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Contesting clusters: a study of norm weaving in Pacific climate mobilities policies

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Abstract

This article identifies a sub-category of norm contestation I've termed 'norm weaving', where actors contest the constitution of norm clusters, instead of the validity of individual norms. This occurs through processes of stretching or reproducing individual strands of existing norm clusters before weaving them together to create behaviour guides in under-governed issue areas that are greater than the sum of their individual parts. I identify two examples of weaving in the world-leading actions of Fiji and Vanuatu around domestic climate mobilities. Using these two cases, we can see that existing models of norm dynamics need to be developed to better explain and understand weaving-like processes of norm contestation. There are two areas where norm weaving extends our understanding – in how clusters of norms emerge and change, and in how contestation applies to groupings of norms. Clarifying what norm weaving looks like in these cases could open the door to further examples being identified in other contexts and a more complete understanding of how norms operate in global politics.

Keywords: norms; contestation; clusters; small states; climate mobilities

Introduction

At the Second Glasgow Dialogue on loss and damage in 2023, the Fijian representative, Dan Lund, noted that Fiji was calling for a 'woven approach to climate resilient development'. Lund continued:

> When considered alone, an uncoordinated array of strands are weak, but when organised and interwoven – these same strands become strong. Weaving is one of humanity's oldest technologies and in the context of climate change speaks to the need to reduce silos, understand intersections, and produce strength through collaboration.[1]

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[1] Daniel Lund, Special Advisor to Government of Fiji, 2023.

Weaving was previously mentioned in Fiji's National Climate Change Policy, which noted that individual strands of material are exponentially stronger when they are interconnected in a systematic way.[2] The metaphor of weaving has also been used to describe how Pacific Island states use statecraft to affect their external environments and how actors interact with and within them.[3] Weaving is a culturally significant and powerful metaphor, not just in the Pacific, but in many locales across the globe. It is one of the oldest technologies in human history, predating ceramics, yet the basic principles of weaving have remained unchanged.[4] The interlocking of a system of threads, more complex than single-element techniques like knitting or knotting, and more deliberate than entropic processes like (en)tangling, has value beyond the sum of its interwoven materials – weavings became symbols that communicated complex layers of social meaning in everyday life and politics.[5]

Beyond the metaphor, there is also a puzzle at the heart of the issue Lund was speaking to. Pacific Island states are some of the most exposed to the effects of climate change. Yet even with this incentive in mind, the lengths that Fiji and Vanuatu have gone to in developing world-leading policies around climate resilience, displacement, and migration are striking – they are two of the first states in the world to develop clear domestic-level policies targeting climate mobilities, yet there is limited clear international legal obligations to do so in this space as yet.[6] It is not that it is surprising that Pacific states have acted, as such, but rather it is interesting that they chose to forge a largely new pathway forward and that these actions seem to have subsequently altered wider understandings of how states should act in similar situations. As Jervis has argued, smaller states are more sensitive to changes in their external environments than larger states. They do not possess the 'margin of time and error', nor the physical capability to effectively respond to or recover from external exigencies.[7] While in some instances, this can spur action, existing literature also suggests that limited state capacity can constrain the ability of actors to adopt or implement policies, particularly in smaller countries.[8] So how is it that Fiji and Vanuatu have relatively successfully managed to weave together a formal approach to managing climate mobilities and convince other actors of its legitimacy and acceptability?

We may begin to understand this puzzle more completely by firstly recognising that smaller actors inherently still have agency and power. Smallness can even present unique opportunities for contestation and creating change. For example, several members of the Small Island Developing States coalition – individually and collectively – have emphasised their unique vulnerabilities within the international order, to gain leverage when contesting norms. Through rhetorical action, various forms of coalition building, and active participation as a distinct group in the processes and practices of international organisations, small states can create change that diffuses 'from below'. By being present and engaging in the competent

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[2]Ministry of Economy 2019a, 7.
[3]Futaiasi et al. 2023; Wallis et al. 2022.
[4]Albers 2003, 19.
[5]Ibid.; Rasmussen and Albrecht 2017, 5.
[6]Cohen and Bradley 2010; Cullen 2020; McAdam 2012.
[7]Jervis 1978, 172; Wiberg 1987, 339; Miller and Verhoeven 2020, 4.
[8]Betts and Orchard 2014, 16; Deere 2009, 315; VanDeveer and Dabelko 2001.

performance of vulnerability, these states can, not just call attention to their agenda, but also ensure their claims have legitimacy.[9] When engaging in contestation like this in issue areas where 'prevailing norms are not well established' – such as the climate mobilities cluster examined here – it is more likely that the actions will precipitate norm emergence and diffusion through emulation.[10]

In the case of Fiji and Vanuatu, not only have their policies changed how climate mobilities are addressed at home, but they have begun to shift the international agenda and intersubjective understandings of how states should manage climate mobilities. The article progresses by first outlining the actions of these states in developing and promoting these policies, before revisiting the literature on norms, clusters, and contestation, and finally showing how a theory of norm weaving can help better understand and contextualise what Fiji and Vanuatu are doing on climate mobilities and the wider effect these contestations are having on the international community.

Beginning from this puzzle, this article uses an abductive methodology of empirically informed theory building to understand how this change has come about. In the first section, I draw on and critique elements of constructivist International Relations theory around norms, contestation, and connections. As Lantis and Wunderlich suggest, the field 'currently stands on the cusp of [a] boom in constructivist theory on norm connections'.[11] I actively contribute to pushing this discourse forward by crafting an understanding that best explains what is occurring in these cases and pushes forward research on norms, clusters, connections, and contestation – all with the Pacific at the centre of inquiry and theory generation. The result of this is the identification of a sub-category of norm contestation termed norm weaving, after the language Fiji itself used in its climate policies and negotiations.

The second section explores the empirics of these two cases, looking at the policies and practices of Fiji and Vanuatu in the climate mobilities space. I then return to theory, using the empirical illustrations to portray norm weaving as a sub-category of contestation; one where what is being renegotiated is how groups of norms are combined, arranged, and preferenced. Individual strands of existing norms are stretched or reproduced before being woven together in a way that contextualises or clarifies how they collectively apply to a different issue area. Fleshing out this concept will help scholars of norms to better understand how groupings of norms emerge and change and how to apply theories of contestation to clusters of norms.

Finally, I note that following recent scholarship, I utilise the terminology of climate mobilities. This better captures 'the multiple forms, directions and multiplicities of human movement in the context of climate change as well as the transformative character of mobility and its impact on places of origin, transit and destination'.[12] It also swerves the well-documented issues of terminology such as climate refugees or migrants.[13] Various forms of migration, displacement,

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[9]Morgan et al. 2024; Carter 2020a, 2020b; Naupa 2017; Corbett et al. 2019, 647–48.
[10]Florini 1996, 378.
[11]Lantis and Wunderlich, 2022, 9.
[12]Boas et al. 2019, 2.
[13]Baldwin 2022; Bettini 2019; White 2019; Munoz 2021; Hiraide 2023; Biermann and Boas 2010.

mobility, and immobility can fall under this broad conceptual umbrella without having to be causally linked to climate change or disasters. I iteratively draw on the idea of weaving in the context of climate mobilities to construct a theoretical explanation for how two small states in the Pacific – Fiji and Vanuatu – have been able to actively and successfully construct a new behaviour guide in an issue area that has, until now, been largely undergoverned.

