The political theologies of climate change-induced migration

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Abstract: This paper aims to understand the political theologies at stake in the discourses and practices of climate change-induced migration. The argument proceeds from the idea that climate change-induced migration is an example of the absolute. It then traces how the absolute finds expression in two versions of the discourse on climate change and migration: the sovereigntist and liberal variations. The principle argument is that when we reduce the debate on climate change and migration to a set of competing secular claims we risk overlooking the theological dimensions of the debate. Consequently, we risk posing the wrong the questions about what is at stake in the phenomenon. The paper argues in favour of using the phenomenon of climate change-induced migration as an occasion to ask: what does it mean to be human in the context of climate change?

Keywords: climate change, migration, political theology, sovereignty, liberalism

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On shrinking islands, families are already being forced to flee their homes as climate refugees.
          US President Barak Obama, speech to the UN General Assembly, 2009

…a sacred emanation is a crucial constitutive dimension of sovereignty, and awe is a crucial effect.
          Wendy Brown *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty* (2010, p. 71)

With this in mind, our task is not to show allegiance to the messianic nature of the liberal promise […it is] to understand how this faith-based narrative conditions the present so that serious questions can be raised about the profoundly onto-theological dimensions to the liberal will to rule planetary life.
          Brad Evans, *Liberal Terror* (2013, p. 11)

Introduction

Migration is a longstanding theme in climate change and environmental discourse. It conjures

apocalyptic images of the 'hordes at the gates', political violence and 'climate wars'. But it also

impels a form of liberal humanism which measures our humanity by the way in which we treat

those who leave their homes because of climate change - the internally displaced, the

dispossessed and the stateless. In the former, the migrant is endowed with an extraordinary

capacity to catalyse violence and bring about death, whereas in the latter, the migrant is

endowed with adaptive capacity, dignity and agency. These caricatures are often made to

represent two opposing sides of the debate about climate change-induced human migration (hereafter migration). This is especially the case in liberal argumentation which regularly warns against the embrace of alarmist, apocalyptic rhetoric about climate migrants (Dun and Gemenne 2008). Such rhetoric is said to fuel arguments in support of a militarised response to the human consequences of climate change (Hartmann 2010, White 2011). The central claim of such argumentation is that adopting a less paranoid, more humane attitude towards climate change-induced migration would be less divisive and violent than would a militarised approach and, thus, more likely to bring about the realisation of universal humanity. When framed as such, as a debate between securitisation and militarism on the one hand, and liberalism on the other, it would appear that the contemporary debate about climate change-induced migration is unfolding largely as a *political* debate.

This paper presents an alternative reading of climate change-induced migration. It argues that when we reduce the debate about climate change-induced migration to a set of competing secular claims, we risk overlooking how the debate is configured by various theological imaginations. Specifically, we risk overlooking how the figure of the climate change migrant comes to represent the otherworldliness or absolute that is so central to political theology. Consequently, we risk misdiagnosing climate change-induced migration solely as a political phenomenon, rather than one whose ontology is theological in origin. Conceptualising the phenomenon as onto-theological, by which I mean a phenomenon whose ontology derives from prior assumptions about the absolute, the paper refuses to take sides in the political debate on climate change-induced migration. Instead, it argues that recognising the theological imaginaries at stake in the debate on climate change-induced migration opens up a host of questions that allow us to think our world differently, questions about what it might to be human in the context of climate change and about forging new ways of living and new solidarities in the context of climatic uncertainty.

The paper develops this interpretation by tracing the theological imaginations implicit in what I am labelling the sovereigntist and liberal variations on climate change-induced migration discourse. These terms will be explained in more detail later. But broadly, the sovereigntist variation expresses concern for the way that climate change-induced migration poses a threat to sovereignty. The sovereigntist position then seeks to allay this concern by taking up a defensive or protective posture that would shore up the sovereignty which the climate migrant threatens to overwhelm. The liberal variation, in contrast, accepts the inevitability of migration and goes about governing migration in the universal interest of planetary well-being. The paper traces the respective theological imaginations apparent in each of these two variations. Each makes markedly different assumptions about space and the contingent, assumptions that are onto-theological in origin, and, perhaps not surprisingly, each authorises a different politics. The first task of the paper is to explore the respective onto-theological origins of the sovereigntist and liberal variations in order to better appreciate the theological dimensions of the political debate about climate change-induced migration. So, for example, in the case of the sovereigntist variation, the climate change migrant comes to represent sovereignty's excess the primary effect of which is to induce a kind "theological awe" (Brown, 2010 p.26) and to inaugurate a politics that reinvigorates sovereign authority against its waning potency in the face of climate change and other transnational forces. Or take the liberal formulation in which the climate change migrant comes to represent an emergent potential on the plane of global experience. Here, the migrant expresses the opening out of the world, an ever-unfolding world, a world of pure potential, and it inaugurates a politics aimed at pre-emptively governing this emergent unfolding world in the interest of ensuring the continuity of life on a planetary scale (Evans 2013).

