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Complications of the Climate Change Narrative within the Lives of Climate Refugees: Slow Causality and Apocalyptic Themes

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ABSTRACT: With projections of rapidly increasing numbers of climate refugees in the next decades, the discourse surrounding climate refugees becomes ever more pertinent within the field of sustainable development and the public sphere. I offer an alternative analysis of the processes which surround "knowing" and "defining" climate refugees by employing an interpretive framework which disseminates the term "narrative" according to Jean François Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. In the discourse surrounding climate refugees, two main narratives interact with each other: the dominant climate change narrative and the individual narratives of climate refugees themselves. I contend that the dominant narrative of climate change complicates the narratives of climate change refugees through specific characteristics of climate change discourse, specifically, the temporal characteristics of slow causality and apocalyptic themes as evinced in two case studies, one in the small town of Shishmaref, Alaska and the other in the Maldives. Through researching and examining the thematic elements featured in narration, we gain a fuller comprehension of the personal narratives of climate refugees. The dominant climate change discourses permeate almost all environmental issues, and therefore, the field of sustainable development continuously confronts and interacts with such discourses. Furthermore, one aspect of sustainable development involves the ongoing circumstances of forced migration due to climate change. Illuminating the ways in which the dominant climate change narrative reduces the personal narratives of climate refugees compels us to look towards climate refugees themselves as sources for their own narratives instead of permitting the dominant narratives to overshadow their experiences.

Keywords: climate change discourse, refugees, narratives, media

The "Human Faces of Climate Change"

Due to the increased public awareness of climate change within the last decades, the general public has begun to acknowledge the direct effects of climate change on human populations, and many highly affected communities find themselves in situations of forced migration. Consequently, the intensification of climate change over recent years has led to the formation of a new identity and label for peoples forced to migrate due climate change's expansive consequences: "climate change refugees" or "climate refugees." However, because the identity, "climate refugee," has only surfaced within recent decades following the ever-increasing effects of climate change, a dearth of knowledge and awareness exists about climate refugees and their experiences. In response to this gap of recognition and understanding, I offer an alternative analysis of the processes which surround "knowing" and "defining" climate refugees. This analysis employs the interpretive framework of narratives detailed in Jean François Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* to position the narrative of climate change itself in dialogue with the personal perspectives of climate change refugees. Moreover, I contend that the dominant narrative of climate change complicates and influences the personal narratives of climate change refugees through specific characteristics of climate change discourse. Specifically, the temporal characteristics, "slow causality" and "apocalyptic themes," impress themselves upon the stories of climate refugees and thus impact the experiences of climate refugees as reflected in the case studies of Shishmaref, Alaska and the Maldives, respectively. By recognizing the dynamics of the thematic elements at play in narration, through the experiences of community members in Alaska and the Maldives, we will be able to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of climate refugees, which will enable us to more effectively address their needs and advocate for more sustainable policies and practices.

Narrative Definition as an Interpretative Framework

While media and spaces of public discourse employ the term, "climate refugee"—defined in the Oxford English

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Dictionary as "a person who has been forced to leave their home as a result of the effects of climate change on their environment" ("Climate Refugee: Definition of Climate Refugee by Lexico," n.d.)—under international law, such refugees effectively do not exist. The United Nations Refugee Agency, UNHCR, affirms that, "The term 'climate refugee' is often used in the media and other discussions. However, this phrase can cause confusion, as it does not exist in international law" (United Nations (U.N.), n.d.). This "confusion," as elucidated by the UNHCR, significantly affects those forced to migrate, as they are unable to receive the same assistance and resources as persons recognized as "refugees" under law. Since the term "refugee" is defined on the basis of the fear of persecution "for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion," climate refugees remain blatantly excluded from this definition (U.N., 1951, p. 3). These lacunae in international law and international discourse convey a trend in the study of climate refugees, a trend of "confusion" and exclusion that hinders understanding and communication of information about them. In addition, this lack of clarity and support raises concerns relating to other important fields involving climate refugees, such as those of sustainable development, immigration policy, and international governance. Specifically concerning sustainable development, the absence of legal definitions may restrict or even impede such development from occurring in the places that need it most, because without the identification of "refugee," climate refugees do not yield the same resources and pathways as legally recognized refugees. And, as the consequences of climate change on humans become more evident, climate change refugees are often deemed the "human face of climate change" (Piguet, 2013; Bettini, 2013). This designation places climate refugees at a unique, yet precarious position on the global stage, a position of both prominence and ambiguity. Therefore, understanding climate change refugees becomes more pertinent than ever in understanding the consequences of an ever-warming global climate on humanity.