Norms, clusters, and contestation

While the concept of norm weaving is rooted in efforts to better understand the practices of Pacific states around climate mobilities, it has been developed iteratively in conversation with predominantly Western discourses of norms and constructivism. This comes from my position as one of Hau'ofa's so-called 'sea-struck scholars', and is rooted in an understanding of Oceania as a blue continent comprised of large and capable ocean states.[14] I do not try to reconcile the colonialist histories of IR and constructivist research here but rather take a small step towards recognising the agency of these often-overlooked actors and the emancipatory potential of their ideologies, without gentrifying or essentialising them or their ontologies.[15]

As an approach, constructivist IR theory has fundamentally sought to produce a more complete understanding of how the world works and 'hangs together'.[16] When constructivism emerged, seeking to understand the parts of global politics that were neglected by other mainstream theoretical approaches meant looking at the role that 'social facts' like norms, standards, rules, and ideas played in explaining political decisions, alongside material factors.[17]

As the Global IR movement suggests, what is now often overlooked is theorising and cases from outside the traditionally studied Global North states.[18] If one seeks to understand the type of contestation and normative change that has occurred in the two cases detailed above, we can see that dominant understandings of norm dynamics are inadequate for the task. I note two particular points of critique and intervention – the lack of detailed explanation around how norm clusters emerge, and an incomplete understanding of how clusters can be changed through contestation. It is not that these topics have been entirely neglected, as the following section shows, but rather that existing models are incomplete and could benefit from the addition of weaving dynamics in specific cases.

Commonly, constructivist scholars in IR have understood norms as standards of appropriate behaviour for actors with a given identity,[19] collective expectations about proper behaviour,[20] or shared understandings that make behaviour claims.[21] As well as constraining behaviour, norms also constitute the identities and interests

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[14]Hau'ofa 1994; Morgan 2022; Teaiwa 2020.
[15]Milders 2024.
[16]Finnemore and Sikkink 1998; Ruggie 1998.
[17]Ruggie 1998; Searle 1995.
[18]Acharya 2016.
[19]Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, 891.
[20]Jepperson et al. 1996, 54.
[21]Checkel 1997, 477.

of actors.[22] Norms are the language and grammar of international politics, they give structure, order, and stability to the world and the actors who subscribe to them.[23] However, there are several nuances of how norms emerge, spread, and evolve that are overlooked in these oft-reproduced understandings. Understanding the fluid, contested, and collective nature of norms is an essential prerequisite to establishing how norm weaving occurs and creates change.

Norms as collectives

Orchard and Wiener identify the tendency 'to focus on individual norms at the expense of a wider set of structures' as an 'enduring question' of norm research.[24] It is not that norm relations have been completely discounted, however. Numerous scholars have recognised – both explicitly and implicitly – that norms do not exist in isolation or a vacuum.[25] Structures beyond single norms are needed to understand how norms interrelate and interact with each other, both conceptually and in practice.[26] In reality, actors are constantly navigating complexes of multiple legal regimes, norm clusters, and institutions, which is something our theories need to reflect more accurately.[27]

This recognition has permeated norm research for decades,[28] though without influencing the questions asked or how they were answered to the extent it perhaps should have. It was Finnemore and Sikkink who acknowledged in their seminal article that norms existed only as part of larger structures, or as a 'collection of practices and rules', though they were by no means alone in this observation.[29] Drawing on this, Florini argued that norms operate as patterns or structures that shape state behaviour.[30] Strikingly, Florini's analogy of norms as genes directly implies that each gene exists within larger structures of chromosomes or DNA.[31] Axelrod also suggested that norms only exist within their social settings,[32] while Checkel used the example of the European human rights framework as a 'robust international regime' that predisposes the region 'for high levels of international regime and norm influence on state policies'.[33] This suggests there is an unidentified, intangible quality that a well-defined collection of norms has, which makes them more likely to shape behaviour than a discrete, isolated norm.

Links between norms are also explicitly referenced in discussions of resonance, with new ideas more likely to be accepted because of the ideational affinity they have with prior established ideas.[34] It is not just the framing of specific messages

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[22]Klotz 1995, 461–62; Cortell and Davis 2000, 66; Winston 2018, 640; Wendt 1999; Wiener 2014.
[23]Cortell and Davis 2000, 66; Kratochwil 1989; Onuf 1989.
[24]Orchard and Wiener 2024, 16.
[25]Lantis and Wunderlich 2022, 8.
[26]Orchard 2020, 31; Winston 2018, 652; Rhoads and Welsh 2019, 615; Staunton and Ralph 2020, 4.
[27]Reus-Smit 2018, 68.
[28]Lantis and Wunderlich 2022, 8.
[29]Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, 891; Zimmermann 2014, 106; Zimmermann 2017, 3.
[30]Florini 1996, 364.
[31]Ibid., 367–68.
[32]Axelrod 1986, 1097.
[33]Checkel 1997, 480.
[34]Payne 2001, 38; Keck and Sikkink 1998, 204.

that matters here, but the wider communicative environment and normative context the framing occurs in.[35] Price built on ideas of resonance to coin the term grafting, which refers to the 'normative rooting and branching' that described how new norms were linked to existing ideas both structurally and strategically.[36] Similarly, Acharya suggests that local actors can actively create parallel or analogous versions of global norms that better fit with local practices through localisation or export locally constructed versions of norms to a wider audience through subsidiarity practices.[37] In both these cases, the new norms do not exist in isolation – they are products of their context and are inextricably linked to the original norms they were based on. The links between domestic and international norms can also have suasion, leading to some norms being more likely to be referenced or ignored over others depending on the domestic political context in question.[38]

Additionally, there has been recognition that some norms have 'primordial importance' and their gravitational power has essential effects on the functioning of the international systems and the norms and actors within it.[39] These are variously called fundamental norms,[40] foundational norms,[41] metanorms,[42] meta-governance norms,[43] or higher-order norms.[44] So while key constitutional structures, as Reus Smit terms them, such as sovereignty, procedural justice, and the moral purpose of the state, are still subject to the same principles of dynamics as other more fluid and transient norms, they remain largely stable to interim examination due to the almost universal acceptance of them over long periods.[45] For clusters, these metanorms can act as deep structures,[46] system level norms,[47] or the understandings that 'undergird norms'.[48] Their established suasion can make norms that are linked to them more compelling and increase the chance of contestations being accepted that have a strong fit or resonance with the underlying principles.

