sea level rises of 18-59 cm, which are predicted using the ‘business-as-usual’ climate change scenario by 2100, would make the low-lying nation uninhabitable (Ahmed and Suphachalasai 2014). The Maldivian population is often referred to as “canaries in the cold mine,” in regards to their and other low-lying island nations primary vulnerability to climate change and their status as the first to experience climate change affects (Asian Development Bank 2011). The Maldives has also become representative of adverse climate change consequences and a producer of ‘climate change refugees’ for the stark future predictions place on the ability of humans to continue living on the ‘sinking’ islands and atolls. In addition to severe sea-level rise, the Maldives is also threatened by coastal erosion, salinity intrusion, changes in monsoon patterns, and flood and drought. The central government has invested in climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies and has advocated for the rest of the world to do so because of the severe threats posed to this collection of low-lying islands and atolls. The country became the first to ratify plans to go carbon-neutral in 2009, and has also held important conferences on climate change and climate change effects. At the Small States Conference on Sea Level Rise, the UNEP and other nations signed the Male Declaration on Global Warming and Sea-Level Rise and started the Ocean and Coastal Areas Program Activity Center to provide support to affected national governments and evaluate possible effects of climate change (Stojanov et al. 2016).

Migration has been an integral part of life in the Maldives. Islanders often migrate from island to island, or from island to mainland in search of better livelihoods or for other social, economic, environmental or security reasons. Stojanov asserts that there is a diversity of

migration typologies in the Maldives with a single factor rarely being the exclusive cause of a migration decision; in fact, in his study he found that only 2% of survey respondents selected environmental conditions or natural hazards as decisive factors of migrating (Stojanov et al. 2016). In 2004, a severe tsunami hit the Maldives and compromised several communities. Individual voluntary migration and government funded resettlement programs to other islands not affected were created as part of disaster relief. However, as Stojanov demonstrates, although climate change impacts may play a more serious role in migration decisions in the future, currently, out-migration as adaptation to environmental degradation or climate change is a last resort for many individuals and families (Stojanov et al. 2016).

2.5 Common Themes and Chapter Conclusion

Perhaps the most concerning climate change consequence in South Asia will be sea-level rise affecting coastal and island populations across South Asia. According to the Asian Development Bank, 27 million people in India alone will be at risk from rising sea levels by 2050 (Asian Development Bank 2011). Coastal urban centers in the region like Dhaka, Mumbai and Kolkata, are at immediate increased risk because of the populations they hold and the relatively low level of infrastructure and development to mitigate these rising sea levels. Additionally, these are the cities many from rural and other areas often migrate towards for a wide variety of reasons, including environmental degradation and climate change. There is potential for catastrophic disaster and displacement in these urban centers if these are not addressed as these urban centers are characterized by poorly maintained, basic infrastructures, unprecedented and unplanned growth and meager living conditions (Revi 2008) (Tacoli 2009). Also, the climate change impacts of increased sea levels, salination of water resources, flooding, drought and other effects can have on day-to-day life and agriculture throughout the subcontinent

have and may stimulate migration in the future (Werz and Hoffman 2015). Climate change effects that compromise people's livelihood and impact economic and social stability may prompt changes to already existing migration patterns.

Additionally, labor migration contributes to migrant flows in the region and the high volume of rural-to urban relocation and international displacement. In discussing global protection for vulnerable migrants, the numbers of Afghans, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis displaced and seeking asylum or refugee status in Europe and other Western nations is of concern. In recent years, due to the diminishing conflict in Afghanistan and relative political stability of the rest of the subcontinent, these migrants do not qualify under current international refugee law for protection. These migrants are often labeled 'economic' or 'environmental' migrants and there are reports of many being turned away and deported back to unstable environments. As discussed in the first chapter, this has significant consequences in terms of human rights and humanitarianism and must be addressed if these flows continue or increase. Finally, migration and climate change migration have significant intersections with gender. The Asian Development Bank and other authors report that environmental disaster increases women's vulnerability to human trafficking, abuse and gender-based violence as livelihoods are lost and socioeconomic status and stability becomes compromised (Asian Development Bank 2012) (Martine et al. 2009). Additionally, migration in South Asia is a highly-gendered process; for example, while, most migrants from Nepal are male, the overwhelming majority from Sri Lanka is women. These gender patterns lie in complex socioeconomic conditions that alter migrant flows. Throughout South Asia, it is not uncommon for households under economic or environmental pressures to send a male member of the family to work abroad and send remittances. However, recently, this pattern has begun to change as more and more women move

for domestic employment opportunities or to enter the unskilled labor market in Gulf States or the West. This has lasting effects on gender dynamics, power relationships, and women's rights as whole in the South Asian context (Asian Development Bank 2011).

Overall, the discussion surrounding migration in a South Asian context demonstrates its complexity. Climate change impacts are beginning to play a much bigger role in migration decisions and the potential effects this may have on migration patterns must be adequately and appropriately addressed.

