



The state of emergency caused by the environmental crisis has drawn forth the necessity to re-evaluate the centres of gravity in our world, including the means and ends of the arts. A number of exhibitions, seminars and individual art works at the 55th Venice Biennale in 2013 resonated with this call for change. *Altern Ecologies* sets out to trace this emergent discourse focused on our relationship with the non-human world within the polyphonic maze of the Biennale. Growing out of the conversations following the *Counter Order of Things* symposium, organized in connection with the exhibition in the Nordic and Finnish Pavilions, the anthology consists of a selection of commissioned articles alongside a number of national pavilions invited to present their exhibitions from the 2013 edition of the Biennale.

Altern Ecologies includes contributions by Ursula Bieman, T. J. Demos, Catherine de Zegher, Taru Elfving, Anselm Franke, Simryn Gill, Terike Haapoja, Hanna Husberg, Alfredo Jaar, Harri Laakso, Antti Laitinen, Laura McLean, Tuula Närhinen, Khaled Ramadan, Henk Slager, Syrago Tsiara, Stefanos Tsivopoulos. Edited by Taru Elfving and Terike Haapoja, the anthology is published by Frame Visual Art Finland in collaboration with the University of the Arts Helsinki.

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Emergent Perspectives on the Ecological
Threshold at the 55th Venice Biennale

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CLIMATES OF DISPLACEMENT: THE ARGOS COLLECTIVE'S MALDIVES*

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It is common today to read accounts by scientific analysts – such as those involved with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) – that warn of a near future of forced displacement on a massive scale owing to climate change. Inhabitants of small island nations such as Tuvalu and the Maldives, particularly exposed to the threat of sea level rise in the Pacific, for instance, figure as impending “climate refugees”. Koko Warner, an expert on climate change and migration at the United Nations University in Bonn, says the displacement of those populations forecasts “a phenomenon of a scope not experienced in human history.”¹ Such an eventuality appears credible, especially given the ever-increasing rise in greenhouse gases and quickly approaching tipping points, in addition to the real-life extreme weather-related disasters in our present (including Hurricane Sandy that hit New York City in 2012; the 2005 Hurricane Katrina that decimated New Orleans; and Typhoon Haiyan that devastated the Philippines in 2013).

While the scientific basis of the climate modeling of that potential future is clear, it does not entail accepting such narratives as somehow irrevocable – although it's difficult not to be seduced by such narratives, given the entertainment industry's regularly released spectacular sci-fi visions of futuristic apocalypses and mass migrations (think of films *Flood*, 2007; *The Road*, 2009; *2012*, 2009; or *Oblivion*, 2013). Indeed, even the curators of the Maldives Pavilion of the 2013 Venice Biennial, the Chamber of Public Secrets, courted just this imaginary, as implied in their show's title: *Portable Nation: Disappearance as a work in Progress*.² Yet, such disaster predictions – whether presented in the media, visual culture, scientific discourse or in artistic practice's ecological romanticism – carry a risk of a debilitating fatalism, for they overlook forms of agency in the present that define a politics of resistance to the fossil fuel economy driving climate change. Before we accept the inevitability of climate refugees, we must ask: How might we invent creative modes of resilience and mitigation in the face of the danger of runaway environmental disaster, and rethink aesthetics in relation to the politics of climate justice – system change, not climate change! – rather than giving in to modes of irresponsible futurist speculation that potentially eclipses real options in the here and now? In what follows, I'll investigate this question in relation to the intersection of visual culture and politics when confronting the ecological situations of the Maldives – a geopolitical and ecological hotspot facing the threat of global warming today, where migration in one way or another is presented as an unavoidable fate.

THE MALDIVES: A FRENCH REQUIEM?

For the low-lying Maldives, the threat of rising seas is admittedly already a present danger, forcing residents to consider migration as an eventual necessary measure, meaning the abandonment of their longstanding home in the Indian Ocean, which has been inhabited since the sixth century BCE. Approaching the Maldives' ecologically and socially precarious situation and emphasizing precisely this migration scenario, the Argos Collective recently assembled *The Maldives – A Nation at the Water's Edge*, a photographic suite that documents the islands' inhabitants and their fragile environment. Comprised of a group of ten French journalists and photographers, the Argos Collective work with NGOs and humanitarians, and publish books of their images, including *Climate Refugees* from 2010, which contains the Maldives depictions, along with essays describing their subjects.³ "Our job is to tell stories we have heard and to bear witness to what we have seen," explains journalist and member Guy-Pierre Chomette. "The science was already there when we started in 2004, but we wanted to emphasize the human dimension, especially for those most vulnerable."⁴ In their visual presentation, Maldivians appear in domestic settings, preparing food, playing on the beach, swimming in water, with other photographs portraying their threatened environment beset by coastal erosion and bleached coral reefs. In relation to one image showing a group of youths, the Argos Collective points out that 60% of Maldivians are younger than 15 years old, and "during their lifetime they will probably see the first exiles leave the island due to sea-level rise and erosion."⁵