To analyze the interaction between climate change discourse and the personal narratives of climate refugees, I first designate a definition of "narrative" that encompasses both the discussion surrounding climate change and the lives of climate refugees. In defining the term "narrative," I employ the interpretative framework put forth in Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition*. This "report on knowledge" aims to broadly outline an analysis and construction of knowledge throughout history. Within this interpretive framework, Lyotard claims, "Narration is the quintessential form of customary knowledge" (Lyotard, 1984, p. 19); therefore, "narration" can generally be construed as knowledge. However, Lyotard delves more deeply into this widely encompassing definition, specifying his definition of "meta narratives" or "grand narratives" which act as ways of perceiving and understanding various aspects of the world. Lyotard asserts that,

> "Narratives...determine criteria of competence and/or illustrate how they are to be applied. They thus define what has the right to be said and done in the culture in question, and since they are themselves a part of that culture, they are legitimated by the simple fact that they do what they do" (Lyotard, 1984, p. 23).

Thus, according to Lyotard, narrative serves as a widely accepted form of explaining and perceiving knowledge "in the culture in question." Additionally, narratives exist "as a part of that culture," and they possess a sense of legitimacy in the knowledge relayed through narratives. Two conditions mentioned within Lyotard's definition of narrative should be emphasized: the fact that narratives in themselves are deemed legitimate by a culture and the fact that a narrative serves as a means of conveying knowledge, albeit within appropriate designations. These two conditions assert the significance of narratives in our daily lives as well as the importance of contemplating the formation and characterization of grand narratives.

In elucidating the definition of "grand narratives," in particular, Lyotard presents examples that encompass the subjects of history and thought, such as "The Enlightenment" narrative and the Marxist narrative (Lyotard, 1984, p.xxiii). Yet, most pertinent to the topic of climate change and climate refugees is Lyotard's stance that science, such as the knowledge of climate change, is also a "grand narrative." Lyotard comments that when "scientists... appear on television or are interviewed in the newspapers after making a 'discovery'... They play by the rules of the narrative game; its influence remains considerable not only on the users of the media, but also on the scientist's sentiments" (Lyotard, 1984, p. 28). Lyotard's theory thus insinuates the slippery nature of a narrative; the scientists themselves believe in the narrative they tell, and then "feed" the narrative they have created to the media, which, in turn, disseminates the scientific grand narrative to the public.

The relevance of media in the depiction and propagation of the scientific narrative promoted by Lyotard is expounded upon in Brooke Gladstone's *The Influencing Machine* which examines the various biases evident in news media, specifically emphasizing "narrative bias." In news media, narrative biases employ a reusable "template" which involves the same "plots and characters" used "when

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reporting on the same subject" (Gladstone et al., 2011, p. 66). Gladstone's narrative bias echoes Lyotard's definition of grand narratives in that both narrative bias in media and grand narratives remain predicated in consensus. As narratives are repeated about the same topic—for instance, the topic of climate change—a coherence, or "consensus," develops in the communication of knowledge on that subject comparable to the consistent conveyance of information within Lyotard's grand narratives. Moreover, Gladstone highlights the disadvantages in narrative bias, especially in relation to disseminating science in media. Although narratives, like stories, possess "beginnings, middles, and ends," science, a subject that is continuous and dynamic, does not inherently follow this story-like structure. Since science, and the study of climate change specifically, is frequently evolving, the narrative bias in media confounds scientific knowledge by instituting and forcing an "ending," when science narratives, according to Gladstone, are "all middle" (Gladstone et al., 2011, p. 65). Both Lyotard's and Gladstone's analyses of narrative and narrative bias imply that scientific topics are primarily disseminated through narrative. Therefore, they affirm the necessity of understanding the form of narrative in relation to science—and in this case, the necessity of understanding the dominant narrative of climate change—in our attempt to fathom the transformations occurring in our world due to climate change, including that of forced migration.