Chapter 3 – South Asian Voices: Differing Perspectives

3.1 Chapter Objectives

The global narrative concerning climate change migration as discussed in Chapter 1 focuses mostly on the production and protection of current and future climate change refugees. However, as shown above, the history of migration and current migration patterns in South Asia do not necessarily fit the discourse of climate change as a primary driver of displacement. As Farbotko asserts, the climate refugee narrative is perpetuated despite the “invisibility of much climate change phenomena to the naked eye or layperson’s perspective” (Farbotko and Lazrus 2012). The many interpretations of how climate change impacts individuals’ livelihoods and possibility for migration demonstrates that the ‘climate change refugee’ discourse may be ignoring the larger picture in which migration occurs. In this chapter, I will investigate something often ignored by international agendas and discourses, not just the numbers of South Asian individuals displaced, but also their voices. I will demonstrate the diversity in perspectives among this population to assess how appropriate the climate change refugee discourse is in this region of the world. In this chapter, I will use both media and academic research representations of climate migrants to demonstrate how voices and stories are used to promote the ‘climate change refugee’ agenda or critique it.

3.2 Media and Discourse Representations

Much of the media concerning ‘climate change refugees’ uses alarming titles, predicting mass flows of migrants from rapidly disintegrating environments. Critics highlight that these migrants are represented as ‘victims of climate change’ and their status as ‘climate change refugees’ is examined to the extent that alternative adaptation or migration strategies are little

discussed (Farbotko and Lazrus 2012) (Bettini 2013). Thus, climate migration is often only represented as a crisis of ‘climate refugees.’

Most popular media articles focus on the climate change affects in the Sundarbans and coastal areas of Bangladesh and northeast India, especially highlighting the internationally displaced people. These articles focus on stories of climate disaster that prompts inevitable migration and constant fear of deportation in the host-nation due to the lack of recognized international or regional legal protection. Additionally, since the recent European and global refugee crisis, media outlets have linked climate change migration to the production of political refugees. Articles in *Foreign Policy*, the *Guardian*, and *Al Jazeera* entitled the “The Pariahs of the Global Refugee Flood,” “Failure to act on Climate Change means an even Bigger Refugee Crisis,” and “Where will the climate refugees go?” respectively add to the narrative that climate change exists only as a ‘threat multiplier’ with impacts on international security and livelihoods (Baker 2015) (Bennett 2015). These articles use images of massive, uncontrollable migrant floods from South Asia to argue for legal recognition and protection of ‘climate change refugees.’ In the *Foreign Policy* article, the unique position of South Asian, including Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Afghan migrants who flee to the West for economic reasons or displacement by climate change are considered. As these migrants are not considered individuals fleeing political oppression, rather considered migrants seeking better economic prospects and lives, they are not afforded mechanisms by which they can seek international protection. They continue contributing to the flows of migrants from the Global South into Europe, which in more recent years, has been met with hostility and xenophobia. The article itself does little to connect these migrants’ decisions to leave to environmental degradation or climate change, with one of their subjects asserting that a lack of employment and poor economic conditions ultimately

pushed him out of Bangladesh. However, the article itself discusses mass refugee flows due to climate change and the need for an encompassing protection under the UNHCR convention or other mechanisms for environmental or climate induced migrants.

In many ways, as Bettini notes, these articles as well as the overall discourse contribute to the growing ‘apocalyptic’ or ‘dystopian’ narrative or rhetoric concerning climate change migration (Bettini 2013). Words like ‘catastrophe,’ ‘disaster’ and ‘urgency’ are used commonly, and climate migrants are painted as amorphous, homogenous masses ultimately seeking basic refuge and protection. The articles themselves rely on statistics predicting massive displacements without necessarily specifying where the numbers themselves come from or who they represent. Deliberate photos and South Asian voices are used to further this discourse, with selected subjects highlighting extreme poverty, significant environmental degradation, familial deaths, and lack of government or international protection. In these articles, migrants take the status of the ‘victim,’ who is both feared by, yet must be protected by the international community. For example, an Inter Press Service (IPS) News Agency article entitled, “A Precarious Fate for Climate Migrants in India,” uses the story of climate change migrants who have resettled in India (Lal 2016). Sanjeela Shaikh, a farmer from the Bangladeshi coastal district of Bhola, lost her entire family, possessions and agricultural fields to severe flooding. She is quoted saying, “I’ve accepted my fate. There’s no future for me in Bangladesh,” after she relocated to New Delhi India (Lal 2016). Additionally, Zahida Begum, who is reported living in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh with her 5-member family, stated,

“When we’d just shifted, we used to spend entire days hiding. Now we just pretend we’re from Indian state of West Bengal as we speak the same language and other cultures are also quite similar. However, we’re petrified of the authorities probing our Bangladeshi antecedents. We can be packed off without any questions. But that’s a risk we are willing to take.” (Lal 2016)

In investigating similar themes in Tuvalu, Farbotko, highlights that ‘climate change refugee’ narratives of local Tuvaluans ultimately “evoked a particularly narrow range of subject positions for inhabitants of Tuvalu – either a helpless victim or a climate hero,” who despite the lack of international protection, still migrates across international borders (Farbotko and Lazrus 2012). She further asserts that the popular representation of climate change migration in the international sphere is problematic; it assumes that displacement and migration is the singular product of climate change, and further entrenches the narratives and lived experiences of already vulnerable populations against powerful discourses and policies that inadequately represent them. These conclusions draw parallels with the representation of South Asian climate migrants; often times, migration and migration decisions are generalized and used as evidence to support the ‘climate change refugee’ narrative and migration is often presented as something international while regional or internal displacements are left unconsidered.