Climate change, migration and 'the absolute'

The sovereigntist and liberal humanist variations on climate change-induced migration discourse also make very different geographical assumptions about the figure of the climate

change migrant. In the former, the migrant is alien, outside, transcendent, whereas in the latter the migrant is immanent, internal to an ever-unfolding world. Their commonality, however, lies in the way each imbues the migrant with connotations of the absolute. In this paper, the absolute is the name I give to a kind of recalcitrant force that exceeds human understanding. My use here of the term 'absolute' comes from Jane Bennett's (2010) explanation of "thing power." For Bennett "thing power" names a recalcitrant force specific to objects, for example, the "uncanny presence" or "not-quite-human force" (p.2) of wilderness. This is a persistent force inherent in any object, one that persists even when an object is objectified as such. Try as we might to describe wilderness in poetics or science, there remains an awesomeness to wilderness that evades capture; it affects us and it is exactly wilderness' capacity to affect that language and experience can never quite capture. Climate change exhibits a similar sort of affective force. Try as we might to identify 'climate change impacts', there remains an unfathomable dimension to climate change, which oftentimes gets labelled 'uncertainty'. Bennett calls this unnameable dimension of objects "an *out-side*" (p.3), and she likens it to Hent de Vries' notion of the absolute. From de Vries, she suggests that the absolute is an "'intangible and imponderable' recalcitrance" (p.3). Thus, the *out-side* that Bennett seeks to describe as absolute is not an un-demarcated horizon or physical space, but a virtual force. Bennett further describes de Vries' notion of the absolute as that which "no speaker could possibly see, that is, a some-thing that is not an object of knowledge, that is detached or radically free from representation, and thus no-thing at all. Nothing but the force or effectivity of the detachment." (p.3). In this sense, the absolute is an affective force that is detached from human knowledge. It is, as Bennett describes it, an "epistemological limit", one that "refuses to dissolve completely into the milieu of human knowledge" (Bennett 2010). The absolute can be sensed but not known.

My argument is premised on the idea that the climate change-induced migrant bears strong resemblance to Bennett's notion of the absolute. Indeed, one of the defining attributes of the climate migrant is its epistemological recalcitrance; its refusal to be fully apprehended by

any positivist knowledge system. This observation features widely across much of the discourse on climate change and migration. We know, for example, that the climate migrant exceeds quantitative and predictive reasoning (Jakobeit and Methmann 2012). Try as we might, we cannot put a numeric value on the volume of people who will migrate due to climate change. We also know that the climate migrant evades easy definition. As Gregory White (2011) puts it, 'climate-induced migration' is an essentially contested concept. Calum Nicholson (2014) presses this point most forcefully when he writes "that the field [climate migration] is most notable for the cacophony of terms and labels, and the essential nebulousness of both its subject and purpose. It is a field that has political currency despite the absence of coherence, and in which a lot is being written without anything definitive being said." Even the authors of the recently published *UK Foresight Report on Migration and Global Environmental Change* (2011) agree: "it is almost impossible to distinguish a group of 'environmental migrants', either now or in the future" (p.11). Moreover, any attempt to identify a migrant as a climate change migrant is met with the counterfactual observation that all migration is multi-causal, irreducible to any singular 'push' or 'pull' factor (Black 2001, McAdam 2012). Taken together, these attributes of the climate change-induced migrant suggest that it is not an actually existing, concrete object of knowledge. Instead, these attributes suggest that the climate migrant occupies a virtual space at the very limits of our world. In this sense, the climate migrant is not the excess of intelligibility (Baldwin 2013) or entirely free from representation. In fact, it is made intelligible through all manner of future-conditional knowledge forms: science fiction, modelling and scenarios to name only a few (Baldwin 2014). Rather, I would suggest that it is more appropriate that we conceive of climate-induced migration as a virtual phenomenon, one whose reality may not be concrete as such, but one which nevertheless asserts a kind of affective force on the world. It is a kind of virtual reality. And what is the quality of its virtual force? The promise of detachment. As Bennett writes, "the absolute is that which is loosened off and on the loose" and thus a thing endowed with the capacity to loosen or absolve. Indeed, the climate migrant is frequently marked with a