This weight of evidence makes it understandable for Payne to note that 'agents, of course, translate ideas into normative structures'.[49] It is obvious the 'enduring question' Orchard and Wiener identified has been a persistent part of norm research, although it is yet to be convincingly solved. Scholars accept, almost as given, that norms exist within broader structures of meaning – and this is how actors interact with them – yet instead of inquiring into the dynamics of these collections of norms, a great degree of research remains mired in empirically proving

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[35]Payne 2001, 39.
[36]Price 1998, 628.
[37]Acharya 2011, 97–98.
[38]Cortell and Davis 2000, 69.
[39]Raymond 1997, 223.
[40]Ibid.; Wiener 2009, 179.
[41]Ruggie 1998, 873; Winston 2023, 2; Sandholtz 2008, 103.
[42]Axelrod 1986, 1100.
[43]Lantis and Wunderlich 2022, 11.
[44]Kratochwil 1984, 687.
[45]Reus-Smit 1997, 556; Wendt 1992, 413.
[46]Legro 1997, 32.
[47]Klotz 1995, 460.
[48]Payne 2001, 38.
[49]Ibid.

individual norms exist and hold power. To paraphrase Legro, 'by concentrating on showing that [individual] norms "matter,"' analysts have given too little attention to how norms emerge, exist, and evolve within their associated clusters and structures.[50]

Despite this, several scholars have attempted to push the literature forward with competing and complementary concepts that seek to define, explain, and understand how norms are bundled together in groups or collectives. Welsh refers to complex norms,[51] Orchard to regimes,[52] True and Wiener to bundles,[53] Coen to complex bundles,[54] Winston and Lantis and Wunderlich both to clusters (though understood differently),[55] Collier and Mahon, and Fehl and Rosert to family groups,[56] Sandholtz to systems or constellations of norms,[57] and Zimmermann, Capie, and Kelley all use the term norm set.[58] While these numerous understandings of norms diverge on many issues, they are underpinned by a common assumption that to more fully understand how norms work – how they shape and are shaped by actors and practices – we need to do more to examine them in context and association with each other.

I spotlight two broad schools of thought in this space, both with utility for norms research. Firstly, Winston, Lantis and Wunderlich, and Fehl and Rosert, among others, have pushed forward with utilising the terminology of clusters to explain how norms are interconnected and grouped.[59] In their view, 'there is no such thing as an isolated norm'; all norms emerge into a 'wider preexisting normative structure'.[60] Starting from this position, we can see that the international system is not multi-normative, but inter-normative. Clusters are defined as 'collections of aligned, but distinct, norms or principles that related to a common, overarching issue area'.[61] Interpreting this broadly, one could argue that all the types of norm collectives or groupings listed about could fit under this categorical umbrella.

In contrast, building on the work of Goertz, others like Orchard and Betts prefer the term norm regime.[62] Kratochwil defined regimes as 'rather complex composites of norms, expectations, and formal organizational features',[63] while Orchard suggests that the bundles of norms regimes are comprised of are what serve as a 'web of meaning' for actors to understand and interpret their meanings.[64] As

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[50]Legro 1997, 31.

[51]Welsh 2019, 56, 63, 66.

[52]Orchard 2014, 28.

[53]True and Wiener 2019, 554.

[54]Coen 2019.

[55]I note that Winston's understanding of clusters differs here from Lantis and Wunderlich. Lantis and Wunderlich 2018, 576; Lantis and Wunderlich 2022; Winston 2018, 647.

[56]Collier and Mahon 1993, 846–47; Fehl and Rosert 2020, 8–9.

[57]Sandholtz 2008, 103.

[58]Zimmermann 2017, 3; Zimmermann 2014, 106; Capie 2008; Kelley 2008.

[59]Winston 2018; Lantis and Wunderlich 2018; Lantis and Wunderlich 2022; Fehl and Rosert 2020; Fehl 2018.

[60]Lantis and Wunderlich 2022, 8.

[61]Lantis and Wunderlich 2018, 571.

[62]Goertz 2003, 15; Orchard 2014, 241; Betts 2014.

[63]Kratochwil 1984, 685.

[64]Orchard 2014, 28; Orchard 2018, 6.

Goertz and Kratochwil suggest, an additional level of formal institutionalisation is required for a collection of norms to be classified as a regime.[65] To avoid problematic levels of variation in the application of the term regime,[66] I suggest this type of institutionalisation is narrower than Keohane's definition,[67] and rather the formality must be reflected in the constitution and practices of international organisations. This means that while a formal treaty and enforcement mechanism is not necessarily required to be a regime, some level of governance structure and procedural oversight or monitoring is. This speaks to Raymond's observation that, a significant distinguishing feature of regimes is the 'qualitative increase in the commitment of its members'.[68]

I suggest both conceptual terminologies have utility for norm researchers. Put simply, we may understand all regimes as also clusters, but not all clusters as regimes – regimes have an extra degree of formality through the attachment of an institution and codified or regulated governance, while clusters can be less structured collections of norms, inclusive of developing ideas and maturing concepts. I use the term cluster more frequently here, following Lantis and Wunderlich most closely,[69] as it better captures the nebulous and emerging state of the nascent climate mobilities norm cluster. There is a persistent dissatisfaction, however, in how current thinking understands how these clusters emerge and change.

Emergence, change, and contestation

The most widely cited models of norm emergence and change have historically been the norm life cycle, boomerang, and spiral models. Finnemore and Sikkink's norm life cycle model proposes a three-stage process of norm emergence, cascade, and internalisation.[70] Here, successful entrepreneurship can reach a tipping point upon which a norm cascades through the rest of the population. Once a norm has cascaded through the global community, it becomes internalised. In this final stage, a norm acquires a 'taken-for-granted quality' and is no longer publicly debated. Finnemore and Sikkink acknowledge that not all emergent norms will reach a tipping point and so it is not guaranteed that all norms progress towards institutionalisation.[71] There are several issues with this model, including how it declines to acknowledge the importance of domestic-level implementation,[72] and how the narrow focus on the role of non-state actors putting issues onto the agenda in their role as norm entrepreneurs excludes a number of important potentialities.[73] However, for this argument, the main critique is how norms are framed as isolated, discrete, individual entities in the life cycle model.

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[65]Goertz 2003, 15; Kratochwil 1984, 685; Orchard 2018, 8.
[66]Raymond 1997, 213.
[67]Keohane 1988.
[68]Raymond 1997, 213.
[69]Lantis and Wunderlich 2018, 576; Lantis and Wunderlich 2022, 8.
[70]Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, 895.
[71]Ibid.
[72]Orchard 2018, 23; Betts and Orchard 2014.
[73]Wunderlich 2020, 29; Coleman 2013; Orchard and Gillies 2015; Davies and True 2017; Adamson 2019; Bloomfield 2016; Crandall and Allan 2015.

The boomerang and spiral models seek to address some of these critiques, but ultimately still focus on individual norm change rather than the broader dynamics of norm clusters. Keck and Sikkink's boomerang model explains how norms spread when channels between the state and domestic actors are blocked. It describes how domestic non-governmental actors bypass their states and utilise international allies to pressure their states from the outside. The international networks and contacts can help bring attention to issues state actors are deaf to, suppress issues they do not want on the agenda, or create space for an issue to be discussed and translated back into the domestic arena.[74] Risse and Sikkink's spiral model builds upon this work, arguing that different actors use different diffusion methods at different times in their efforts to shape a single state's understanding of a given norm with pressure from both above and below.[75] Subsequently, the authors have revised this model, acknowledging that initially, the model failed to take into account that powerful core states could themselves be norm-violators, that not enough attention was paid to violations in areas of limited statehood, and the spiral model did not recognise the growing importance of non-state actors in the human rights field. To remedy these omissions and oversights, the focus was shifted to the processes that lead from an actor committing to human rights norms to that actor complying with the norms.[76]

On top of existing critiques, what these popular models fail to adequately engage with is the singularity versus collective question that Orchard and Wiener, and others, point to.[77] Other theoretical advancements can provide greater clarity and understanding here, though. From the range of norm collectives detailed above, many engage with the question of how clusters emerge – however, it is most often in the context of how ideas emerge within established clusters, instead of how norms emerge into crowded normative contexts. What norm weaving pushes us to do is extend this thinking to consider how norms spread and grow into new, emerging, or radically changing contexts.