Consisting of a double string of twenty-six atolls, joining an archipelago of 1,190 islands, the Maldives is the smallest Asian nation in terms of land and population. Following short periods of Portuguese and Dutch reign during the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries, and a British protectorate from 1887 to 1965, the country gained its independence only to be subsequently ruled by an authoritarian government for three decades until the country's first free elections in 2008, bringing the progressive Mohamed Nasheed to the presidency. Like other island states such as Kiribati, Tuvalu, and Nauru, the Maldives is particularly vulnerable to inundation and storm surges, with climate change bringing a multitude of negative bio-geophysical and socio-economic impacts.⁶ With a population of approximately 400,000 people, eighty per cent of the country's islands – of which 200 are inhabited – are less than one meter above sea level, and studies predict the Maldives could be submerged within 100 years, lending the support of independent scientific research to the Argos Collective's claims. Indeed, the 2007 Fourth Assessment Report of the IPCC forecasted an approximate fifty-centimetre sea-level rise by the end of the twenty-first century, an increase expanded by the IPCC's Fifth Assessment Report in 2014 to potentially more than two meters.⁷ The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration offers an equally dire scenario, suggesting an increase as great as 6.6 feet by 2100.⁸ While coastal geomorphologists

point out that islands are more flexible than often thought, capable of adapting their shape and elevation to the vagaries of sea level and currents, the Maldives will certainly have to confront a future menaced by water.⁹ In addition to inundation and storm surges, the negative effects of sea-level rise include coastal erosion, the salination of fresh water, and extreme weather events, which in turn threaten vital infrastructure, human settlements, health, agriculture and trade. The negative economic hit is particularly harsh for a country heavily reliant on tourism, with a per capita GDP of only \$4,967 in 2008. As such, the Maldives, it is claimed, may soon be the first nation where the entire population will become climate refugees, foreshadowing "an age of insurgent climate refugees on a far more threatening, chaotic scale."¹⁰ At the same time, developed nations, led by the US and those in the EU, followed by other countries such as India and Bangladesh, are already preparing for an unprecedented near-future demographic flood by building defensive fortresses around their countries to control migration with increasingly militarized and high-tech borders. Such is the securitization of climate change response, in regards to state, military, and corporate planning for worst-case scenarios. There, climate change is viewed as a threat multiplier, where migration figures as a criminal act, rather than a mode of behavioral adaptation for human survival. The state-military-corporate response to climate change imagines a nightmare future demanding ever more advanced weaponry and full-spectrum dominance planning in protecting borders, as developed by security-service corporations and defense contractors in a billion dollar a year industry, overriding all concerns for human rights.¹¹

The Argos Collective's text surrounding the photographs describes the collective's visit to the islands in advance of their 2010 publication, where they spoke with diverse Maldivian representatives, such as Mohammed Ali, director of the Maldives Environmental Research Center, Abdullah Mifthah, head engineer at a resort on Thulhagiri, and Mohammed Shahid, manager of Hulhumali's artificial enlarged island, each of whom contribute to the Argos' narrative of the Maldives' vulnerability and likely apocalyptic future: "A puff of a wind, a wave, and this emerald necklace that appears to be floating precariously on the water might just sink irretrievably into the depths of the Indian Ocean," Chomette explains.¹² While the aim of such depictions may be to raise awareness of the current ecological crisis and its effects on people living at the forefront of climate change, the Maldivians themselves are conspicuously allotted no political agency in these images and narratives. By projecting this climate refugee subjectivity onto the islands' population, the Argos Collective indeed tends to objectify their subjects, reducing them to anthropological evidence, and casting their situation as urgent according to their own NGO-like criteria. As they point out, we can expect 200 million refugees by the end of the century. Though the group advocates immediate international cooperation to stop global warming, they expect it will not be enough to halt the warming process, and thus we must prepare for the negative consequences. It's a question of "human rights" when a nation's

people is “suddenly shorn of their self-determination,” they write, and to meet this “humanitarian disaster” we must “immediately begin planning for the mass migration of climate refugees that will mark the 21st century.”¹³