similar capacity. In both its sovereigntist and liberal expressions, the climate migrant's

virtualness threatens to loosen established social bonds and cast entire societies into chaotic

disorder.

Acknowledging the absolute quality of the climate change migrant is a first step in

exposing the theological dimensions of the debate on climate change and migration. The

remainder of the paper traces how this notion of the absolute finds specific expression in the

sovereigntist and liberal variations of climate change-induced migration discourse, and it is

divided into three parts. The first part examines the sovereigntist variation of the discourse. The

second part examines the onto-theological dimensions of liberal variations on climate change

induced migration, drawing primarily on the political theologies at stake in liberal security

reasoning. This section draws from Brad Evans' recent book *Liberal Terror* (2013). The final

section of the paper then asks what is to be gained by recognising the theological underpinnings

of the debate on climate change–induced migration. Here, I want to move beyond the political

debate and to think more creatively about the kind of worlds that this virtual phenomenon might

enable. Here, I caution against using the migrant to reinforce existing identifications, such as

environmental citizenship or nationhood. Instead, I suggest that the figure be used to open up a

politics of human becoming, one that remains open to new expressions of de/reterritorialisation.

The sovereigntist variation

One of the most prevalent narratives of climate change-induced migration casts the climate

migrant as a threat to national or international security. This narrative's basic premise is that the

climate migrant has the capacity to catalyse either political or religious violence, whether

domestic or transboundary. My contention is that central to this violence narrative is the climate

migrant's potential to overwhelm state sovereign authority. Different versions of this narrative

make different assumptions about the form that sovereign authority takes, but all presuppose

the migrant as the potential excess of sovereign authority, a body whose very presence poses

the possibility for disorder. For example, fantastical accounts which imagine mass transboundary migrations occurring as a result of climate change regularly equate sovereign authority with the state's capacity to secure its territorial border. The well-cited report on the national security implications of climate change commissioned by the Pentagon and published in 2003 invokes precisely this notion of sovereign authority, claiming that one likely response by the US to the migration effects of climate change will be the fortification of it borders. The implication is that in the absence of border fortification, climate migrants will freely pass over the border thereby overwhelming US sovereignty. In other variations of the sovereigntist narrative, sovereign authority is equated with the state's capacity to constitute extraterritorial order. A good example of this is found in a recent report published by the Center for American Progress (CAP) concerning what it calls the 'climate change, migration, and security nexus' in the region encompassing Nigeria, Niger, Algeria and Morocco, a region it describes as the 'arc of tension.' (Werz and Conley 2012) The report claims that climate change will amplify existing migration throughout the 'arc of tension', which in turn will potentially destabilise an otherwise already unstable region of Africa. Here, again, the climate migrant, a figure synonymous with insecurity and disorder, is said to pose a challenge to US state sovereignty by potentially overwhelming the state's capacity to secure North Africa in the national interest. Much can be said about the specifics of each of these two examples. The point I wish to emphasise is that each imbues the climate migrant with the capacity to overwhelm the sovereign. In both the climate migrant is made to signify sovereignty's excess, that which stands outside and beyond the sovereign.

But in what ways is the sovereigntist narrative of the climate migrant theological? Here we should recall that the climate migrant is imbued with connotations of the absolute. The climate migrant designates a body that is "loosened off and on the loose" (the migrant is by definition a dis-*located* body), and it is inscribed with the capacity to loosen i.e., the climate migrant threatens the dissolution of social order. Its absolute status is further evident in its epistemological uncertainty. It inspires awe for its wayward and destructive capacity, and

because it is an empirically unverifiable phenomenon. It is awesome because it is unfathomable, because it exceeds comprehension. As Madleen Helmer, then Head of the Red Cross/Crescent Climate Centre, put it in the 2010 cinematic production *Climate Refugees* (Nash 2010), "It's so big, it's coming our way. It's almost beyond our comprehension."