The Dominant Climate Change Narrative

From Lyotard's discussion of grand narratives, I understand the narrative of climate change to encompass how we, as an international community, widely perceive and accept the scientific knowledge surrounding climate change, involving the way in which the knowledge of science is understood and propagated by a culture. Within the global context, the IPCC report serves as the scientific basis for the dominant climate change narrative. The IPCC, or Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, is the United Nations body tasked with assessing climate change; this body regularly releases a comprehensive report on climate change, including its causes, its effects, and possible responses based on the newest scientific data (International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), n.d.). Widely considered the leading authority on climate change science, "the IPCC epitomizes the scientific discourse with its synthesis of the best available climate science... IPCC reports are extremely widely cited, and to be part of IPCC narratives substantially amplifies the attention that a topic receives within... in the media, and in policy circuits" (Bettini, 2013).

With the IPCC report acting as the scientific foundation of the dominant climate change narrative, several other facets of the climate change narrative should be noted. Although a plurality of climate change narratives exists, the one I focus on and reference in my research is the prevailing, most widely disseminated narrative. This dominant narrative is characterized by a future-focused, Western perspective and has been espoused by "the international climate change discourse coalition over the past 30 years" (Arnall & Kothari, 2015). This dominant climate change narrative then "becomes locally appropriated" which involves "ordinary" people assimilating the dominant narrative into their established belief-systems, knowledge, and perceptions (Arnall & Kothari, 2015). This appropriation occurs more frequently in communities more obviously experiencing the impacts of climate change, and therefore, climate refugees regularly come into contact with the dominant climate change narrative. Despite this appropriation, refugees also establish their own perceptions on the effects of climate change that diverge from aspects of the dominant climate change narrative.

The Personal Narratives of Climate Refugees

As more populations confront the negative impacts of climate change, they also encounter the dominant climate change narrative in their daily lives. But, because "these outcomes [of climate change]" cause significant uncertainty "for different populations" living in disparate locations around the Earth, the application and presence of a single dominant climate change narrative convolutes the personal storylines of climate refugees (Farbotko & Lazrus, 2012). Two scholars researching climate refugees in the island nation of Tuvalu, Carol Farbotko and Heather Lazrus, assert that, "To understand its [climate change's] effects fully, analysts must integrate perspectives, values, and knowledges of people who live in climate change affected places along with the biophysical changes occurring" (Farbotko & Lazrus, 2012). Yet to observe the individual and cultural aspects of climate refugees' personal stories, we must also recognize the ways in which the dominant climate change narrative complicates and pervades climate refugees' lives. The leading climate change discourse often uniformly implements "abstractions of time, space and belonging," which "are not universally shared," onto the experiences of climate refugees, eliciting sweeping over-generalizations (Farbotko & Lazrus, 2012). By comprehending and being cognizant of the most pervasive characteristics of the dominant climate change narrative, we gain a more holistic perspective of the climate refugees' personal narratives, meaning their

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accounts of their lived experiences. For instance, the field of sustainable development is concerned with those who are most vulnerable and most impacted by the effects of climate change; through understanding the unique perspective of climate refugees, sustainable development initiatives could develop goals and strategies that more closely mirror the actual needs and desires of climate refugees. Through this awareness and application, we can actively seek to read dominant narratives as espoused in media circles and the public sphere against the grain. I explicitly seek to read the two case studies of Shishmaref, Alaska, and the Maldives "against the grain" to demonstrate how the dominant climate change discourse profoundly influences the personal narratives of climate refugees and how climate change refugees are discussed within the international community.

Slow Causality

In expressing the unique characteristic of slow causality within the climate change narrative, literature scholars Tina Choi and Barbara Leckie affirm the requirement and need for a climate change narrative in their paper "Slow Causality: The Function of Narrative in an Age of Climate Change." By declaring that "Thinking about climate change as a set of conditions, processes, and events demands an engagement with narrative" (Choi & Leckie, 2018), they establish that the engagement of narrative serves a necessary purpose in conveying the science of climate change to the general public. This imperative employment of narrative endows "place, objects, entities, and events" with a sense of sequence or chronology as an attempt to comprehend and distinguish "the relationships between them" (Taylor, 2016, p. 16). We then utilize narrative in our endeavors to "forecast the consequences of our actions" on our environment and the future of the planet (Taylor, 2016, p. 16). Choi and Leckie engage in dialogue with Lyotard's definition of narration by expounding on various instruments that lead narratives to be a source of "understanding" or "perceiving" a specific subject; they describe causality as the instrument of narration that supports a sense of understanding. The establishment of narrative "performs and realizes causal relations" (Choi & Leckie, 2018), and in these causal relations, we attain a greater ability and sense of "perceiving the subject," which in this case is climate change.