Overall, media and discourse representations paint a picture of chaotic, grandiose changes in migration patterns throughout South Asia, with significant regional and global impacts. It highlights the lack of protection for migrants who choose to leave, and often times ignores the narratives of those who choose to stay. In doing this, it oversimplifies migration decisions and abandons climate change impacts in climate migrant-producing areas.

3.3 Local and Academic Perspectives

However, in contrast to the crisis imagery given above, many South Asian voices stand in stark contrast to the climate change refugee agenda. In a 2009 Scientific American article, Ainun Nishat, the International Union for Conservation of Nature’s representative for Bangladesh is quoted saying,

“Will people leave? Maybe in 100 years, but that is not my priority now. People are living in areas that go underwater once in a fortnight in the coastal belt, the point is,

they're still here. They are not migrating today. It is not time to worry about it. My priority is the natural disaster that is happening now" (Friedman 2013).

This quote critiques the alarmist nature of much the climate refugee debate, which mostly focuses on threats of future displacement and highlights cases that are evidence of such displacement. Additionally, Nishat also demonstrates the complexity of climate change and migration decisions, emphasizing the adaptive strategies and resilience that members of these climate vulnerable communities exhibited in the past and continue to exhibit today. Additionally, in the same article, Gaurpodomando, whose entire family fled to India illegally from Bangladesh due to floods that affected their fishing livelihood, states,

"I do feel a little lonely and sad, but I don't really want to go to India I don't want to leave this place, I don't want to leave this country. I love this place," (Friedman 2013)

regarding his decision to stay in Bangladesh. His response emphasizes the differences in migration decisions among members of the same community, highlighting the complexity of such decisions and the importance of other factors in such decisions. While climate change affects may become much more severe in the future, Gaupodomando's decision to stay leaves him unprotected by such a 'climate change refugee' regime that uplifts those who choose to migrate. Similar topics are explored in the Thomson Reuters Foundation Article, "As Climate Impacts Hit, Pakistan faces Migration Surge – Experts," which details the experiences of a fisherman living on the Pakistani island Hajamaro due to increasing severity and frequency of cyclones and other tropic storms coupled with sea-level rise (Saeed 2015). Shafqat Aziz, a food security expert at the Dutch affiliate of Oxfam states,

"Local Adaptation plans can help people ensure their livelihoods and safety in the face of calamities like droughts, floods and earthquakes" (Saeed 2015).

to support his assertion that climate induced migration is not necessary if the government supports programs that help populations adapt to and mitigate climate change effects.

Mohammed Yusuf, a resident of the Hajamaro island whose family suffers economic loss and death due to climate change, further demonstrates the challenges behind migration by stating,

“If we had sufficient resources to relocate, we would have moved to Thatta city some five years ago and quit fishing,” (Saeed 2015).

demonstrating the importance of employment stability and livelihood in migration decisions.

An article in *Global Environmental Change*, “Challenging Climate Change and Migration Discourse: Different Understandings of Timescale and Temporality in the Maldives,” demonstrates the differing perspectives, approaches and descriptive language to climate change and migration between ‘elites’ and non-elites’ (Arnall and Kothari 2015). The authors point out that ‘climate refugee’ discourses often marginalize or ignore the perspectives of ‘non-elites,’ or those who are not climate change professionals or experts. The interview-based study concluded that overall, the discourse has become “locally appropriated,” with gaps between how such elites and non-elites perceive the threat of climate change migration (Arnall and Kothari 2015). The researchers pin-pointed temporal differences in perception between the two groups. The first being that while elites tended to focus on the distant future distant from the lived experiences of non-elites, or the long term, while non-elites tended to focus present, every-day climate change, social and economic problems, such as steady employment, education and healthcare.

Additionally, while elites tended to invoke the ‘crisis’ discourse when discussing climate change migration, few non-elites identified mass future displacement or disaster due to climate change effects. While a policy maker was quoted saying,

“People don’t see what is coming. In 20 years, many of these [islands] will not be habitable due to saltwater inundation. In 50 years, they might not even exist. It’s like a ticking time bomb sitting under people’s noses. People will be forced to move away from their islands, which will be bad for them, but they just can’t see it... This is why it’s too important for all Maldivians to join forces and act now,” (Arnall and Kothari 2015).