If it seems far-fetched that the climate migrant carries theological significance, then consider how the sovereigntist narrative resembles the narrative form of divine prophecy. The sovereigntist narrative embodies a prophetic quality by which I mean it expresses the vision of a certain kind of subject with the capacity to foretell the future, the prophet. Julian Reid (this volume) describes the prophet as "always positioned between the present and the future, functioning to reveal what is hidden in the future." The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines it as "a divinely inspired interpreter, revealer, or teacher of the will or thought of God or of a god." Putting the two together, the prophet is an intermediary figure who reveals the future and in so doing reveals the will of God. The prophetic quality of the climate migrant is partly evident in the fact that the discourse on climate change-induced migration is written exclusively in the future tense. The CAP report mentioned earlier is illustrative of this wider grammatical phenomenon. Here are just a few examples taken from that report: "the potential effects of climate change have the potential to increase the numbers of migrants"; "In the 21st century the world could see substantial numbers of climate migrants"; "while experts continue to debate the details of the causal relationship between climate change and human migration, climate change is expected to aggravate many existing migratory pressures around the world." However, if we put the climate migrant's absolute quality together with its future-conditional grammatical form, what emerges is a figure that bears an extraordinary resemblance to divine prophecy and not just any old prophecy but that of the End Times. Indeed, as Julian Reid (this volume) reminds us, the migrant often signifies that the End Times are nigh, sent, at least so the prophets tell us, as a punishment of God. In Christian eschatology, the End Times marks the final judgement after which God the sovereign will rule over all eternity. In this sense, the End Times foretell the

coming apocalypse and here they carry a moral injunction. In the telling of an apocalyptic future, the prophets warn that humanity has committed some grave act of immorality and the apocalypse is God's punishment. What sin has been committed? The sin of exceeding one's finitude, or of exceeding one's place in the universe. The prophetic vision is an injunction to reclaim our morality, to reclaim our finitude for in the final judgement, this is what matters. One must reclaim one's sovereignty from immoral excess.

The sovereigntist narrative of climate migrant adheres to this prophetic script quite closely. Its principal effect is to induce awe amongst those called upon to witness it. Indeed, as many have argued the climate migrant is routinely invoked to stoke fears of political violence and social ruin as a specific political strategy to galvanise public support to take action on climate change (McNamara and Gibson 2009, Hartmann 2010, Bettini 2013). The moral injunction at stake in projections of the climate migrant as the excess of sovereignty is the restoration of finitude. If fossil fuel based economic production has resulted in a global climate now on the verge of abrupt transformation, the moral injunction contained within the sovereigntist narrative of the climate migrant is that humanity needs to reverse its excessive use of fossil fuels. A failure to do so, according to its prophetic reasoning, will have apocalyptic consequences, including the proliferation of migrating bodies and the commensurate erosion of sovereignty and resulting political violence. And in this sense, the climate migrant expresses an affective relation with the future. It is a figure conjured to impel governmental action, which brings us squarely into the realm of political theology. For if we accept that the climate migrant is an indeterminate, absolute and prophetic form, which, the prophets tell us, has the capacity to unleash extraordinary insecurity, then the sovereigntist narrative contains an injunction to impede this insecurity before it becomes fully manifest. Some moral act must be undertaken to forestall the coming apocalypse. Sovereignty must be restored, reinvigorated and reclaimed from the forces of excess. The migrant must be blockaded and contained.

The CAP report (2012) mentioned earlier exemplifies well this prophetic narrative form. It proclaims to reveal a future in Northwest Africa in which the environmental effects of climate change, such as rising coastal sea levels, desertification and drought, will proliferate migration throughout the region, in turn complicating existing insecurities in what it describes as an 'unstructured security environment.' No doubt one of the principal effects of the report is to cultivate a sense of foreboding. It presents an account of Northwest Africa on the verge of complete ungovernability as climate change, migration, Islam-inspired terrorism converge. But perhaps most important, it links the unfolding crisis in the 'arc of tension' to US national security, calling upon the US government to implement what it refers to as 'sustainable security', presumably to structure this otherwise unstructured environment. In other words, the report calls upon the US to police, intervene on and contain the crisis before it has fully materialised. We might read this as a desire for the extraterritorial application of US sovereignty aimed at securing in the national interest. But if we take seriously that this desire invokes the absolute in the figure of the climate migrant, that it follows a prophetic script in which the migrant is sent by the prophet to carry a moral injunction, then we need acknowledge that the sovereignty it calls upon issues not from the state, or rather from any *actual* condition of national insecurity but is born out of an appeal to the absolute.