The story is in fact familiar in mainstream media reportage. For instance, in a recent issue of *National Geographic* dedicated to the subject of “rising seas,” the lead article’s author predicts that developed nations with substantial resources, such as the Netherlands, will be able to negotiate shifting coastlines and sea levels via experimental architecture, design, and geo-engineering projects – the floating housing project of Ijburg in Amsterdam is exemplary – whereas poor nations without comparable resources or technical capabilities face the increasingly likely situation of forced migration.¹⁴ As Arnoud Molenaar, manager of Rotterdam’s Climate Proof program, explains, “to build on water is not new, but to develop floating communities on a large scale and in a harbor with tides – that is new... Instead of fighting against water, we want to live with it.”¹⁵ Yet for “poorer countries,” the prediction is very different: “By 2100 rising seas may force Maldivians to abandon their home.”¹⁶ The problem with such accounts is that they simply accept the differential effects of climate change and reproduce – thereby helping to naturalize – environmental inequality. In addition, there is no critical reflexivity in these narratives, produced by artists and journalists in the North, about the fact that it is the greenhouse-gas-polluting industry of developed countries that have historically created the causes of ecological effects that small island states are now confronting. Playing into just this type of doomsday scenario, the title of the Argos Collective’s series on Tuvalu is crystal-clear: *a Polynesian requiem*. In an act of “wishful sinking,” in the terms of Carol Farbotko, a critic of just this sort of catastrophe-seeking projection, the island, in one telltale image, is pictured as if already underwater.¹⁷

Yet we need not accept such projections, even if we must take the warnings seriously. Consider an alternate approach, one by artists Christoph Draeger and Heidrun Holzfeind, who recently proposed a very different narrative. In 2011, the Swiss-Austrian duo initiated a research project to investigate countries affected by the 2004 Indian ocean tsunami, including Thailand, Aceh (Indonesia), Sri Lanka, Maldives and India, resulting in a video shown recently at the Maldives Pavilion, a newly initiated project as part of the 2013 Venice Biennale.¹⁸ *Tsunami Architecture / The Maldives Chapter Redux*, 2011, at twenty-six minutes, explores post-disaster architectural achievements and challenges in the Maldives, offering an early glimpse of future climate change dangers. Documenting conversations with survivors, eyewitnesses, aid workers and rescue personnel, the video inquires into how aid money, which flowed into the Maldives following the tsunami, transformed the land and refashioned local economies. Certain islands were evacuated to relocate populations so that government services were not spread too thinly, and new housing has been built on “safe islands,” better protected against future tsunamis and sea level rise. While interviewees critically acknowledge that ultimately there is no such thing as a safe island, and that new housing is

often inadequate especially for the poor, the video portrays the Maldivians as possessing realistic options in the present, and resists accepting the fatalism of migration as the only response to climate change. As such, the video appears in stark contrast to the Argos Collective’s project, where viewers are offered images of depoliticization, in which islanders are reduced to humanitarian victims in need of aid, exposed to an implacable future of migration against which they seemingly have no control, presented without possessing political agency, scientific knowledge, or legal recourse.

UNDERWATER GOVERNMENT

It is telling that the Argos Collective includes no mention or image of President Mohamed Nasheed in their photographs, book, or website. During his first presidential term (2008–2012), when the group did their research, Nasheed was a visible and vocal proponent for climate justice – a fundamentally different way of framing the crisis and potential responses to it than climate refugee scenarios or humanitarian logic. In October 2009, he held an underwater cabinet meeting in scuba-diving gear, where he signed into law a commitment to become a carbon-neutral nation within ten years. Nasheed’s media appearances have dramatized the urgency of the ecological calamity facing the Maldives for international observers, defining that calamity not as a “natural disaster” in the making, but as a political crisis in the present – created by those governments who live in a psychosis of denial and inaction, operating in league with Big Oil and Gas to prevent global governance systems from addressing the threat of climate change in any substantial way.¹⁹ Nasheed’s innovative approach to political theater, in this regard, recalls artistic analogues that perform an aesthetics of politics – such as the socially-engaged projects of Abderrahmane Sissako, particularly his 2006 film *Bamako*, for which he documented a Malian community that placed the IMF and World Bank on trial for crimes against humanity in Africa; and Christoph Schlingensiefel, especially his 2000 *Foreigners Out! Schlingensiefel’s Container*, a live theatre-reality TV event in Vienna where a group of asylum seekers were voted out of the country by viewers, thereby critically visualizing the country’s xenophobic populism.²⁰ The difference is that Nasheed was actually in a position to effect social and political transformation in government.