Looking at the Women, Peace, and Security norm cluster, True and Wiener argue that 'norm emergence and change depend on access to norm validation' through formal, social, and cultural validation pathways. This is largely a discursive form of contestation, where the political practice of contestation challenges or validates norms at the various sites that those affected by the norm(s) have access to.[78] However, this model is largely used to look at how different aspects of the norm cluster have emerged over time, rather than looking at how clusters can spread into new or otherwise undergoverned areas where existing norms do not directly apply.

On this, Lantis and Wunderlich suggest that 'emerging norms never enter norm-free spaces'.[79] Clusters can be birthed organically due to the genealogy or similarity of norms and their principles or they can strategically be linked by entrepreneurs through discursive practices – which is more reflective of the practices identified

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[74]Keck and Sikkink 1998, 12–13.
[75]Risse and Sikkink 1999, 18, 38; Risse and Ropp 2013; Winston 2018, 649.
[76]Risse and Ropp 2013, 9.
[77]Orchard and Wiener 2024; Lantis and Wunderlich 2022, 7.
[78]True and Wiener 2019, 556–57.
[79]Lantis and Wunderlich 2022, 12.

by weaving.[80] There is an existing normative architecture comprised of norms, relationships between norms, and metanorms that underpin structures of global politics – but this architecture can be consciously manipulated through contestation practices.[81] While I agree, to an extent, I suggest that new, emerging, or changing issue areas – such as climate mobilities, oversight of artificial intelligence and data gathering, or governance of extraplanetary areas like objects in near-earth orbit – can have less existing architecture and more space for norms to be selectively contested and interpreted. It is as Sandholtz argues, that normative structures 'cannot stand still',[82] and we must assume change and evolutions as inherent features of the inter-normative system.

Similarly, Winston suggests that norms can diffuse in two ways – they can be exactly reproduced, with actors following a stable norm, or the contents of the norm can change through the process of adoption. The second option speaks to the inherent flexibility of norms and their propensity to travel and evolve. This can occur during localisation, implementation, grafting, and other similar processes where global norms are applied to more specific local contexts. When we recognise that norms exist in interlinked clusters, instead of discretely, the ability for some norms to travel and increased variability in adoption, compliance, and implementation is more understandable.[83] In terms of the cluster's emergence, however, Winston says that 'clusters emerge, grow, and change, just as single norms have been theorized to do, and by using the same diffusion mechanisms'.[84] What this establishes is that the links can be 'loosened' between norms and, as long as the resulting outcome is accepted by the community of actors in question, a cluster can be created from a 'set of single norms'.[85] This work pushes understandings of norm clusters forward, but what norm weaving can add is a deeper exploration of how it is that norms diffuse and are consciously intertwined with each other.

This adds to work by Moore, who specifically looks at why some norms are influential in emerging issues areas, and others are not. She suggests that conflicts between various norms or framings of norms, such as in the climate adaptation space, can result in ongoing processes of dynamic negotiation and compromise. Factors like the fit of the individual norm or norm cluster within its broader complex or constellation affect the likelihood of it gaining suasion in the new issue area, as does the authority of those promoting the new norm interpretations. Within this, however, Moore importantly acknowledges that the 'force and quality of articulation' can produce outcomes that outweigh the apparent geographical size or economic power of those promoting them.[86] This framing of the problem is congruent with weaving as a concept and practice. What weaving adds to this discourse, however, is a more detailed articulation of how actors engage in these negotiations and contestations in putting forward their own entrepreneurial ideas.

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[80]Lantis and Wunderlich 2018, 576; Fehl 2018, 5–6.
[81]Lantis and Wunderlich 2022, 3.
[82]Sandholtz 2008, 101.
[83]Winston 2018, 643–48.
[84]Ibid., 648.
[85]Ibid., 649.
[86]Moore 2012.

Outside of IR norm theorising, there are applicable ideas as well. The most relevant is the concept of norm-knitting in international legal studies. While I stated in the introduction that knitting is more representative of single elemental combination techniques – constructing patterns through the stitching of a single thread into a complex structure – as opposed to weaving which combines many individual strands into a single structure, this theory shares many similarities with weaving. Endres describes norm-knitting as having 'many small and often entangled phases', where the new contribution is deliberate, but conditional on what pre-exists, and not indicative of what will happen next.[87]

Endres eschews the weaving metaphor, suggesting that it implies 'threads always have to be straight and perpendicular to each other', while 'knitting allows for much more flexibility in the construction phase'.[88] I contest this framing, however. While knitting may have more flexibility, it remains that the flexibility applies to the incorporation of single norms into preexisting clusters. While basic weaving may layout strands perpendicular to each other before their combination, they can then be woven together in innumerable ways to create an almost infinite number of patterns or structures – structures that, if constructed correctly, are much stronger than the individual strands were on their own. Finally, Endres does stray towards the individualisation of norms in their conception of the final knitted product being a single norm instead of a combination of strands.[89] Beyond the specific metaphor used, however, the idea of norm-knitting offers a lot for scholars of legal and political scholars in the space. Fundamentally, for this argument, the key point is that normative meaning can be constructed through the conscious arrangement and interlinking of ideas in a common issue area.

Perhaps the most important models for understanding norm change, however, are rooted in the third move of norm research and the shift towards seeing all norms as constantly contested entities.[90] Contestation is defined 'as a *social activity* that involves discursive and critical engagement with norms of governance',[91] or 'challenges towards the meaning (or meaning-in-use) of norms'.[92] Contestation can occur both for the meaning of a single norm and in competition with other incompatible or conflicting norms.[93] Despite the focus on conscious contestation in much of the literature, norms and their meanings evolve through everyday interactions and so they are 'contested by default'.[94] Additionally, running counter to prior work in the space, contestation does not necessarily erode or weaken norms. In fact, contestation generally increases legitimacy by clarifying

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[87]Endres speaks in reference to the emergence of environmental human right, which she acknowledges as a catch-all term for the 'different variations in which human rights and environment are entangled'. The various 'resources' for the knitting are acknowledged, without extending this to assert that these resources are themselves norms. Endres 2023, 880, 883, 899, fn 28.

[88]Ibid., 880.

[89]Ibid.

[90]Orchard and Wiener 2024.

[91]Wiener 2014, 2.

[92]Lantis and Wunderlich 2018, 571.

[93]Florini 1996, 367.

[94]Wiener 2009, 179.

intersubjectively understood meanings and applications.[95] Generally, however, contestation studies fall into the trap of examining the dynamics of individual norms to the exclusion of studying how norm clusters emerge and change.

There are some exceptions, however. One theoretical lens that engages with the conceptual implications of a contested inter-normative world is the emerging literature on norm collisions. Collisions occur when 'actors perceive at least two norms as incompatible with each other'.[96] This reflects the understanding that in an inter-normative world filled with norm clusters 'tensions and contradictions' between norms or clusters are something that is inevitably 'commonplace'.[97] Rather than destabilising norms and clusters, collisions or interface conflicts can work to 'establish more settled normative expectations' through practices of contestation.[98] The complexity of norm clusters can also be exploited by actors who highlight overlaps, conflicts, and collisions to circumvent norms they dislike, shift an issue into an alternative cluster or forum, and even try and undermine the legitimacy of a norm. As opposed to strategic linkages for norm building, this highlights how strategic linkages can be made for alternative forms of contestation aimed at blocking a direction of norm development or eroding support for norms.[99]

Contesting collectives: a theory of norm weaving

My claim here is not that these theories are incorrect, but in the tradition of constructivist research, I suggest scholars can do more to better understand the dynamics of norm change and evolution. At a theoretical level, norm weaving helps to both illuminate avenues by which clusters can emerge and change and to show how theories of contestation can be applied to collective norm dynamics. It does this in two ways.