By drawing attention to the sovereignty narrative, my point is not to reiterate the well-rehearsed and obvious argument that the figure of the climate migrant inaugurates a politics of security. Instead, I want to insist that we recognise the onto-theological foundations of the sovereigntist narrative. That is, I want to insist that we recognise how calls for governmental action to secure imagined political geographies threatened by the climate migrant, geographies such as the 'arc of tension', are based on a prophetic imaginary. They invoke the spectre of an absolute figure, the figure of the climate migrant, in order to (re)constitute state sovereign authority. And the reason I want to insist on this is that such calls coincide sharply with and are unfolding within an historical moment in which the theological origins of sovereignty are

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becoming more starkly evident as sovereignty is increasingly loosened off from the nation-state. In a brilliant interpretation of the state practice of walling i.e., fencing the US-Mexico border or the border separating Indian and Bangladesh, Wendy Brown (2010) argues that walling is symptomatic of a wider 'post-Westphalian world' in which sovereignty is no longer principally associated with the nation-state but is migrating to the realms of religion and capital. The crux of her argument is that as nation-state sovereignty is ever more "compromised by growing transnational flows of capital, people, ideas, goods, violence and political and religious fealty" (p.22), walls emerge as the paradoxical expression of nation-state sovereignty's growing impotence. In principal, walls are installed to impede unwanted flows and to shield a citizenry from the diluting effects of transnational relations. But walls paradoxically never actually accomplish what they are called upon to do. Instead, and this is Brown's point, walls generate a kind of theological awe by projecting an aura of protection. They serve the purpose of inducing awe, of reminding those who witness them (those on either side of the wall) that the power they project is eternal and absolute, a power emanating from God. In other words, at the very moment that sovereignty is found waning, walls emerge as projections of sovereignty's theological origin, even as they signify the ungovernability of that which they are principally designed to impede.

My contention is that sovereigntist narratives of the climate migrant have acquired their performative force at precisely this historical conjuncture, a moment in which, as Brown puts it, "the new walls iterate […] a vanishing political imaginary in the global interregnum, a time after the era of state sovereignty but before the articulation or instantiation of an alternate global order." (p.39) In this respect, the wide appeal of the sovereigntist narrative and its political expression in calls for border fortification and sustainable security must be conceived as symptomatic of this vanishing political imaginary. For if it signifies anything, the climate migrant signifies the interregnum between an unravelling sovereignty and some new world order that will

surface once the turbulence of climatic catastrophe subsides. It acts as a moral injunction to openly and aggressively reorder the world and to usher in an alternate global order.

And what about the sovereigntist narrative's geographical form? Its geographical form is principally that of spatial distribution. If the figure of the climate change migrant is absolute and thus possessed of some sort of divine quality that elicits fear, then the fear it conjures is quite fundamental. This is a fear in which some fundamental, God-given order is said to be on the verge of disruption. Rectifying such a fantastical situation thus requires reordering space, restoring the distribution of people, things, and so forth to their given place in the divine order. This may entail fortifying borders with walls, even if, as Brown reminds us, fortification only ever signifies the ungovernability of that which it seeks to impede. But this distributional logic may also entail actively reterritorialising sovereignty through the reorganisation of spatial relations beyond state territory through, for example, establishing camps, establishing development regimes in areas of potential disruption, extraordinary rendition and negotiating with transit states (White 2011). The implications of this are striking for this is a model of power that naturalises the social order it seeks to re-impose, a model of absolute power that suspends history in favour of a determinist teleology the ends of which are pre-figured in its genesis.

The liberal variation

The second variation on climate change-induced migration discourse is the liberal variation. This is a narrative that accepts migration as a basic element of the human condition and goes about governing migration as a universal value. The liberal variation on the theme of climate change induced migration adopts the position that migration represents a perfectly reasonable adaptation response to climate change, which may result in universally beneficial outcomes. The migrant is constructed in this narrative not as inherently destabilising but as a figure whose potential mobility has the capacity to contribute to human and planetary well-being. As such, liberal variations of climate change-induced migration discourse often begin by gaining distance

from or dismissing the sovereigntist narrative, doing so on the grounds that constructing the

migrant as a threat to security will likely result in the imposition of restrictive border measures

and military intervention. The liberal variation also often posits some form of human

development to mitigate the phenomenon. As such, the liberal variation poses as a critique that

seeks to displace the sovereigntist narrative in favour of a conceptualisation in which migration

is said be a development issue.