However, non-elite respondents tended to minimize or reject the significance of rising sea levels and other climate change effects. Non-elites already had been integrating climate change affects in their everyday lives, and thus, felt more prepared to take on future issues. In comprehensive interviews held with members of non-elite and elite individuals in the study, non-elite respondents did not cite climate change induced sea level rise as a sufficient reason to migrate in the future. In such interviews, non-elites downplay or rejected the significance of rising sea levels and other climate change effects. One non-elite interviewee stated,

“We will always survive by building sea walls, floating islands, underwater homes, whatever we need to,” (Arnall and Kothari 2015).

demonstrating the belief that adequate and trusted adaptation mechanisms are already in-place to counter climate change effects.

Finally, the article mentioned that migration was something common to both elite and non-elite Maldivian life, with individuals and families’ relocating between islands seasonally or permanently Maldivians for employment or education. Many individuals used their already existent frequent relocation patterns to already create future adaptation strategies, a 25-year old respondent stated,

“I have heard climate change from the television, but I am not so worried... If sea level rise occurs, then I will go to Dubai because there is work there and good socioeconomic conditions. Then I’ll be able to provide support to my parents and family. Here [in Maldives] there is not so much for me as there are no jobs,” (Arnall and Kothari 2015).

In general, the article itself demonstrates the complexity of climate change migration in terms of one of the islands most vulnerable to sea-level rise in the world. Overall, the article concluded that in order to reconcile these differences in perspectives towards climate change migration, and prevent forcing external, global narratives on Maldivian lives, there must be more dialogue

between elites and non-elites to create effective policy interventions to address a wide range of perceived issues and barriers.

To conclude, local and academic perspectives of climate change migration patterns and predictions in the South Asian context demonstrate the gaps or inconsistencies in the narrative of the 'climate change refugee.' South Asian migrants are not a homogenous group and migration as adaptation is not a phenomenon that is new. Overall, South Asians, in their migration decisions, are considering and evaluating a wide-range of factors.

3.4 Chapter Conclusion

Dr. Jamuna Sheshadri, a Delhi University associate professor of Sociology, was quoted in the same 2009 Scientific American article discussed above, saying,

“Everyone knows that climate change is displacing people, but no government is willing to acknowledge this officially for fear of having to recognize these people as refugees and be held responsible for their welfare,” (Friedman 2013).

The climate change migration debate is one that is diverse. While climate change is a significant factor in migration decisions, it still remains unrecognized by most international and regional governing bodies. The global responsibility to those impacted by climate change is unaccounted for, leaving certain migrants in vulnerable conditions. However, there are diverse perspectives among a wide range of South Asian populations regarding climate migration; while it is a serious current reality for some, it is seen as less of a threat by others undergoing similar climate change pressures. Multiple factors weigh into migration decisions and affect migration patterns during or after climate change induced environmental change. South Asian actors have taken advantage of a wide range of creative strategies to combat the issue of climate change migration as it occurs within their local worlds in the vacuum of comprehensive regional or international action.

Overall, in drafting a climate change migration framework, the diverse perspective and adaptation strategies already employed by South Asian populations should be integrated.

Finally, as will be demonstrated in the next section, climate change ultimately interfaces in complex ways with poverty and development as well as history and culture. It becomes difficult and problematic to characterize all South Asian climate migrants using global, external narratives that emphasize their vulnerability and their status as ‘refugees.’ As will be demonstrated more thoroughly in the next section, such rhetoric fails to capture adaptive strategies and continued resilience of climate change-affected communities and minimizes their past and present ability to adapt.

Chapter 4 - A Changing Migrant? Critiques of the 'Climate Change Refugee' Discourse

4.1 Chapter Objectives

In this chapter, I will critique the 'climate change refugee discourse' against the complex reality in South Asia. I will also explore the relationship between development, something not significantly addressed by the 'climate change refugee discourse,' which emphasizes only the mass displacement of people from climate vulnerable regions and advocates for their protection. While climate change is occurring and climate change effects are serious and will impact displacement, highlighting critiques, gaps and consequences of the 'climate change refugee' discourse will help create a more robust, nuanced framework for climate migrants in the South Asian region. Overall, this critique does not serve to reject or deny the reality of climate change nor its diverse impact on human life and mobility; however, it creates a narrative that is all-encompassing, representative of and fair to both scientific and academic findings.

4.2 A Crisis Narrative

Climate scholars like Farbotko, Bettini among others have cited that mass relocation or displacement due to both slow onset or sudden climatic degradation is unlikely (Farbotko and Lazrus 2012) (Bettini 2013). In South Asia, different combinations of social, economic, and political factors affect migration decisions. Similar climate change events across the subcontinent do not necessarily result in the same level of migration due to varying levels and success of disaster risk management programs. There is also a growing body of support for the idea that climate change may not result in increased migration patterns, rather may just change existing ones. However, the term 'climate change refugee,' paints environmental degradation as the sole reason for a forced migration, erasing the context in which migration occurs and removing an individual's agency in making a migration decision (Farbotko and Lazrus 2012) (Bettini 2013).