Firstly, it helps explain one way that norm clusters can emerge, through the process of stretching and copying norm strands, before recombining them in a deliberate and considered manner to create a newly woven cluster. Building on the existing work on clusters and other norm groupings, norm weaving offers a Pacific-rooted lens to understand how actors can extend behaviour and governance guides into areas that are newly emerging or inadequately governed. The metaphor of weaving highlights both where the constitutive elements of the new norm cluster have come from and the process by which they are combined and interlinked.

Secondly, the lens of norm weaving gives an extra layer of depth to existing theories of norm contestation and conflict. Conceptually and empirically, much of the work on norm contestation has followed a similar pattern to that of the first move of norm research, in that it has established its validity through the examination and analysis of discrete, individual norms and their dynamics. The cases of Fiji and Vanuatu in the following section make it clear that we need to do more to understand how actors like these are engaging in contestation of clusters. In this way,

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[95]Wiener 2014, 2–3.
[96]Gholiagha et al. 2020, 291.
[97]Sandholtz 2008, 106; Kreuder-Sonnen and Zürn 2020, 242.
[98]Krisch et al. 2020, 360.
[99]Fehl 2018, 5–6.

norm weaving can be described as a sub-category of norm contestation where the constitutive elements of a cluster are renegotiated and re-preferenced to alter how the overall behaviour guide of the cluster is understood and implemented by actors. Bringing norm weaving under the umbrella of contestation recognises that all agential-driven normative change comes through contestation. Wherever actors try and change the meaning, interpretation, or application of a norm they are engaging in a form of contestation; and norm weaving is no different.

The questions that follow are who engages in norm weaving and when. Here the lens shifts from understanding weaving as a concept to a practice of contestation. On the first question, anyone who has access to the relevant spaces of contestation, or 'normative opportunity structures',[100] can engage in norm weaving. The difference in weaving is twofold – there is a reduced cost of contestation and there is increased complexity in the contestation required. Firstly, rather than trying to contest the content of an individual norm head-on, weaving allows actors to sidestep this conflict and instead engage in contestation around the margins. The existing legitimacy afforded to established norms that are stretched or reproduced can aid actors in their campaigns to have their new behaviour guides widely accepted by the target community. On the other hand, however, this is a far more complex task than simply reinterpreting or violating a single norm. Actors will require the knowledge, resources, and, significantly, the political will to engage in complex contestations to create new behaviour guides that both are appropriate for the new issue area and are close enough to the source material that the audience recognises the inherent legitimacy the norm strands have.

Secondly, the implication here is that weaving is a form of conscious, proactive contestation. The actors who engage in weaving do so to clarify, extend, or push back against norms. I argue that this is especially the case in issue areas where current guidance is lacking. This can be due to the recent emergence of the issue area, a fundamental change in the context, a degradation of existing guidance that makes it inadequate, or social changes that make the prior behaviour guide no longer acceptable. This is somewhat similar to the 'zone of ambiguity' that Sandholtz speaks of, where norms cannot be straightforwardly applied, yet still hold some influence and suasion.[101]

As a theoretical intervention into the norm literature, I posit norm weaving as both a conceptual sub-category of contestation and a type of material practice. In theory, norm weaving speaks to the conceptual process of weaving together idea strands to create normative meanings that go beyond what each single norm entails. As Lund stated on behalf of Fiji, individual strands are weak, but combined they become stronger. From a normative point of view, individual norms alone can be more easily ignored, avoided, radically changed, or violated than a woven web of norms constructed to bring an entire behaviour guide into being. As a practice, norm weaving is perhaps best illustrated through examining how Fiji and Vanuatu have developed, implemented, and promoted new approaches to managing climate mobilities at the level of the state.

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[100]Wiener 2021, 3; Wiener 2018, 28.
[101]Sandholtz 2008, 105.

Fiji and climate mobilities: an archetypal example of norm weaving

Fiji has arguably been the most influential Pacific state in the climate mobilities space in recent years. After gaining significant attention from international news reporting that it carried out the first state-sponsored planned relocation because of climate change,[102] Fiji adopted one of the first climate mobilities-specific policies in the world with its Planned Relocation Guidelines.[103] Since then, Fiji has followed with a further suite of policies including the Displacement Guidelines in the Context of Climate Change and Disasters[104] and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to accompany the Planned Relocation Guidelines.[105] In 2017, Fiji's Ambassador to the UN said developing climate mobilities policies was challenging as 'there was no international experience to build upon'.[106] Further, while international laws that could apply to the management of climate mobilities did and do exist, it is often unclear when and how the obligations they invoke should apply and to whom they should apply. This is particularly the case in the instance of slow-onset hazards and climate-related processes like sea level rise and coastal erosion when there are not acute, identifiable events that force people to move.[107] Drawing on evidence from the policy, practice, and promotion of these ideas by Fijian authorities, I argue these policies did not come from nothing. Instead, they were woven together from strands of existing norms to create a new, interlinked cluster of principles and laws to govern state-level obligations and behaviours around climate mobilities management and protection in this uncertain and undergoverned issue area.

More than 98 per cent of the 1.3 million square kilometres of the territory of the large ocean state of Fiji is ocean.[108] On land, 76 per cent of Fiji's 850,000 citizens live within 5 kilometres of the coast – 27 per cent of these within just a kilometre.[109] Adding to this picture, since 1992 the ocean around Fiji has been rising by almost twice the global average,[110] and around three times the global mean in 2019.[111] These figures show how exposed the population of Fiji is to the effects of climate change and why the management of climate-related mobilities is such a pressing policy concern. The Fijian government is on record as saying in 2023 that it had already completed six state-led climate relocation projects with three ongoing,[112]

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[102]Davenport 2014; Doyle 2017; Witschge 2018.
[103]Ministry of Economy 2018.
[104]Ministry of Economy 2019b.
[105]Climate Change Division 2023.
[106]Khan 2017.
[107]McAdam 2012; Cohen and Bradley 2010; Kälin 2010; Ferris 2019; Ferris and Bergmann 2017.
[108]Fiji has a land area of 18,270 km² and an Exclusive Economic Zone of 1,289,978 km². Hume et al. 2021.
[109]Andrew et al. 2019.
[110]Martin et al. 2018, 2.
[111]Church et al. 2013, 1148.
[112]The six relocations include the initial relocation of Vunidogoloa, alongside Vunisavisavi, Denimanu, Nagasauva, Narikoso, and Tukuraki. Both interviewees from the Climate Change Division confirmed the number of around 40 communities who require assistance, though further inquries suggested that this list is not as fixed or freely available as the frequent quoting of this figure suggests. Kumar 2021; author interview with Filimone Ralogaivau of the Climate Change Division, Government of Fiji on the 9th of March, 2023; author interview with Lebaiatelaite Gaunavinaka: of the Climate Change Division, Government of Fiji on the 13th of January, 2023.