The underwater session drew media visibility, amplified by international activist groups like 350.org,²¹ which energized the international consideration of climate change at the time, pointedly doing so two months ahead of the 2009 UN-sponsored COP 15 meeting in Copenhagen that would address climate change, even though the Maldivians were sidelined along with other developing and small-island nations by Annex 1 developed nations. Attending the meeting, Nasheed explained to an audience of world leaders: “Developed countries created the climate crisis. Developing countries must not turn into a calamity. Therefore, I invite the leaders of big developing

countries to recognize their responsibilities.”²² Yet the final Copenhagen deal, arrived at in a private meeting between the US, Brazil, China, India, and South Africa, brought no binding agreements on greenhouse gas reductions (controversially accepted by the Maldives, owing to the promise of US financial assistance for adaptation), and was widely criticized as undemocratic and ineffective – an outcome repeated at subsequent UN climate meetings. At the 2010 Cancun climate talks, 43 island nations, comprising the Alliance of Small Nation Island States (AOSIS), including the Maldives, announced that they face the “end of history” if rich countries fail to act now against climate change.²³ The situation has not changed for the last few years, and after COP 20 in Lima, Peru, in 2014, critics commonly talk of how we are basically “burning the planet, one climate COP at a time.”²⁴

Still, counter to the fatalism that all-too-easily assumes an inevitable future abandonment of the islands, Nasheed has argued for investment now, on a globally transformative scale, in a post-hydrocarbon future, in order to avoid future catastrophe. Governments must halt carbon emissions, he has urged, and keep future warming within two degrees, as recommended by scientific consensus as a safe level, meaning a widely accepted requirement of an 80% reduction of emissions from 1990 levels by 2050 (though the IPCC Fifth Assessment Report on Climate Change, 2014, has revealed that global temperatures are likely to rise by as much as 4.8 degrees Celsius by the end of the century, governments maintain the status quo.²⁵) Nasheed’s position is largely consistent with the goals of the climate justice movement, which demands the inclusive participation of marginalized communities in the global climate negotiation process, and that discussions acknowledge that climate change negatively impacts human rights and worsens economic inequality worldwide. As activist groups like Climate Justice Now! and the Global Justice Ecology Project argue, environmental justice is inextricable from the struggle for economic equality, democratic politics, and the rights of indigenous and marginalized communities.²⁶ Environmental justice for the Maldives would therefore require that developed countries acknowledge their role in causing global warming, and assume their responsibilities in overcoming the crisis in the present, not simply accepting the narratives of future anthropogenic environmental disruption.

Nonetheless, after winning the country’s first democratic elections in October 2008, Nasheed announced plans to create a sovereign wealth fund financed from tourism, which could be used to buy a new homeland in India, Sri Lanka or even Australia, should migration eventually become inevitable. Other island states in the Pacific, such as Kiribati and Tuvalu, facing a similar threat of submergence, have followed the same course, and have already asked Australia and New Zealand to accept its citizens as permanent refugees – as yet to no avail.²⁷ Yet, importantly, such a plan is not Nasheed’s only solution, and indeed it may be a further act of media publicity to gain more visibility for the country’s dire situation in the present. Still, such a proposal, along with

the visual politics that endorse it, prompts further consideration of “climate refugees” as a prospective legal and conceptual category, especially as it has been taken up in much artistic practice as of late.

CLIMATE REFUGEES?

Some legal theorists argue that offering environmental refugees recognition under the Geneva Conventions will grant them internationally assured protection, independent of the laws of their own governments.²⁸ Yet this suggestion raises complex legal questions, beginning with the fact that Article 1A of the 1951 Geneva Convention grants refugee status to those fleeing persecution for reasons only of race, religion, nationality, or political opinion. The term “environmental refugee” was first introduced in a United Nations Environmental Program policy paper by Essam El Hinnawi in 1985, defining it as “those people who have been forced to leave their traditional habitat, temporarily or permanently, because of a marked environmental disruption,” where environmental disruption designates “any physical, chemical, and/or biological changes in the ecosystem (or resource base) that render it, temporarily or permanently unsuitable to support human life.”²⁹ But this definition has yet to be recognized in international law.

Recognition of “environmental refugees” by international law could occur, analysts point out, by expanding the Geneva Convention, developing existing international law (for instance, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change), or extending the mandate of the UNHCR (as the Argos Collective proposes).³⁰ That said, there are nonetheless several reasons to question this route as a credible response to the displacement crisis brought on by climate change. For one, it is difficult to define environmental causes and separate them from poverty or the multifarious negative contextual factors that exacerbate the effects of climate change. As such, the climate refugee proposes, by definition, an intangible figure owing to the difficult-to-disaggregate causality of its circumstances. What climate change brings to vulnerable people is the intensification and exacerbation of an already complex set of challenges, including uneven access to resources as diverse as water, land, infrastructure, social structures, institutions, capital, and the rule of law.³¹ Second, political theorists, such as Angela Oels, remain skeptical of establishing such confusing and complex distinctions in classifying refugees, as “it will leave plenty of room for thresholds of indistinction that leave the final decision on the status of life up to sovereign power,” a sovereign power capable of abusing such ambiguity in oppressive ways.³² Third, placing climate refugees under the UNHCR’s jurisdiction will not enable refugees to enjoy rights, but rather will potentially transform them into the depoliticized and victimized objects of humanitarianism, from whom aid can be withdrawn at any time.³³ Consider, for example, the displaced victims of Hurricane Katrina and their effective relegation to the status of bare life – a form of life stripped of political agency, reduced to mere biological existence, according to Giorgio Agamben – in their stadium-turned-camp environment. That

dystopian occurrence offers one real-life scenario for the future treatment of climate migrants in expanded camps in the US, the EU and elsewhere (as many migrants are in fact treated now).³⁴