However, the ‘climate change refugee discourse’ often portrays a picture in which migration is characterized as forced and through the mass, unavoidable production of refugees. The use of the word ‘refugee’ is politically and socially charged; the contemporary connotation of the word removes agency and power from individuals in making such migration decisions and implies the crossing of international borders. The ‘refugee’ narrative may lock migrants them into a category that is not necessarily representative of their situation or the threat against them (Farbotko and Lazrus 2012). Validating a term like ‘climate change refugee’ can also impact sense of identity, culture and belonging; it can uproot cultures and identities strongly tied to specific regions of the world and force migrants to adopt a status that emphasizes their non-belonging to any state in the world (Crate and Nuttall 2004). As an anti-climate refugee activist from the vulnerable Pacific Island of Kiribati sums up, “equity, identity and human rights,” are central to climate change migration in regards to vulnerable communities’ perceptions of their migration status (Farbotko and Lazrus 2012). In the current international political climate in which the monitoring of and hostility toward migration has increased, characterizing those displaced due to climate change as ‘refugees’ may increase regional and international tensions. Hartmann highlights that the current ‘climate change refugee’ discourse has the potential to reignite racist fears of massive flows of poor migrants from the Global South and further contribute to imageries of migrants as inherent security threats (Hartmann 2010). This presents an unrealistic image of climate change migration rather than confronting the fundamental issue of climate change and preventing, adapting to, and mitigating its various impacts.

While climate change migration will occur, presenting it as a migration or refugee crisis is neither accurate nor productive. Given that climate change holds a precarious place in international and domestic diplomacy, Bettini notes that the severe narrative and imagery

disseminated by the 'climate change refugee' discourse plays an important role in bolstering recognition and acknowledgement of climate change impacts and support for climate change programs (Bettini 2013). However, he still remains critical of the 'apocalyptic' or 'crisis' narrative furthered by the discourse mostly conceptualized in the West by climate change experts, scientists and advocates who make broad claims about a wide range of vulnerable populations. The imagery of a 'crisis of nature' and mass migration wrought by climate change does not wholly parallel the views and perspectives of climate exposed populations and discounts commonplace and already existing migrant patterns and flows (Bettini 2013).

The 'climate change refugee' discourse overall predicts a climate crisis and mass migration due to such a crisis. However, in doing so, it decontextualizes and erases already existent migration patterns and emphasizes the complete vulnerability and devastation of the people, removing their resiliency and agency. As seen in South Asia, already existing adaptive migration strategies are in place; migration to different regions of the same country, or internationally are intentional, with individuals sending back remittances that are important for family members and communities that stay behind. Thus, such a discourse may reorganize power relations in a way that vulnerable communities are disenfranchised and unable to make decisions independently (Bettini 2013). Overall, the discourse must be adjusted to reflect what is truly happening in the South Asian region and must be adapted to adequately, responsibly and justly aid migrants moving due to climate change instead of disempowering them, emphasizing their status as victims and forcing them to adopt an international legal label or classification.

Finally, given that all except one country in South Asia have not signed conventions like the 1951 Convention or 1967 Protocol concerning forced migration and refugees, it is unlikely that they will concede to another international framework recognizing this newer type of 'climate

change refugee.’ Additionally, many South Asian countries themselves do not have substantial climate change adaptation strategies in place to cope with their own climate change or migration problems. As demonstrated in Chapter 3, a majority of migration stimulated by environmental degradation or climate change remains internal or at least confined to regional boundaries. South Asian climate change migrants are not expected in large numbers to flee to parts of the world other than South Asia. This paradox puts the region in a precarious position in which it will both produce and host large numbers of ‘climate change refugees’ under the protection-based solutions advocated by the discourse. The ability of the region to do so is questionable given its low development indices and lack of current substantial action toward mitigating and adapting to climate change.

4.3 Lessons from South Asia: The Nexus of Climate Change and Development

South Asia poses an interesting context in which climate change occurs due to its lower levels of development and infrastructure. According to the World Bank, in South Asia in 2012, ~18.8% of the population lived on less than \$1.90 a day and millions lived under the absolute poverty line. Additionally, large numbers of the population (~200 million) lived in slums and ~500 million lived without access to electricity (Qian 2017). Throughout the region, there are varying development and infrastructure patterns, with some states with higher development indices. The variability in regards to development in the region is testament to the complexity and challenges it faces in regards to reducing poverty, improving livelihoods and increasing resilience of communities. In regards to climate change, it has been cited that low income and high levels of poverty aggravate climate change risks and increases severity of environmental disasters by increasing the vulnerability of individuals and populations – in short, poor development indices reduce adaptive capacity of communities (Climate Change 2014 Synthesis

Report IPCC 2014). Additionally, climate change effects and disasters may compromise already existing infrastructures, and may increase the future vulnerability of communities, which may result in some levels of migration.