40 communities in need of urgent relocation, and 800 others at risk of relocation or requiring significant assistance soon.[113] More generally, almost 6000 people a year are likely to be displaced by hazards in Fiji and there is a 56 per cent probability that around 35,000 will be displaced by storm surges alone before 2038.[114] This makes the development of clear policies and practices to prepare for and manage climate mobilities understandable – yet the degree to which Fiji's policies establish new domestic obligations that are not present in the international guidance is striking.

Fiji's Planned Relocation Guidelines (2018) were recognised as the first national policy framework developed to manage the process of state-supported relocations of communities moving due to the effects of climate change. The Guidelines state that relocation is appropriate when other efforts to adapt *in situ* to the adverse impacts of climate change are not feasible or have been exhausted. It emphasises that community involvement and engagement throughout the process of relocation is essential, that pre-emptive action should be taken to prevent harm where possible, and that relocation is only seen as the option of last resort.[115] These are key themes that are reproduced throughout the subsequent policies as well.

The process of norm weaving can be seen at multiple points within Fiji's Planned Relocation Guidelines. At a broad level, the document notes the importance of principles contained within the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and multiple human rights conventions. The influence of these key international agreements, principles, and declarations is exemplified by the government's stated commitment to observing 'all international norms and standards available' regarding relocations and other forms of 'rights-based' responses to climate change.[116] What is significant, however, is these norms are being stretched beyond their initial contexts and applied to situations they were not initially envisioned for. This is how the new strands for the weaving have been created in this instance.

One of the best discrete examples of norm weaving is how the guidelines explicitly recognise that the state has the 'primary duty and responsibility to provide minimum standard protection and assistance to people at risk of, or affected by disasters and environmental change'.[117] On the one hand, this reflects the content of UN General Assembly resolution 46/182,[118] which affirms states have the primary responsibility to protect people within their borders, but it also weaves in jurisprudence from the European Court of Human Rights and UN Human Rights Committee on state obligations to prevent harm from foreseeable environmental

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[113]As Piggott-McKellar and McMichael note, the official number of sites identified by government officials for relocation vary according to source and change over time. Around 42 communities are in need of relocation and 800 at risk of needing assistance in the future seem to the be the most oft-quoted figures. Piggott-McKellar and McMichael 2021; Thornton et al. 2020.

[114]Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre 2018, 4.

[115]Ministry of Economy 2018; McMichael and Katonivualiku 2019; Moore 2019.

[116]Ministry of Economy 2018, 5.

[117]Ibid.

[118]UN General Assembly 1991, paras. 3–4.

hazards,[119] and broader principles of the UNFCCC on climate and environmental responsibility.[120] This is a clear archetypal example of weaving, where strands of existing ideas have been stretched into or reproduced for a new context, before being woven together.

Weaving is also visible in how the policy takes an explicitly human rights-based approach to designing and implementing mobility solutions. The policy draws on foundational human rights documents like the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Cultural, Economic, and Social Rights, but reproduces and contextualises them for instances of climate mobilities by referencing the Paris Agreement and the environmental obligations this entails at the same time.[121] Norms regarding marginalised groups and the differentiated needs they have are also recognised, with 'women, elderly, and persons with disabilities' referenced specifically as groups that must be 'meaningfully engaged' with to ensure their needs are met and their rights are upheld.[122] This links to broader ideas about principles of consultation and participation that draw not just on basic human rights, but also more specific ideas including rights to voluntary movement and to not be arbitrarily displaced.[123] Principles of participation are also enshrined within the Paris Agreement,[124] which shows how intertwined these ideas are in practice and why the process of norm weaving especially makes sense in the context of climate mobilities governance. These principles are manifested in the policy with the acknowledgement that relocation is only appropriate when all other measures to adapt to the adverse impacts of climate change have been exhausted or deemed unfeasible, and can only be conducted when the community is meaningfully engaged and involved throughout the process.[125] Again, multiple strands of existing international norms have been stretched and copied before being woven together to create new guidance on how these ideas should apply to climate mobilities and how actors should behave. This final step of weaving the strands back together adds an additional level of complexity that reflects the interlinked nature of norm clusters which extends theories beyond more simplistic concepts of stretching, grafting, or copying.

Finally, flagging the intent for these ideas to be spread beyond the borders of Fiji, the policy suggests that a regional approach should be taken. A 'regional approach refers to bringing domestic policies in accordance with regional existing norms' through 'a set of comprehensive integration policies, promoting inter-state collaboration' and the sharing of 'good examples'.[126] This both recognises the high probability of cross-border movements and advocates for the diffusion and transfer of norms and policy between states in the region.[127] The implication is these are

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[119]*Case of Öneryildiz v. Turkey* 2004, paras. 71–2; *Case of Budayeva and Others v. Russia* 2008, 128–35; Human Rights Committee 2020.
[120]UN General Assembly 1992, 1994.
[121]Ministry of Economy 2018, 8.
[122]Ibid.
[123]Oloka-Onyango 2010, 10.
[124]Paris Agreement 2015, 2, 16.
[125]Ministry of Economy 2018; McMichael and Katonivualiku 2019, 288.
[126]Ministry of Economy 2018, 9.
[127]Ibid.

not entirely domestic policies for domestic audiences – there is the intention for this to be a form of proactive contestation, where entrepreneurial weavings are promoted to an international audience. This intention is further signalled by how this ostensibly domestic-facing policy was introduced. The Planned Relocation Guidelines were unveiled, not in Fiji, but at a side event during COP24 in Katowice, Poland. This template was reproduced a year later, in 2019, at COP25 in Madrid, Spain. In front of representatives of donors, multilateral development banks, and country delegates, Fiji's Displacement Guidelines were launched.[128]

The companion set of Displacement Guidelines builds on the Relocation Guidelines, whilst also recognising a broader range of displacement and solutions, including multiple forms of temporary, recurrent, and permanent displacement.[129] Again, a rights-based approach reflective of the Planned Relocation Guidelines is adopted. Within the Displacement Guidelines 'fundamental principles of humanity and free movement of people' are emphasised, as is the state's primary responsibility to provide protection and ensure rights are upheld.[130] SDG 13 on Climate Action and Article 8 of the Paris Agreement are specifically referenced again, and this time the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (hereafter Guiding Principles) are directly acknowledged.[131] In particular, the idea is drawn out that the state has primary responsibility for providing protection and assistance to internally displaced persons (IDPs) and, significantly, 'avoiding conditions that might lead to displacement' and ensuring 'all feasible alternatives are explored to avoid displacement'.[132] Within this statement alone, we see elements of environmental agreements such as the precautionary principle from the UNFCCC being brought into conversation with the IDP protections of the Guiding Principles and acknowledgement of pre-emptive flight from the Refugee Convention, whilst also being contextualised for the Fijian experience of climate mobilities.