One can therefore understandably be skeptical of proposals for the future institutionalization of the climate refugee category, as it implies a proliferation of distinctions between “good” and “bad” migrants, and invites an intensification of biopolitical regimes of control, which includes such measures as automated and weaponized surveillance systems, the militarization of borders, expanded refugee camps, complex visa processes and biometric applications, and the further commodification of migration.³⁵ It is not surprising, then, that many islanders reject the refugee role allotted to them by humanitarian groups and NGOs, who wish to save and enlist them as poster children in their political campaigns.³⁶ “In the eyes of Tuvaluans,” write Carol Farbotko and Heather Lazrus, “permission to cross a western border as a refugee falls far short of the climate change remedies required: extensive, immediate reductions in global greenhouse gas emissions, and significant legal and financial action to redress lost livelihoods and self-determination if emissions reduction is not achieved.”³⁷ One final problem regarding the category of climate refugee is that migration narratives – and even those that stress the “autonomy of migration” perspective, arguing for open borders and protesting the growing criminalization of migration³⁸ – tend to minimize the resilience of both political agency and climate justice in the present. As well, this solution, even if conjoined to human-rights claims, shifts the conversation to geo-technical fixes, such as buttressing seawalls, that will drain the energy directed toward cutting emissions.³⁹ In this regard, advocates for adaptation come all-too-close to those who deny the anthropogenic causes of climate change in the first place; for if adaptation is seen as the answer, then the danger is people may stop trying to do anything now about the causes of global warming.⁴⁰

CLIMATE JUSTICE NOW!

Representatives of small-island nations are not surprisingly on the forefront of demanding climate justice in the present, rather than accepting a future of migration. Consider the case of Tuvalu, a Pacific island nation midway between Hawaii and Australia, for which global media and some NGOs, along with the Argos Collective, have emphasized a doomsday scenario of future submergence. The IPCC warns, however, that such narratives operate “to silence alternative identities that emphasize resilience,” and it is “adaptation, perhaps even more than relocation or mitigation initiatives, which is of immediate importance in island places...[especially] in the face of changes brought about by ‘global warming’.”⁴¹ Indeed the IPCC authors observe that the “danger” of future climate change “is as much associated with the narrowing of adaptation options... as it is with uncertain

potential climate-driven physical impacts.”⁴² Instead of reproducing a form of environmentalist determinism – according to which climate change is seen as a mono-directional power of necessity, as if an unstoppable force of nature – it’s crucial to consider climate change as part of a “web of vectors” that exert force in different directions and open up various sites of agency, depending on the situation of the people, places, and socio-political structures in question.⁴³

Against the “narrowing of adaptation options,” the Maldives’ Ministry of Home Affairs, Housing and Environment has in fact outlined the following goals: coastal protection, reduction in the number of inhabited islands, the development of hydroponic agricultural systems, solar energy and rainwater harvesting, public awareness and education campaigns, and the increasing of elevation. An additional measure is for small island nations to become “renewable energy islands” and model a path away from fossil fuel dependency, as have Fiji, Samoa, Pellworm, and La Réunion, all of which are cited as currently generating more than 50% of their electricity from renewable energy sources.⁴⁴ The Argos Collective might have also considered activist-oriented legal approaches as an emerging mode of political agency, as the governments of the Maldives and Tuvalu have done by demanding that polluting countries pay for damage caused by climate change. The argument is framed as a matter of climate justice, rather than one of charity, aid, or loans for adaptation.⁴⁵ “Rather than relying on aid money, we believe that the major greenhouse polluters should pay for the impacts they are causing,” claims Tuvalu Deputy Prime Minister Tavaud Teii.⁴⁶ In 2002, Tuvalu even considered initiating a lawsuit in the International Criminal Court of Justice in The Hague in an attempt to sue major greenhouse gas emitters like the United States and Australia, though they decided ultimately against the idea given the difficulties in winning such a case.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, the example points to a potentially litigious future around the effects of and responsibilities for climate change, as well as those related to corporate environmental malfeasance.⁴⁸ Indeed, proponents of this legal strategy have been steadily developing an emerging model of “earth jurisprudence,” attempting to reconcile human governance structures with a paradigm-shifting bio-centric – rather than market-centered – global legal system, forming one source of hope for transformation in coming years.⁴⁹ According to this paradigm, advocates could hold polluters legally accountable for the devastation of environments, atmospheric pollution, and even destructive climate change.