An excellent example of this critique is provided by White (2011), who argues "against a

security-minded response to climate-induced migration" (p.7) and in favour of "a more nuanced

and constructive approach to climate-induced migration, one that emphasizes improved

governance and a focus on 'development and climate' initiatives." (p. 12) White's concern is that

the need to securitise climate change-induced migration is both empirically overstated and

results in a form of extra-territorial sovereignty. It is empirically overstated insofar as the

empirical literature on climate change induced migration predicts that such migrations will more

often than not be internal rather than transboundary. It is extra-territorial to the extent that

border fortification never simply ends at a state's territorial border but "merely reassigns

responsibility for contending with mixed migration to adjacent or even far-flung borders." (p.7)

And instead of a security-minded approach, White advocates some combination of an

international governance regime, predicated on extending rights to those displaced by climate

change, and a form of human development sensitive to climate change mitigation and

adaptation. Other examples of work that refuse the securitisation of climate change and

migration and that fall broadly within the liberal humanist tradition include recent work by Betsy

Hartmann (2010), Neil Adger (2010) and Simon Dalby (2009).

This line of thought is also now firmly institutionalised. Take, for example, the *UK

Foresight Report on Migration and Global Environmental Change*. Although broadly sympathetic

with the disruptive potential of environmental-change migration found in more conventional

security narratives, one of the central messages in the *Foresight Report* is that "migration can

represent a 'transformational' adaptation to environmental change, and in many cases will be an extremely effective way to build long-term resilience" (p.10). And indeed, the opening paragraph of a commentary published in *Nature* (Black, Bennett et al. 2011) by some of the authors of the *Foresight Report* enacts precisely this liberal critique. "Conventional narratives," they write, "usually cast these displacements in a negative light, with millions of people forced to move, and tension and conflict the result. Our study suggests that the picture is not so one-sided." (Black, Bennett et al. 2011) The Asian Development Bank (2012) adopts a similar approach to climate change-induced migration, arguing that "it is also important to recognize that migration can also be a way for people to cope with environmental changes. If properly managed, and efforts made to protect the rights of migrants [sic], migration can provide substantial benefits to both origin and destination areas, as well as to the migrants themselves" (p.viii)

A great deal can be said about the liberal variation. However, I wish to emphasise three main ideas that are pertinent for our discussion. The first is that in the liberal variation the migrant is framed in quite congenial terms. Here, the migrant does not inevitably lead to political violence, but is said to make a potentially positive contribution to human well-being. Important, here, is that the migrant acquires its congenial status when its migration can be said to enhance the resilience of whatever system it happens to be circulating within. However, and second, the liberal variation does not necessarily assume the migrant as inherently beneficial. Indeed, the liberal variation argues that migration is *potentially* beneficial. What the liberal variation argues for, then, is a regime of managed migration, one specifically designed to maximise the positive attributes that migration can make to human well-being. This idea is captured well in the *UK Foresight Report* (2011) which argues "that international policy should aim to ensure that migration occurs in a way which maximises benefits to the individual, and both the source and destination communities" (p.10). And third, what this means is that while the migrant is potentially beneficial, it is also a potentially disruptive force. In other words, migration needs to be properly managed so that it does not revert into some sort of chaotic form. Again, the *UK*

Foresight Report is clear on this point: "proactively facilitated and managed migration should lead to improvements […] as it will reduce the chances of populations being trapped and/or being displaced in circumstances which raise wider geopolitical challenges" (p.10). Consequently, the liberal variation broadly advocates a regime that not only manages migration, but one that must also differentiate between desirable and undesirable forms of migration.