The temporal characteristic of slow causality relates to the challenge of understanding the causal relationships of climate change through narrative as a result of extensive and complicated time spans. As Choi and Leckie elucidate in their paper, "climate change...considers a chronology that extends beyond 'our actions' and encompasses the earth and 'deep time'" (Choi & Leckie, 2018). However, this extended "chronology," which includes climate change before and after the age of humans, remains difficult to communicate broadly. As humans, we face limitations in our ability to imagine the state of the Earth before our inception as a species and after our eventual extinction. To examine the long-term impacts of climate change—for example, the rising amount of carbon dioxide in the Earth's history—climate scientists must refer to a time before humans. In elucidating the effects of climate change, climate scientists often reference the conditions of the Earth using geologic time, and in geologic time, humans have only existed for a minute portion of the Earth's existence. For scientists, "Slow causality functions...as it might for us, too, in an age of climate change—as a narrative practice, a strategic methodology for reconciling human to geological temporalities and allowing incomplete evidence to support a more complete understanding" (Choi & Leckie, 2018). Furthermore, as Choi and Leckie highlight, the projection of climate change's impacts includes describing effects that will continue beyond the lifespans of anyone alive today; the processes exacerbated by climate change such as higher sea levels, increased temperatures, erosion, and decreased biodiversity have an ongoing temporality. Often, within colloquial rhetoric surrounding climate change, the trope that we must consider "the generations that come after us," remains insufficient in clarifying the full length of the impacts of climate change on the planet. In reality, the consequences of climate change will be felt long after humans cease to exist on Earth (Choi & Leckie, 2018).

Shishmaref, Alaska: A Case Study of Slow Causality

To elucidate how the characteristic of slow causality impresses upon the lives of climate change refugees, I explored the story of the Kigiqtaamiut Inupiaq of Shishmaref, Alaska, outlined in the book *Climate Refugees*. The Kigiqtaamiut Inupiaq are an indigenous people who resided on the island of Shishmaref long before the area was considered "Alaska" (Collectif Argos et al., 2010). Their livelihood depends on the subsistence hunting of seals and fish, and especially during the winter months, the community relies on the presence of pack ice to allow for mobility during hunting. Like many other Arctic communities, the Kigiqtaamiut Inupiaq endure the most severe effects of climate change in the form of decreased ice coverage and warming temperatures, both of which directly impact their food sources and their ability to continue to live on the island of Shishmaref, which will soon be uninhabitable. The community continues to encounter the dominant narrative of climate change as

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outside actors, such as the U.S. federal government, the Alaskan state government, the media, and scientists, turn their gaze towards this small, indigenous community being forced to move from their island as a result of climate change.

The personal narratives of the Inupiaq community of Shishmaref, Alaska interact with the temporal characteristic of slow causality present in the dominant climate change narrative. As rising sea levels and decreasing ice coverage over the past few decades have caused extreme erosion and depleted food resources, the Kigiqtaamiut Inupiaq have encountered slow causality as related to the discussion of geologic time. The interplay between the characteristic of slow causality within the dominant climate change narrative and the climate refugee experience is elucidated here:

> "As the island shrinks at an ever-increasing pace, the 600 inhabitants of Shishmaref have no other solution than to retreat. In 2001, most of them voted to relocate the village by 2015, their last chance before Sarichef becomes uninhabitable, according to geologists, meteorologists and other experts who have flocked to the aid of these climate refugees living on borrowed time" (Collectif Argos et al., 2010, p. 22).