In regards to these political and legal developments, the Argos Collective has little to say, only acknowledging the Maldives’ migrant fate. They write: “where will the Maldives get the billions of euros necessary to construct more artificial islands? Where will they find the funds to build tetrapod seawalls around the 200 inhabited islands?”⁵⁰ In its place, they offer an acritical embrace of the migration model devoid of climate justice claims. The inadequacy of their analysis and prognosis is more than clear in their short video, *Maldives: An Archipelago of Water Flowers (Maldives: un archipel à fleur d’eau)*. It begins with an ill-translated UN quote: “Because of the global warming, some 150 millions people will have to migrate until the end of the century [sic].” The voices of everyday Maldivians

are then heard reflecting on their uncertain future: “what will we do if the sea level rises? Climb the coconut trees or live on boats!”⁵¹ With this, viewers are presented with a model of isolated localism, one of un-reflexive othering, which offers the construction of victimization ultimately serving the interests of those sectors of the humanitarian industry that accepts climate change as a *fait accompli*. If we are to stop “disappearance as a work in progress,” other visions will be essential.

1 * This text, originating as a contribution to the Contingent Movements’ seminar that accompanied the Maldives Pavilion at the Venice Biennial in 2013, derives from my forthcoming book, *Decolonizing Nature: Contemporary Art in the Age of Climate Change* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2015). Rachel Morris, “What Happens When Your Country Drowns? Meet the People of Tuvalu, The World’s First Climate Refugees,” *Mother Jones* (November/December, 2009), at www.motherjones.com.

2 See Chamber of Public Secrets, “Portable Nation – Disappearance as a Work in Progress,” in *Portable Nation: Disappearance as a Work in Progress: Approaches to Ecological Romanticism*, ed. Dorian Batyca et al. (Dogana, San Marino: Maretti, 2014), 11–14.

3 Argos Collective, *Climate Refugees* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2010).

4 See: <http://mitpress.mit.edu/authors/collectif-argos>.

5 The Argos Collective, “The Maldives – A Nation at the Water’s Edge,” at www.climaterefugees.eu.

6 On the case of Tuvalu, see Alexandra Berzon, “Tuvalu is Drowning,” *Salon* (Mar 31, 2006), www.salon.com/2006/03/31/tuvalu_2/.

7 Nobuo Mimura and Leonard Nurse et al., “Small Islands,” *Climate Change 2007: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability: Contribution of Working Group II to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, ed. M.L. Parry et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 694. For 2014 IPCC scenarios, see: Wong, P.P., I.J. Losada, J.-P. Gattuso, J. Hinkel, A. Khattabi, K.L. McInnes, Y. Saito, and A. Sallenger, “Coastal Systems and Low-lying Areas,” in *Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. Part A: Global and Sectoral Aspects. Contribution of Working Group II to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 369.

8 As reported by Tim Folger, “Rising Seas,” *National Geographic* (September 2013), 40–41; and <http://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar5/>. There is continual uncertainty about the future rate of Greenland and Antarctic glacial melt – if all their ice melted and entered the sea, then waters would rise by 216 feet (as in the Eocene period), although such an eventuality, scientists expect, would take thousands of years.

9 See the research of Paul Kench, a coastal geomorphologist at the University of Auckland, as reported in Nicholas Schmidle, “Wanted: A New Home for My Country,” *New York Times* (May 8, 2009), www.nytimes.com. At Columbia University’s Earth Institute, scientists argue that sea rise and surf will reshape islands, not drown them.

10 See Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 265.

11 See Steve Wright and Tessie Humble, “Corporate Military Management Approaches to Climate Change: From Refugee to Exclusion,” unpublished manuscript, 2013; and Ben Hayes, “The Surveillance-industrial Complex,” in Kirstie Ball et al., *Surveillance Studies Handbook* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2012).

12 Guy-Pierre Chomette, “Maldives, an Archipelago in Peril,” in *Climate Refugees*, 125.

13 See Argos Collective, “From Global Warming to Climate Refugees,” *Climate Refugees*, 14–16.

14 Folger, “Rising Seas,” 54.

15 Folger, “Rising Seas,” 54.

16 Folger, “Rising Seas,” 44, and 57. Also see Morris, “What Happens When Your Country Drowns?,” 2: “The United Nations Development Programme estimates that \$86 billion will need to be spent annually by 2015 to help developing countries adapt to the effects of global warming. The UN has launched a fund for this purpose, but has only collected \$100 million so far. What’s more, rich countries commonly use so-called adaptation funds as a bargaining tool to push for lower emissions from the industrializing countries of the developing world.”