Taken together what these three ideas suggest is that the liberal variation, while at first glance appearing to have very little to do with risk and security, is in fact centrally concerned with both risk and security. In the liberal variation, migration is said to be a perfectly legitimate adaptive response to climate change, providing it builds resilience amongst its various constituents. However, as an adaptive response, migration requires careful management in order to avoid potentially dire, even catastrophic, consequences. In this sense, managed migration functions as a form of risk management, but it also provides a good example of what many security scholars refer to as an apparatus of security (Dillon and Reid; Evans 2013). This is a form of security often associated with Michel Foucault (2007) which works by allowing things to circulate, by promoting and regularising circulations "but in such a way that the inherent dangers of this circulation are canceled out" (p.65). Moreover, this is a form of security that functions very differently than the mode of security found in the sovereigntist narrative. Whereas the sovereigntist narrative is centrally concerned with securing by taking up a defensive posture and controlling territory in order to prevent or contain migration, the liberal narrative promotes a form of security that seeks to annul risk by managing and regularising migration.

What kind of theological traces can be found in this liberal variation on the theme of climate change-induced migration? To answer this question let us briefly consider the onto-theological underpinnings of liberalism. As Brad Evans (2013) describes it, the liberal imaginary is "planetary in scope," an imaginary that subordinates the sovereign state as merely one form of actor in an otherwise singular plane of global experience. The onto-theological origins of this

imaginary derive from the absolute emergence of the immanent plane of global space not from

some absolute outside, which is sovereignty's founding condition. In this respect, global space

is full of potential, some of it beneficent and some catastrophic, and the liberal imaginary

intervenes in the world by embracing the immanent unfolding of the world, by accepting and

managing the potential emergence of the world, precisely in order to minimise its potentially

catastrophic consequences. Brad Evans (2013) sums up the difference between sovereigntist

and liberal forms of eschatology rather poignantly this way:

> While both fixate on the event-to-come, the apocalyptic is founded upon the eventual revelation of the One (true God, true religion, Supreme Being). The catastrophic, in contrast, proposes a future-oriented discourse that is fuelled by the infinitely possible. Whereas apocalyptic narratives therefore put forward a Sovereign eschatology that impresses on the subject's imaginary the plagues of judgment such that onto-theological rule can shape actions of believers in the present, catastrophic narratives construct the basis for their onto-theologically driven rule by promoting life as an emergent, adaptable, pre-epistemic eschatological complex. So whereas apocalyptic imaginaries propose an altogether teleological religiosity whose eventual revelation is a prophesied truth, the catastrophic imaginary offers a non-linear eschatology of the living that moralizes the government of life on a planetary scale in lieu of the fact that nothing can be known with absolute certainty. (p.41)

This is a lengthy quote but it captures the distinctive political theologies at play in both sovereign

and liberal eschatologies. It also requires some further explanation. Crudely, we might say,

sovereign eschatology locates the coming *apocalypse* as the foundational condition for a

religious moralism, whereas liberal eschatology locates non-linear *catastrophe* (i.e., events

which cannot be foreseen in advance) as the moral basis for liberal government. The difference

between the two lies in their specific terminology. In the former, the *apocalypse* is said to place

a limit on time; it names the period when time ends and it inaugurates a distributional politics

that seeks to reorder space in accordance with a pre-political biblical account of the world. The

latter, in contrast, is motivated to secure against the coming *catastrophe*, where the catastrophic

does not place a limit on time so much as it marks the moment of bifurcation when a system's

temporal unfolding undergoes a dramatic transformation such that its unfolding trajectory

appears altogether different from its predecessor. In such an account, linear time does not stop, its contents are simply rearranged such that it unfolds differently. Time did not stop with the arrival of Hurricane Katrina. Rather, the hurricane induced a massive social displacement (one prefigured by a long history of racial inequality), such that New Orleans, while still New Orleans, is now unfolding as a markedly different place than was the case prior to the hurricane. Michael Dillon (2011) describes such eschatology this way: "modern eschatology….does not signify the biblical threshold of the end of time. To repeat, the temporal limit of modern times signifies, instead, a continuously open horizon of finite possibility, an infinity of finite possibilities." (p.781)