As demonstrated in Chapter 2, there are varying climate affects anticipated in the South Asian region and past climate events demonstrate the diversity of responses to such disaster. Much of this was related to development and infrastructure systems that helped mitigate or adapt to climate change affects and thus reduced negative impacts of severe climate change events. Fritz notes that environmental migration is often influenced by vulnerability, resilience, and adaptability, noting that not everyone in climate vulnerable or susceptible regions will move or want to move (Fritz 2010). Overall, vulnerability of communities and individuals is determined by access to resources and the effectiveness of such resources. Studies show that much climate change adaptation will come from an individual or communities' own social capital and resources. Likewise, human mobility is intrinsically linked to human rights and social and political capital; often the poorest and most marginalized are the least likely to migrate due to social, political and economic barriers. Thus, social and economic capital facilitate migration, making the wealthier more able and likely to migrate as an adaptation strategy to climate change events (Naser 2013). This brings a paradox in which migration itself may contribute to the weakening of communities by removing the social and economic protection and resources provided by its former members. Thus, a discourse which promotes migration out of climate vulnerable areas must also acknowledge, provide for, and protect those who decide to stay in such vulnerable places.

Finally, studies in Bangladesh demonstrate that while migration and resettlement is an effective adaptation strategy to climate change risk, it also predicts a dip in development and

living standards, including the social and economic vulnerability of those who decide to migrate (Raleigh, Jordan, and Salehyan 2008). Within South Asia, a common trend is internal migration to urban areas; the significant drain on resources in such cities due to increased in-migration results in its poor living conditions and poor, unsustainable infrastructures. Overall, the 'climate change refugee' discourse must offer more than just legal protection for climate vulnerable individuals; it must confront the underlying issues of poor development indices and their relation to current and future adverse climate change events.

Finally, disaster relief and aid programs for climate change risks demonstrate similar parallels to development as climate change. These programs are important for increasing the resilience of communities and strengthening their adaptive capacity to environmental disaster (Asian Development Bank 2012). Poor development patterns will yield poor disaster relief programs, yielding more serious complications when future environmental disaster strikes. This is seen in the varying migration responses to floods, droughts and landslides throughout the subcontinent (Raleigh, Jordan, and Salehyan 2008)(Naser 2011). Thus, creating adequate precautionary infrastructures, improving relief aid and development, to mitigate the impact of climate change will be important adaptation strategies for communities.

While migration has been widely cited to be an effective adaptation strategy to mitigate climate change, it is not the only way of responding to climate change disasters and should not be the only solution offered by an international or regional framework. Thus, climate change migration must be thought of within and as part of a broader development and climate change adaptation framework, instead of working solely for the legal protection of vulnerable groups.

4.4 Chapter Conclusion: Unintended Consequences

Overall, the ‘climate change refugee’ discourse currently being discussed by international organizations to be implemented as a legal protection for future climate change migrants must be adapted. When drafting a new political or social label to represent a group of people, as the ‘climate change refugee’ does, anticipating negative unintended consequences of such a label is necessary. Historical examples of this include the characterization of internally displaced peoples (IDPs) and refugees, which has had significant social and political consequences, including disenfranchisement of entire populations and vulnerable peoples, and is consistently being revisited by international players (UNHCR 2015) (Rajaram 2002). Overall, the current ‘climate change refugee’ discourse is one that is broad and that tends to homogenize climate migrants and erase the contexts in which environmental disaster and their migration decisions take place. It remains separate from other climate mitigation and adaptation strategies and upholds migration as a primary adaptation mechanism. These characteristics have the potential to alter existing migration patterns in South Asia and incentivize abandoning a vulnerable place or region to climate change impacts. In turn, this may have long-lasting impacts on social and cultural identity and may imply that some regions or areas of the world are not worth saving simply because of anthropogenic climate change impacts caused primarily by industrialized nations with the resources to mitigate adverse effects.

However, although the discourse itself may not be completely representative of the situation in South Asia, some level of climate change-induced migration in the region will still occur and must be accounted for through legal protection. Development and climate change migration are closely related; thus, a framework surrounding climate change migration should also include development strategies concerning adaptation and mitigation.

Chapter 5 - Conclusions and Next Steps

5.1 Brief Summary of Arguments

In this chapter, I will outline my major arguments as well as reflect on general perceptions of the topic. The research question of this thesis is how has the ‘climate change refugee’ discourse been articulated and adopted in international and regional spheres, and how applicable are its representation of migrants and offered solutions in the South Asian region? Overall, the thesis engaged a wide range of academic and media evidence to demonstrate the inconsistencies between the theoretical or abstract ‘climate change refugee’ argument and the reality of migration and environmental degradation in the South Asian region.

Although environmental migration has been a common practice throughout human history, climate change-induced displacement poses a unique challenge to this century. Environmental migration has been sparsely defined by a wide range of actors, including the UN and IOM, and definitions of ‘climate change refugee,’ are even more variable. Although specific countries like Sweden are beginning to recognize a type of climate change or environmental refugee, a unified definition of ‘climate change refugee’ and international framework regarding their protection is yet to be defined. Thus, much of the literature on ‘climate change refugees’ has not been practically applied to broad regions of the world.