17 Carol Farbotko, “Wishful Sinking: Disappearing Islands, Climate Refugees and Cosmopolitan Experimentation,” *Asia-Pacific Viewpoint* 51/1, (2010), 47–60. This narrative was also reproduced in Al Gore’s documentary *An Inconvenient Truth*, 2006, in which Gore observed – falsely – that “the citizens of these Pacific nations have all had to evacuate to New Zealand,” accompanied by photographs of a flooded Tuvalu. For a critical review of the Argos Collective’s book, see Yates McKee, “On *Climate Refugees*: Biopolitics, Aesthetics, and Critical Climate Change,” *Qui Parle*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (Spring/Summer 2011), 309–325.

18 Also see Khaled Ramadan’s video *Maldives To Be or Not*, 2013, shown on the same occasion, which presents an anti-spectacular and sensitive account of the concerns of the Maldivians, questioning the results of capitalist modernization and tourism on traditional island life. In addition, there were the politically and ecologically engaged videos of Ursula Biemann (*Deep Weather*) and Oliver Ressler (*For a Completely Different Climate*).

19 See Neil Smith, “There Is No Such Thing As A Natural Disaster,” in *Understanding Katrina: Perspectives from the Social Sciences* (11 June, 2006), at: <http://forums.ssrc.org/>. Smith argues that “every phase and aspect of a disaster – causes, vulnerability, preparedness, results and response, and reconstruction – the contours of disaster and the difference between who lives and who dies is to a greater or lesser extent a social calculus.”

20 On Sissako’s film, see my *Return to the Postcolony*. Also see Jon Shenk’s feature length documentary on President Nasheed and his climate struggle: *The Island President* (2011).

21 See <http://350.org/maldives>.

22 See “Voices from Small Island States: Maldives President Mohamed Nasheed, a Tuvaluan Delegate and a Youth Activist from the Solomon Islands,” *Democracy Now!* (December 17, 2009), www.democracynow.org.

23 See Subhabrata Bobby Banerjee, “A Climate for Change? Critical Reflections on the Durban United Nations Climate Change Conference,” *Organization Studies* 33/12 (2012), 1761–1786. Banerjee argues that “Despite more than fifteen years of high level efforts led by the United Nations to broker a binding agreement on emissions reduction, negotiations at every annual meeting have failed to establish a global agreement, mainly due to significant disagreements between industrialized and developing countries over differentiated responsibilities in reducing emissions,” (1761).

24 See Mary Louise Malig, trade policy analyst of the Global Forest Coalition, “Burning the Planet, One Climate COP at a Time,” (December 13, 2014), at: <http://peopleforestrights.wordpress.com>.