Returning then to the traces of theology apparent in the liberal variation on the theme of climate change-induced migration, what we seem to have here is a form of eschatology in which faith is located not in an apocalyptic imaginary, but in the acceptance of the contingent, in the acceptance of a deep uncertainty full of both beneficent or catastrophic possibilities. Or we might say that the liberal variation is a mode of risk management that seeks to secure by embracing risk (Dillon 2008), the onto-theological foundations for which are to be found in a devout faith in contingency. Such a welcome embrace of the contingent is evident in liberal renderings of climate change-induced migration. Such renderings regularly take the view that migration is a complex, non-linear and emergent phenomenon (Black, Kniveton et al. 2011, Renaud, Dun et al. 2011, Kniveton, Smith et al. 2012). The relation between climate change and migration is said to be complex and emergent because the outcomes of climate-migration interactions can never be known in advance. And it is said to be non-linear and non-deterministic inasmuch as climatic variations can never be said to be the singular cause of migration. Recent work in agent-based modelling suggests framing "the nexus of climate change and migration as a complex adaptive system" (Kniveton, Smith et al. 2012). These are systems which are said to be self-organising and "that emerge as a result of interactions among system components (or agents) and among system components (or agents) and the environment" (Portgieter and Bishop 2001 as quoted in Rammel, Stagl et al. 2007).

By prioritising the relation between climate change and migration as complex, such liberal accounts give onto-theological primacy to the contingent. In other words, they locate the absolute quality of the climate change-induced migrant in the immanent, contingent unfolding of the world, rather than in an external time-space that characterises the apocalyptic imaginary.

Thinking the Human through the climate change migrant

In the foregoing, I have tried to identify the theological imaginaries present in both the sovereign and liberal variations on the theme of climate change-induced migration. My point in doing so has been to suggest that if we reduce the debate about climate change-induced migration to a set of competing secular claims, we risk overlooking the theological dimensions of the debate. And this, I suggest, is important because in misdiagnosing what is at stake in the phenomenon, we risk posing the wrong questions about it. As I have tried to show, what is so striking about the debate on climate change-induced migration is that both sides assume the object of their analysis. Both assume that the phenomenon coincides with an empirical reality in spite of the inherent difficulties in locating this reality in any actual sense. Consequently, both seem to accept the future-conditional possibility that climate change may effect migration and both seem content to ask how this future possibility might be managed whether, for example, through sovereigntist or liberal means. My point, however, is not to repudiate the phenomenon of climate change and migration, nor is it to discredit those who seek to understand it. After all, if we are willing to accept the science of climate change, which tells us that the earth system is on the threshold of profound geophysical disruption, then surely such disruption will come to bear in some way on human movement. Research on exactly this theme is imperative, now more than ever.

Rather my point is that in pressing ahead with policy interventions that seek to manage the phenomenon of climate change and migration, we risk overlooking the theological dimensions of this phenomenon and, in doing so, rush past what to me is a far more pressing

set of questions. Again, we should recall that the absolute names a kind affective force (a vexing, awe-inducing notion) which names a potential to loosen, absolve, or undo social relations. My contention is that the phenomenon of climate change and migration is absolute in exactly this sense. So if, as Jane Bennett (2010) has argued, "it is from the human that the absolute has detached; the absolute names the limits of *intelligibility*," (p.3, emphasis in original), then the absolute is that what which is fully detached from the human. We therefore might ask what it means to be human when confronted by the absolute, in this case the affective force expressed by the phenomenon of the climate change-induced migration. Or put different, if climate change poses the potential of a nomadic humanity (Goldberg 2013), such potential vastly exceeds collective human knowledge, and in the absence of such knowledge, making sense of this potential becomes almost impossible. Consequently, we might ask what kind of knowledge is required to make sense of this potential. Is scientific knowledge enough? What philosophies and concepts are also required? To what extent can faith-based forms knowledge contribute to our understanding of this potential? How might we orient ourselves to absolute potential? How might established religions reaffirm their authority in a context of mobile humanity? Or if we are to place our faith in capital, then what new forms of value, exploitation and violence will shape what it means to be human in a context of mobile humanity?

These are extremely pressing questions inasmuch as both the sovereigntist and liberal variations make all manner of assumptions about the Human. In the sovereigntist narrative, human salvation remains tethered to the territorial nation-state, which suggests that the sovereigntist variation risks reproducing 'the Human' as an effect of exclusion. Or in the liberal variation, the human is conjured as the figure of right and agency, albeit one that needs to be managed in the interest of planetary life. This again raises questions about the Human as an object of management. In both cases, we risk reifying or hardening the categories through which the Human comes to be understood as such. Instead, I suggest that we use the affectivity of climate change and migration as a resource in reimagining what it means to be human in the

context of climate change, to open up a sense of human becoming to new

de/reterritorialisations.

Acknowledgements

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