The current ‘climate change refugee’ discourse arose in response to a lack of protections for migrants fleeing unstable environments specifically due to climate change effects and escalating concerns about future impacts of climate change. Both humanitarian and human rights frameworks have been evoked to defend the ‘climate change refugee’ discourse, citing alleviating human suffering and global inequities leading to the cause of displacement as primary reasons to include international protections for ‘climate change refugees.’ However, despite an

increasing literature surrounding the discourse and the widely cited increasingly severe negative impacts of climate change, an international consensus on climate change migration or the international protection of ‘climate change refugees’ is yet to be developed. The lack of global diplomatic consensus and action regarding climate change and climate change migration is concerning despite the abundance of literature linking the two and arguing its inclusion. Within South Asia, the lack of such diplomatic action is linked to the absence of both climate change and migration within specific country agendas as well as among regional and national priorities, where economic development and cooperation take precedence. Escalating political tensions between and within countries in the region further distance climate change and climate change migration from domestic and regional frameworks.

Climate change impacts have been widespread and variable within South Asia. These impacts intersect with local realities in complex ways to complicate migration patterns. Thus, within the South Asia, it is difficult to solely attribute any type of migration to any particular reason. Even in the extremely climate vulnerable nation of the Maldives, there are diverse perspectives concerning climate change migration and the use of the term, ‘climate change refugees’ remains contested.

Overall, the thesis demonstrates that the discourse and solutions offered by the ‘climate change refugee’ regime are neither representative of nor applicable to South Asian migrants. The discourse does little to address mitigating climate change impacts and developing climate vulnerable areas. Instead, it works to disempower and remove agency from those living in vulnerable places by presenting them with no options, and quasi-forcing them from their long-established homes and livelihoods.

5.2 Developing a nuanced “climate change refugee” discourse

As stated before, climate change is a global phenomenon with widespread effects over diverse populations. While I affirm the validity of climate change effects and demonstrate how they impact migration patterns, I argue the ‘climate change refugee’ discourse does not offer practical solutions. While the humanitarian and human rights-based defense of ‘climate change refugees’ claim legitimacy, both rely on an idealist interpretation of humanitarian action and the standardization and absoluteness of human rights. In short, they do not acknowledge the existing nuance within humanitarian and human rights spheres. Additionally, the discourse attempts to garner impetus and urgency to address climate change issues by linking climate change to the production of refugees; however, the inadequacy of the solutions offered demonstrates the need for changes in how migrants are represented and treated under such a discourse.

The exaggerated images of mass displacements of individuals permanently fleeing from climate vulnerable areas are neither accurate nor practical; they remove the context from which migration occurs, erase resilience and adaptation strategies undertaken by vulnerable communities, and assume well-established individuals and communities will abandon their lands and way of life. Additionally, these drastic images work to create fear among countries and regions that host those fleeing environmental disaster. This contributes to negative views and narratives of migrants and has significant impacts on how native and migrant populations interact. The presentation of migrants within the discourse must be re-framed so instead of the displaced being seen as a potential future security risk or burden, they are seen as individuals with agency who have utilized a wide range of adaptive strategies. Finally, the discourse should not work to disenfranchise or abandon those who wish to remain in climate vulnerable regions

by incentivizing migration. Those who remain must be afforded protections against climate change effects if scientifically possible.

Thus, policymakers and humanitarians must consider if even presenting such migrants as completely devoid of options is appropriate. Views of climate migration should be adapted to fit within a broader context, where migration can be temporary or permanent, and local, regional or international in nature. The recent use of temporary visas in Australia, in which displacement is acknowledged and protected for a duration appropriate for a specific migrant, may prove fruitful for such climate migrants (Asylum Seeker Resource Center 2013). Finally, climate change itself must become normalized in the international sphere to avoid the problem of creating an alarmist discourse. Climate change adaptation and mitigation must be interwoven with broader frameworks of migration and development to counteract such dystopian narratives of future possibilities.

To address the issue of climate migration, a discourse must be developed that also acknowledges the multiple perspectives and priorities of different actors in climate change migration situations to decrease the burden of negative unintended consequences of introducing this new class of migrant into international and regional spheres. Thus, characterizations of climate migrants must work with local communities threatened by climate change, instead of imposing external perspectives and narratives on how individuals are affected and respond to climate change consequences. Many of these communities have lived and adapted to environmental disaster and have created various strategies for survival. While migration has often been a means of adaptation, it should not be thought of the only adaptation strategy for those in severe climate change situations. However, it must also be understood that in the most

extreme situations, adaptation other than migration may not be possible, and in these most severe circumstances, protections to migrants must be afforded.