- 25 Mimura and Nurse, "Small Islands," and www.ipcc.ch/report/ar5/. Also see Mark Hertsgaard, *HOT: Living Through the Next Fifty Years on Earth* (New York: Mariner, 2012).
- 26 See <http://globaljusticeecology.org/>. Frances Williams, "Climate is Rights Issue, says Maldives Minister," *FT.com* (Mar 4, 2009).
- 27 To date, New Zealand has rejected requests to classify Tuvaluans as climate refugees, and instead calls them "labor migrants," agreeing to admit 75 per year under its Pacific Access Category. See Angela Oels, "Asylum Rights for Climate Refugees? From Agamben's Bare Life to the Autonomy of Migration," unpublished manuscript (2008); and Alexandra Berzon, "Tuvalu is Drowning," *Salon.com* (31 March, 2006).
- 28 See Molly Conisbee and Andrew Simms, *Environmental Refugees: the Case for Recognition* (London: New Economics Foundation, 2003), 39.
- 29 Essam El Hinnawi, *Environmental Refugees* (Nairobi: UNEP, 1985), 4. For more on climate refugees, see Jane McAdam, *Climate Change, Forced Migration, and International Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Laura Westra, *Environmental Justice and the Rights of Ecological Refugees* (London: Routledge, 2009); and Gregory White, *Climate Change and Migration: Security and Borders in a Warming World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).
- 30 See Oels, "Asylum Rights for Climate Refugees?," 10; Conisbee and Simms, *Environmental Refugees*, 38–39; Fabrice Renaud, et al. "Control, Adapt or Flee: How to Face Environmental Migration?," *InterSecTions* 5 (2007), 34; and Argos Collective, *Climate Refugees*, 15.
- 31 See Carol Farbotko and Heather Lazrus, "The First Refugees? Contesting Global Narratives of Climate Change in Tuvalu," *Global Environmental Change* 22 (2012), 382–390.
- 32 Oels, "Asylum Rights for Climate Refugees?," 11. Oels references Agamben's discussion of the state of exception and bare life in relation to migration politics.
- 33 Oels, "Asylum Rights for Climate Refugees?," 16.
- 34 Oels, "Asylum Rights for Climate Refugees?," 8 and 12: "The social practice of the politics of migration in Europe shows that such 'exceptions' are becoming more and more the rule." On contemporary art and migration, see T. J. Demos, *The Migrant Image: The Art and Politics of Documentary During Global Crisis* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2013).
- 35 Oels, "Asylum Rights for Climate Refugees?," 7–8; Wright and Tessie Humble, "Corporate Military Management Approaches to Climate Change"; and Christian Parenti, *Tropics of Chaos: Climate Change and the New Geography of Violence* (New York: Nation Books, 2012).
- 36 See Farbotko and Lazrus, "The First Refugees?," 383, who write of such a conflict involving Friends of the Earth campaigning to save Tuvaluan "climate refugees" at a 2008 Climate Camp in Newcastle, Australia, only to be told by islanders that they rather wished to receive training to become skilled migrants, should they have to leave their land.
- 37 Farbotko and Lazrus, "The First Refugees?," 388.
- 38 The "autonomy of migration" perspective supports "the call for legislation of *all* migrants, without distinction," and "the recognition of fundamental human rights like the right to reside, to work and to non-discrimination." Activists contend that only open borders will get policymaking to consider the perpetuation of global injustice. Oels, "Asylum Rights for Climate Refugees?," 18.
- 39 Adaptation discourse also allows governments to abdicate responsibility for climate change in the first place. See Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate* (New York: Allen Lane, 2014), 48.
- 40 See Eddie Yuen, "The Politics of Failure Have Failed: The Environmental Movement and Catastrophism," in *Catastrophism: The Apocalyptic Politics of Collapse and Rebirth*, ed. Sasha Lilley, David McNally, Eddie Yuen, and James Davis (Oakland, CA: Spectre, 2012).
- 41 Mimura and Nurse, "Small Islands." See also Farbotko, "Wishful Sinking."
- 42 See Jon Barnett and W. Neil Adger, "Climate Dangers and Atoll Countries," *Climatic Change* 61/3 (December 2003); cited in Mimura and Nurse, "Small Islands," 707, and 711: "The enhancement of resilience at various levels of society, through capacity building, efficient resource allocation and the mainstreaming of climate risk management into development policies at the national and local scale, could constitute a key element of the adaptation strategy."
- 43 Farbotko and Lazrus, "The First Refugees?," 384.
- 44 Mimura and Nurse, "Small Islands." The 1989 "Malé Declaration," initiated under President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, called on the UN and developed nations to adopt alternative energy sources to reduce pollution. See Argos Collective, *Climate Refugees*, 133.
- 45 Tuvalu has lobbied for effective policymaking on climate change, and the rejection of refugee status for its population, with Prime Minister Apisai Ielema arguing against the rhetoric of relocation: "to relocate is a shortsighted solution, an irresponsible solution. We're not dealing here with Tuvalu only. All of the low-lying island coastal areas are going to be affected. You tell me whether the world is ready to evacuate everybody." See Berzon, "Tuvalu is Drowning"; and Oels, "Asylum Rights for Climate Refugees?," 15.
- 46 Afelee Pita, "United Nations high level meeting on climate change: Tuvalu calls for climate change polluters to pay," Press release by the permanent Mission of Tuvalu to the United Nations (29 September, 2007).
- 47 See: www.tuvaluislands.com/news/archived/2002/2002-03-04.htm. And: www.tuvaluislands.com/news/archived/2002/2002-08-29.htm: "Until the United States takes significant action, it is vulnerable to this type of lawsuit," said Jennifer Morgan, formerly the World Wildlife Fund, on the sidelines of the World Summit on Sustainable Development." Oels, "Asylum Rights for Climate Refugees?," 16.
- 48 See Rachel Morris, "Tuvalu v. ExxonMobil? The Coming Tide of Transnational Climate Lawsuits," *Mother Jones* (April 20, 2010).
- 49 See Cormac Cullinan, *Wild Law: A Manifesto for Earth Justice* (White River Junction, Vt.: Chelsea Green, 2011); and Peter Burdon, ed., *Exploring Wild Law: The Philosophy of Earth Jurisprudence* (Kent Town, South Australia: Wakefield Press, 2011).
- 50 Argos Collective, *Climate Refugees*, 134.
- 51 www.collectifargos.com/webdocs-blogs-site/reportages-multimedia/maldives-un-archipel-a-fleur-d-eau#. UjcaN7wd6yw