The third policy in this set, the SOPs, also shows evidence of norm weaving in their construction. Designed to 'support the successful operationalisation' of the Planned Relocation Guidelines, the SOPs provide 'structure and detail' to processes to ensure practices align with the principles set out in the original guidelines. In this way, the SOPs contribute not just to weaving at the level of international norms, but also interlink the Planned Relocation Guidelines and Displacement Guidelines with other climate-related policies such as the Climate Relocation of Communities Trust Fund and the Fijian Climate Act.[133] A new development in the SOPs, however, is the inclusion of language on human security. While principles and norms associated with human security were present in the earlier guidelines, the concept was never directly mentioned. We can see here how another bundle of reproduced international norm threads has been woven into the tapestry of protections, rights, and obligations that constitute Fiji's climate mobilities management policy cluster. This builds on the human-focused elements of earlier guidelines and brings together the 'interlinked elements of protection and participation' that were

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[128]Theys 2021, 210.
[129]Lund 2021, 14; Ministry of Economy 2019b.
[130]Ministry of Economy 2019b, 7.
[131]Ibid.
[132]Ibid.
[133]Climate Change Division 2023.

'consciously embedded' into all aspects of the SOPs.[134] While the SOPs reference all the previously woven norms in much the same way as prior policies, by this stage there is no need to go through the entire process of weaving again. Instead, Fiji can draw on their now established collection of norms from previously established policies. The content and construction of these policies show not just that Fijian authorities are developing and implementing normative protections for those affected by climate mobilities – but also that these protections have been created through weaving reproduced and stretched ideas from existing norm clusters and recombining them.

The empirics here make a compelling case for entrepreneurial policy leadership and norm contestation by Fiji. However, the significance of this case is that it also paints a comprehensive picture of how norm weaving can occur in practice. Over time, a range of policies were developed that drew on existing ideas embedded in international, regional, and domestic law and norms. The new policies combined these ideas in novel ways to create new understandings of how states should act regarding instances of probable or actual climate mobilities. Solidifying this as a form of contestation rather than domestic policy innovation, however, is that these domestic-level policies were actively promoted on a global stage in an attempt to shift intersubjective understandings of acceptable practices in the climate mobilities space.

Vanuatu and climate mobilities: different policy, similar process

The other Pacific state often cited for its pioneering work on climate mobilities policy is Vanuatu. Vanuatu published its National Policy on Climate Change and Disaster-Induced Displacement (NPCCDID) in 2018. This added to an expansive suite of laws and policies around climate and disaster preparedness, response, displacement, and risk reduction – many of which were the first of their kind in the Pacific.[135] While a broader policy than the Fijian examples, Vanuatu's flagship NPCCDID has been described as 'one of the best examples of a national policy on displacement caused by climate change',[136] and 'one of the world's most progressive policies on climate-driven displacement'.[137] Within this policy, we can see another example of how norm weaving occurs in practice.

Developed in close conjunction with the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), the NPCCDID allowed ni-Vanuatu policymakers and implementers to mitigate the challenges of climate mobilities and 'prepare, plan, and respond to the short-term and long-term needs of displacement'.[138] IOM's Chief of Mission, Lesikimakuata Korovavala noted in 2017, Vanuatu was 'venturing into new territory with this initiative', and was one of the 'first countries in the world to prepare such a policy'.[139] Despite the unique and world-leading nature of the NPCCDID,

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[134]Ibid., sec. 1, pp. 1–2.
[135]Wewerinke-Singh and Van Geelen 2018, 16.
[136]Ferris 2019, 438.
[137]Wewerinke-Singh and Van Geelen 2018, 17; McDonnell 2021.
[138]International Organisation for Migration 2018.
[139]Wewerinke-Singh and Van Geelen 2018, 17.

however, it was not created from scratch; it was woven together from elements of existing laws and norms.

Similarly to the Fijian policies, Vanuatu's NPCCDID is filled with specific references to international frameworks including the SDGs, Sendai Framework, UNFCCC, Guiding Principles, and Agenda for the Protection of Cross-Border Displaced Persons. The explicitly stated goal of the document is to draw 'on the principles included in these global, regional and national frameworks to respond to needs of local communities in Vanuatu'.[140] These principles and the norms they are embedded in have not simply been reproduced in full; however, relevant strands of norm clusters have been stretched or reproduced before being woven back together to create a new behaviour guide around climate mobilities management for the ni-Vanuatu context. We can see this in five key areas: the NPCCDID understanding of displacement; the focus on durable solutions; in how ideas around disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation are incorporated; in how human rights are addressed; and finally in how formal and informal Pacific principles and ideas are woven throughout the policy.

The impetus for the development of the NPCCDID came from 'the intensifying need to evacuate people facing flood, cyclones and other hazards, as well as communities facing eviction and land conflicts'.[141] To craft the definition of who counts and can claim the protections and rights afforded to those who are displaced or at risk of displacement from climate-related hazards and disasters, policymakers leant heavily on the more expansive definition of displacement advanced in the Guiding Principles.[142] Displacement in the policy is very broadly defined as 'a process whereby individuals and communities are obliged to move either temporarily or permanently because they are no longer able to reside on the land on which they live or lose access to land and natural resources upon which their livelihoods depend'.[143] Notably, this is not a clone of the Guiding Principles definition. Instead, elements of land rights and livelihood preservation are woven in from Human Rights law and the definition is tailored to the specific context that Vanuatu is facing. The policy looks to operationalise this in Strategic Area Six, where community-led processes for negotiating new land arrangements, and land acquisition options for customary landholders are foregrounded. When displacement is temporary, there is a recognition of the importance of not just ensuring people can return, but the need to assist them to 'build-back-safer' in Action 6.11.[144]

Building on the definition of displacement though, the second key focus of the NPCCDID weaves in more specific types of protections, particularly norms relating to long-term recovery and durable solutions. This is done through references to the Agenda for the Protection of Cross-Border Displaced Persons in the Context of Disasters and Climate Change, the Guiding Principles for Early Recovery, and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Framework on Durable Solutions,[145] and

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[140]Vanuatu National Disaster Management Office 2018, 7.
[141]Ibid.
[142]Wewerinke-Singh and Van Geelen 2018, 4; Vanuatu National Disaster Management Office 2018, 12; Kälin 2008.
[143]Vanuatu National Disaster Management Office 2018, 9; McDonnell 2021, 284.
[144]Vanuatu National Disaster Management Office 2018, 34–36.
[145]Ibid., 12.

it manifests in the policy identifying the specific need to address 'the long-term recovery and development needs of communities affected by displacement'.[146] As well as incorporating strands from these frameworks, we can see that this element of the policy draws on the Guiding Principles, especially Principles 28 and 29 on the obligation of the state to establish conditions and provide the means for displaced persons to fully participate in the planning and management of their voluntary return or resettlement and that those who have returned or resettled shall be assisted in the recovery of their property and possessions, compensated when this is not possible, and be free from discrimination on the basis of their displacement – which themselves are built upon the foundations laid within the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Fourth Geneva Convention, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, and various jurisprudence from UN committees and regional human rights courts.[147] In the policy, this manifests itself in Action 3.3, which calls for policymakers to 'develop protection-centred guidelines to assist community and other stakeholders identify appropriate durable solutions options', as well as specific standard operating procedures for instances of return and reintegration, local integration, evictions, and planned relocations.[148] In effect, this creates a thickly woven mat of interconnected protections for those moving as a result of climate change – protections that previously were unlikely to have been considered to apply in this context.