Finally, the ‘climate change refugee’ discourse must not ignore the broader context in which migration occurs. Currently, the ‘climate change refugee’ discourse solely emphasizes protection for migrants displaced by a broad range of climate change consequences. This vague definition must be adapted for specific local and regional contexts, in which climate change consequences and migration decisions may vary considerably depending on a multitude of social, economic and political factors. For example, specific climate change impacts do not yield the same migration decisions across similar populations, indicating that socio-economic status or ability to cope with environmental disaster may impact migration decisions. As stated before, climate change and development are intrinsically linked; therefore, the ‘climate change refugee’ discourse must address how development impacts climate change consequences and migration decisions.

Specifically, for South Asia, a region where climate change consequences are markedly increasing, developing an effective and representative ‘climate change refugee’ or climate change migration discourse is necessary. Given the lack of international consensus around climate migration, until the international community arrives at specific categories and definitions regarding climate migration, protection of those displaced by climate change as well as their environments lie in the hands of the South Asian countries themselves.

In such a framework, South Asian countries will be responsible for acknowledging and protecting those who are fleeing or displaced by climate change induced environmental degradation as climate migrants, and those who continue to live in climate vulnerable conditions. The dearth of international consensus regarding climate change migration may allow South Asia

to develop a strong climate change migration paradigm specific to its unique context and better designed to meet needs of South Asian migrants. As South Asian countries have not signed international conventions regarding forced migration or refugees, this indicates that traditional notions of what constitutes a refugee may not be adequate for the South Asian region. In this sense, South Asian countries must define or outline regional conceptions of what constitutes a forced migration or refugee. The region may benefit from viewing such climate migrants as ‘adaptation-mitigation migrants’ whose temporary migration may work to diminish severe climate change impacts. Overall, developing a robust regional framework regarding climate vulnerability and temporary resettlement should become a priority for regional policymakers.

5.3 Next Steps: Who is responsible for climate change effects and how?

Overall, the international lack of responsibility and action for climate change consequences stands in stark contrast with increasing attention paid to climate change migration and the ‘climate change refugee’ discourse. Climate change migration is due to climate change consequences and the ‘climate change refugee’ discourse is built on the assumption that the international political and economic community will acknowledge and take responsibility for the impacts of climate change, whether that is through protection of affected migrants or by mitigating the climate change causes. However, important global players, like the United States of America (US) under President Trump, have recently questioned the validity of climate change, cut funding toward climate change mitigation strategies and are considering leaving important international climate change conferences and conventions, like the Paris Conference (Davenport and Rubin 2017). The US’ departure from these important climate change policies and increasingly climate-denial stance has the potential to ripple throughout international and regional circles as the US is currently the world’s second largest contributor to global climate

change (GCC). Thus, in the immediate future, the question of who will take responsibility for and action against climate change impacts, including the displacement of people, will continue to be a problem.

Equally important is the increasing nature of countries within South Asia of being contributors to GCC; currently, India is within the top ten contributors to GCC (Olivier et al. 2015). Given this, South Asian regional and national frameworks regarding adaptation to and mitigation of climate change and its effects must become more defined. Regional cooperation will be key in addressing the widespread and transboundary impacts of climate change and environmental disaster. SAARC has already identified that regional adaptation to and mitigation of climate change will improve development indices and the quality of life in South Asia. In recent years, SAARC has not prioritized climate change or migration, instead focusing on economic development and promoting peace to diminish tensions between major SAARC nations. In April 2010, SAARC released a Statement on Climate Change through the Thimphu Declaration to follow up from the 2008 Dhaka Declaration (“Thimphu Statement on Climate Change” 2010). Both declarations recognize the importance of climate change and the challenge developing nations face in pursuing both socio-economic development and mitigating climate change. In general, South Asian countries are vocally against instituting stringent carbon or GHG emission caps, pointing to industrialization and economic development needs. However, despite global mitigation efforts through the Kyoto Protocol, ratified in 1992 in which 192 signatories vowed to decrease GHG and carbon emissions, and others like the Copenhagen conference, global GHG emissions still increase (Climate Change 2014 Synthesis Report IPCC 2014).

The global need to slow climate change and mitigate its causes points to a changing responsibility for South Asia and other developing countries. To confront this issue,

conceptualizations of who has accountability and responsibility for climate change effects and in what capacity must change. For example, Article 3.1 of United Nations Framework on Climate Change (UNFCCC) stresses common but differentiated responsibilities regarding climate change mitigation, which can be argued to mean that wealthier nations, instead of contributing more to resettlement or mitigation efforts, can invest money and resources into adaptation strategies in these more vulnerable countries (Gibb and Ford 2012) (“United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change” 1992). Additionally, climate activists like former Maldivian president Mohamed Nasheed point to a changing international paradigm in which economic development should not be dependent on carbon emissions (Sadat 2009). Recent scientific literature demonstrate that neither increased carbon emissions nor increased energy consumption leads to economic growth (Zhang and Cheng 2009). Thus, countries in South Asia and around the world should reevaluate their current policies toward climate change in order to create an agenda in which climate change prevention, mitigation and adaptation takes priority. In doing so, for future generations, such countries can prevent even more serious climate change impacts and create lasting frameworks concerning climate change and climate change migration.

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