The interaction between the dominant climate change narrative and the experiences of those living in Shishmaref involves slow causality as "scientists, meteorologists, and other experts" impart geologic time spans upon the refugees' encounters of the natural processes around them such as rising sea levels, erosion, and decreased ice coverage. For scientists, this "shrink[ing]" of the island of Shishmaref contributes to concepts of geologic time as well as to the notions of the pre-human state of the Arctic; they often cite the Arctic region in illustrations of humanity's impact on the changing environment, for example, by describing the state of glaciers in Arctic regions before and after the industrial age. However, these vast temporal spans articulated in the dominant climate narrative diverge from the temporal spans observed by the Inupiaq themselves.

Within their own observations, the members of the Shishmaref community experience the climatic processes on much smaller scales of time. For instance, a Kigiqtaamiut Inupiaq named Joe Braach noted that "Erosion is spreading...when he moved to the island in 1987, several dozen metres of shoreline separated him from the sea when he looked out his window, and he could see a semaphore station, the school's basketball court and sand dunes; all of these are now gone" (Collectif Argos et al., 2010, p. 20). This observation of erosion speaks to the processes that exhibit slow causality reiterated in the dominant climate change narrative. Yet, Mr. Braach only witnessed them for a few decades. Furthermore, he comprehends the complicated processes of erosion in relation to "a semaphore station, the school's basketball court" both of which represent modern times. (Collectif Argos et al., 2010, p. 20). Mr. Braach's illustration evinces discrepancies between the dominant climate change narrative and the actual lived experiences of the climate refugees themselves; the dominant discourses employ complex temporal spans to describe the effects of climate change, while climate refugees use observations of physical changes in their surroundings during their "small" lifespans to recognize alterations in environmental conditions.

Not only does slow causality appear in considerations of the environmental processes occurring in Shishmaref, but it also emerges in how the Kigiqtaamiut Inupiaq consider their future. Another member of the community, Mina Weyiouanna, asked, "'What's going to become of us?... I'm having trouble imagining a future for myself." (Collectif Argos et al., 2010, p. 28). This inability to see an "end" engages with the characteristic of slow causality since the processes forcing them to migrate have existed for decades, if not centuries, and will continue to progress. When discussing the fate of the Shishmaref Inupiaq, scientists, state officials, NGO's, and even the people of Shishmaref themselves believe that "The Shishmaref Inupiaq face an uncertain future." (Collectif Argos et al., 2010, p. 36). The community of Shishmaref does not know exactly how long they have before they are effectively forced to leave. And, as the government seeks relocation in Alaska, the consequences of climate change will not cease after initial relocation. To preserve their culture, the Shishmaref Inupiaq desire to either stay as close to Shishmaref as possible or else be relocated to a similar place. This decision stems from a prioritization of preserving culture as Clifford Weyiouanna, a village elder, explained, "'We have a very old tradition of community life...people work together for the needs of the community...that may be what gives our community the strength and vitality to hand down our culture from generation to generation" (Collectif Argos et al., 2010, p. 24). Consequently, the effects of climate change on the community will follow them as they seek to relocate to other places in the Arctic.

Apocalyptic Themes

The notion of an "uncertain feature," as faced by the Kigiqtaamiut Inupiaq, interacts with the other temporal characteristic of the climate change narrative I will address: apocalyptic themes. Literature scholar Frank Kermode defines "apocalypse" as a consensus between an "imaginatively recorded past and imaginatively

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predicted future, achieved on behalf of us, who remain 'in the middest'" (Kermode, 1968, p. 8), for whom this "imaginatively predicted future" mirrors our need to have a comprehensible End. In this case, the "End" refers to the end of humanity; however, in terms of the dominant climate change narrative, "the End" refers to the end of climate refugees' abilities to inhabit a location before they are forced to move. Kermode asserts that, through the construction of the "apocalypse," humans aim to "project ourselves...past the End." In other words, by "predicting an End," we aim to fathom our own place in the middle of the narrative (Kermode 1967, p. 8). As we experience events around us, we cannot possibly know when the exact "End" will occur, but we can imagine one by employing an "apocalyptic" narrative (Kermode 1967, p. 8). However, this metaphorical act of predicting the "apocalypse" compels us to shape our present knowledge to "conform" to this prediction. In essence, as our predicted future becomes the present, we expect the present to resemble this apocalyptic prophecy (Kermode 1967, p. 8).

The dominant discourse on climate change imagines the future as an extreme time of crisis for people and all other living beings on this planet. This idea of the "apocalypse," of the "End," is found within climate change discourse and consequently impresses itself onto the climate change refugee narrative. In the article, "Climate Barbarians at the Gate? A Critique of Apocalyptic Narratives on 'Climate Refugees," the author questions how the personal narratives of climate refugees are structured and imbued with intense emotions of foreseen calamities and urgency connected with the notion of time. The scientific evidence is commonly bolstered by "such jaw-dropping numbers" as "hundreds of millions of climate refugees," and infinite lists of consequences; but "without such staggering numbers the apocalyptic tones would deflate" (Bettini, 2013). Because media, scientists, and policymakers apply apocalyptic themes in the discourse of climate change, the climate change narrative becomes imbued with "alarmist" tones that may obscure and "distort" the actual scientific evidence, despite the fact that science should ideally be wholly objective (Bettini, 2013). Yet, in the dominant climate change narrative, science is used to support proclamations of "the End" of "life as we know it". With the imposition of "doom and gloom" emotions tied to the climate change narrative, Bettini contends that using this foreboding tone may be "counterproductive...for communicating the urgency of climate change migration" (Bettini, 2013). Indeed, such doomsaying does not encourage improvement, as it explicitly contradicts any hope for the future, since apocalyptic themes are predicated in the very notion that no future exists.

Referring to the interpretative framework in the beginning of the analysis, the narrative of climate change acts as a way for the majority to perceive the science and consequences of climate change. The apocalyptic theme found within the dominant climate change narrative attaches an emotional condition to this perception. The grand narrative of climate change, through the emphasis on the "End," perpetuates a sense of fear and inevitability. The implementation of apocalyptic themes begs the question: if the dominant environmental discourse proclaims that the "End" is evident, how should climate refugees act to confront this? This "sense of emergency" remains embedded within the experiences of climate refugees as they are broadly described as having an "End" to their lives as they know it. Akin to the temporal characteristic of slow causality, the apocalyptic themes espoused by the dominant climate change narrative resurface in many communities facing forced migration due to environmental alterations. Again, the international community imprints a sentiment of doom that some communities, like those in the Maldives, do not relate to their changing environment, thus recalling the importance of unearthing the real perceptions of climate refugees in their encounters with climate change's effects.

The Maldives: A Case Study of Apocalyptic Themes

As with the case study of Shishmaref, Alaska, the residents of the Maldives encounter a confluence of the effects of climate change, including coral bleaching due to ocean acidification, rising sea levels, and warmer temperatures (Arnall & Kothari, 2015). With the rising sea levels, scientists predict that the Maldives will soon be underwater, prompting emergency measures from the Maldivian government including the construction of barrier walls and considerations of population consolidation, which would involve moving the entire population of the Maldives from the two hundred inhabited islands to between 10 and fifteen islands" (Arnall & Kothari, 2015; Vidal, 2017). In recent years, the international community has speculated about the bleak future of the Maldives, considering whether the entire population will be forced to relocate (Arnall & Kothari, 2015). Because of such predictions, the Maldivian people are widely considered to be "climate refugees." Indeed, this crisis may have already begun: small parts of the archipelago are now submerged, and the process continues with no end in sight (Arnall & Kothari, 2015). While this prognostication of mass migration has, fortunately, not yet come to fruition, the people of the Maldives nevertheless experience "smaller,"

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less publicized effects of climate change such as transformations of beaches and differences in rainfall patterns (Arnall & Kothari, 2015). Interestingly, in their daily interactions with the consequences of climate change, the native Maldivians do not attribute these changes with the "apocalyptic" end of their small island nation, as the dominant climate change narrative would imply.

In the research paper, "Challenging Climate Change and Migration Discourse: Different Understandings of Timescale and Temporality in the Maldives," Alex Arnall and Uma Kothari discuss the existence of "a clear construction of a crisis narrative" within the Maldives. Through a series of interviews with local people, government officials, and NGOs, the authors seek to record the interactions between the dominant climate change narrative and the personal narratives of the Maldivian people. As previously explained, the "apocalyptic narrative" instigates a sense of emergency within the discourse surrounding climate change and climate refugees. The Maldives serve as the epitome of this climate change-caused apocalypse; the "End" of the islands as we know them, may very well be near, at least according to the dominant climate change narrative engendered by the international community. Examples of the construction of the figurative "apocalypse" come from the tourist sector, which advertises "'come to the Maldives before they sink,'" as well as from the Maldivian government, which, to gain attention and publicity, hosted a "historic underwater cabinet meeting" (Arnall & Kothari, 2015). These examples clearly reveal how the actions of the media and the Maldivian government impress a sense of urgency upon the inhabitants of the Maldives that conforms to the apocalyptic nature of the dominant climate narrative.

This apocalyptic narrative affects the individual perceptions of climate change refugees by its continued presence in the media and public discourse. However, while this tone increasingly pervades the dominant climate change narrative, native Maldivians resist such a catastrophic stance. The pervasiveness of the dominant climate change narrative made climate change become "a bit of a taboo subject," in some local communities (Collectif Argos et al. 2010, p. 126). A Maldivian government official reiterates this opposition,

> "If you ask local people about fuel or food subsidy, they would be interested to talk about it, as it affects their daily life, but climate change-induced sea level rise is not a concern as it is occurring so far ahead. They do not know and don't understand what TV or newspapers have to say about this" (Arnall & Kothari, 2015).

The government official's statement illumines the juxtaposition between the apocalyptic-themed dominant climate change narrative and the experiences of the local people. By insisting that "Climate-change-induced sea level rise is not a concern" and "They do not know and don't understand what TV or newspapers have to say about this," the official presents key facets of the dominant climate change narrative, yet, locals mainly care about day-to-day matters such as "fuel or food subsidy." This clearly exhibits a discrepancy between the locals' concern for food and fuel and the government's worries about sea level rise. If the government were to appeal to the locals utilizing aspects of their own views, such as the importance of food and fuel in their daily lives, instead of employing the fear and anxieties embedded in the dominant climate change narrative, then both the locals and the government officials would benefit. This improved communication between the government and locals could have boundless positive implications for the future, especially as the consequences of climate change continue to impact their nation.

Furthermore, within the government official's statement, the official appears to insinuate a focus on the "End" for those living in the Maldives, enhancing the distinctive, urgent, "doom and gloom" qualities attributed to apocalyptic narratives. Nevertheless, individual climate refugees in the Maldives remain hopeful as they confront the more prominent apocalyptic themed discourse surrounding climate refugees. One local affirms, "We have always managed...We will always survive by building sea walls, floating islands, underwater homes, whatever we need to do'" (Arnall & Kothari, 2015). Thus, the opinions of local residents blatantly diverge from an "end of the world" mindset to one of survival. This outlook of adaptation towards climate change signals an inherent difference between the apocalyptic themes featured in both the dominant climate change narrative and the personal experiences of climate refugees in international discourse. Instead of feeling a sense of doom, many Maldivian communities feel hopeful. Here the locals eschew the impending "End" imposed by the apocalyptic narratives surrounding them; this act of resiliency should serve as an indicator to many environmental actors and the public, relaying that the people most affected by climate change still believe that we have an opportunity to respond and adapt. For if not, how can international organizations and governments set "sustainable development goals" and "carbon emission reduction goals" without believing in a future? Instead of an "End," environmental actors should take a note from local Maldivians and work to engender a sense of possibility, so that we can believe in our efforts to create a more just and sustainable world.

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Conclusion

Understanding how the predominant climate change narrative impresses upon and complicates the perspectives of climate refugees and the lives of climate refugees themselves remains foundational to an array of fields, particularly the practice of sustainable development. By distinguishing the climate change narrative relative to the true accounts of climate change refugees, we seek to prevent the overshadowing of climate refugee experiences by the dominant climate change narrative. Moreover, we must acknowledge the dynamic relationship in the varying interactions between diverse narratives surrounding climate refugees. By illuminating the outside narratives which complicate the narrative of climate refugees, we gain a wider perspective of the discourses extant in their lives. We are also better able to pursue a "true," multifaceted climate refugee narrative and to look to the climate refugees themselves for access to their own personal narratives. Furthermore, employing Lyotard's definition of a "grand narrative" as a widely held perception of specific knowledge which is deemed legitimate within a certain context or culture, examining the narrative of climate change refugees becomes inseparable from understanding the climate refugees themselves. In other words, to fully understand and recognize climate refugees, we must first understand the narratives that surround, encompass, and shape their collective identity.

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