The third key area is where the NPCCDID has borrowed norms of disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation, combined them with ideas from the Guiding Principles, and applied them in the context of climate mobilities. This is referenced concerning 'aims to reduce the triggers of displacement as much as possible'.[149] Elements of the literature and protections around development-related displacement are also mentioned concerning how they might apply in the context of climate mobilities.[150] Broadly, these types of protections and obligations are viewed through the lens of the UNFCCC and the resolutions stemming from COPs, as well as the SDGs.[151] Domestically, though, they are anchored in Vanuatu's Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction Policy.[152] The overlapping aspects of these frameworks and principles are woven together in Strategic Area 2 of the policy, which focuses on evidence, information, and monitoring. Priorities are given to multi-hazard mapping initiatives, linking this work to planning for mobilities, and ensuring that communities can participate in and benefit from the data being collected.[153] The language of disaster risk reduction and references to the Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction Policy are littered throughout the NPCCDID – the Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction Policy is specifically mentioned 14 times in the main text of the NPCCDID and referenced another six

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[146]Ibid., 7.
[147]Kälin 2008, 127–42.
[148]Vanuatu National Disaster Management Office 2018, 26–28.
[149]Ibid., 7.
[150]Ibid., 11.
[151]Ibid., 12.
[152]Ibid., 7.
[153]Ibid., 24–25.

times in the footnotes.[154] Another issue that permeates the entire NPCCDID in this way is human rights.

In the fourth area, it is notable not just how the NPCCDID addresses issues of human rights broadly, but also how it highlights specific rights issues like gender equality and cultural protections for Indigenous persons. As part of the policy vision, it is noted that 'all people have the right to safety, protection, dignity, health and well-being, freed from discrimination of any kind, and many other rights as reflected in Vanuatu's People's Plan 2030'.[155] What is interesting is how the norm weaving in this instance has chosen specific strands of rights, including gender rights, to highlight in particular through the construction of the NPCCDID. Gender is identified as a cross-cutting issue for the policy,[156] with specific attention given to the need for gender-responsive approaches to planning for and implementing durable solutions.[157] Action 2.3 promotes gender-inclusive participatory methodologies around hazard mapping,[158] Action 5.3 incorporates gender and protection concerns into the planning of physical and social solutions, Action 5.8 focuses on including women's organisations and other community-led groups in processes to improve measures related to disaster risk reduction, safety, and security for women,[159] and Action 6.9 looks to make emergency shelter options gender-responsive.[160] Interestingly, issues of gender rights have been woven throughout many sections of the NPCCDID, rather than being addressed solely in isolation. This shows the strength that processes of norm weaving can offer, creating something greater than the sum of its discrete elements. In each of these four cases, the original norms are reproduced outside of their initial context in a way more akin to grafting or copying than the stretching that dominated the Fijian example. However, there are strong similarities in how these ideas are then interwoven with and between each other to craft a new nuanced and complex governance guide to manage practices in this emerging issue area.

As well as highlighting the links to existing frameworks, laws, and norms, the NPCCDID also positions itself as filling a unique gap.[161] The uniqueness of the ni-Vanuatu policy is that it:

> is one of the first countries regionally and globally to prepare a comprehensive policy on internal displacement stemming from disasters and climate change which includes recommended actions on return and reintegration, local integration and planned relocation, as well as integrating human mobility into development planning across government.[162]

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[154]Ibid.

[155]Ibid., 17.

[156]Ibid., 8.

[157]Ibid., 17.

[158]Ibid., 24.

[159]Ibid., 32.

[160]Ibid., 36.

[161]The policy does note that although there were no other domestic-level policies at the time of its release, other states like Fiji, Bangladesh, Nepal, and the Maldives were in the process of developing their own frameworks. Ibid., 13.

[162]Ibid., 13.

This shows the purpose of norm weaving as a form of contestation. The strands of different regimes are stretched or reproduced and rewoven to form a new interlinked assortment of protections, rights, and obligations in a previously inadequately governed issue area. It is inherently a proactive form of contestation, utilising existing ideas to weave something new and promote it to the world.

Norm weaving: localised examples with global implications

As these cases show, norm weaving is a specific type of contestation. Reflecting the range of ways the term has been utilised in norm research, contestation is defined broadly here as all practices that affect the meaning, interpretation, or application of norms. Norm weaving, specifically though, is the active process of weaving together strands of analogous norm clusters to create or clarify a behaviour guide for a new, undergoverned, or inadequately governed issue area. Rather than radically contesting the validity or meaning of *individual* norms, however, this form of contestation focuses on how norms are grouped and arranged. Actors can use the established validity of existing norms that are stretched or reproduced to lend legitimacy to their contestations and reduce the threshold of investment required to contest norms, in comparison to directly challenging the meaning, interpretation, or validity of a single norm. Instead of a deep contestation of one norm or the authoring of a norm from scratch, there is limited contestation of multiple norms and how they are arranged. We can see this in both cases, as rights and principles are not questioned, but rather consideration is given to how best approach the issue and which aspects should be foregrounded.

Two methods of producing the strands to weave with are highlighted in these cases: stretching and reproduction. Firstly, stretching occurs when norms are pushed beyond the boundaries of what is generally acceptable without crossing the threshold to outright violation.[163] This reflects the range of acceptability and flexibility that norms embody. Betts has already applied this thinking to the stretching of clusters and regimes. Here, norm clusters are stretched to include issues or practices that deviate from those initially pro/prescribed.[164] Stretching may often fall under the umbrella of norm weaving, particularly when new norms are included in the altered cluster to reinforce the newly broadened cluster or the stretched cluster is reordered to better fit the new issue area. This method is far more prevalent in the Fijian case, where more focused policies are created in adjacent issue areas and ideas are expanded beyond their initial remit to apply in this new context.

As the metaphor suggests, the drawback of stretching is that if principles are stretched too far they may lose their suasion or become too thin and broad that they apply both everywhere and nowhere. This can result in norms losing the resonance they may have had or being over-invoked to the point their violation becomes normalised. Counter to this, being able to stretch norms from directly adjacent issue areas can lend a great deal of legitimacy to the contestations of actors and the clusters that they are weaving. This is largely because stretching can leave

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[163]Farrell 2005, 460.
[164]Betts 2013, 30; Betts 2014.

norms in touch with their original context and the foundational rules that applied. The linkages between norms, as Fehl describes them, can be both an important empirical reality and a strategic tool to create an additional level of meaning within and between clusters.[165]

Secondly, norms can be reproduced so that accepted principles from non-adjacent areas can be transplanted into the middle of a new cluster and weaved into its constitution. These are not carbon copies of norms, but rather new evolutions. In this sense, Price's metaphor of normative 'rooting and branching' through grafting is most applicable. There is a close genealogical heritage between the newly reproduced norm and the parent copy; however, this is affected by the 'conscious manipulation' of the actors involved in the contestation.[166] We see this method more prominently in the ni-Vanuatu case, where ideas are brought from a range of issue areas and combined within one core policy that attempts to govern a wide range of issues. Being able to reproduce ideas and remove them entirely from the clusters they were grounded within allows the actors additional flexibility in how these ideas are applied and contextualised.

Copying and grafting norms avoids overstretching principles, but it does run the risk of losing suasion and resonance by moving the norm too far from its original context and the fundamental norms and rules that underpinned it. This is especially the case if the linkages within the new cluster are not widely accepted.[167] Norms operate in clusters, not alone – so norms must gel within the new cluster to work effectively. Transplanting individual norms also runs the risk of them being weakly woven into the new cluster, leaving them susceptible to violation or unpicking through contestation. For example, Staunton and Ralph have noted that in certain circumstances, grafting norms on related, but distinct counterparts can dilute the normative power of the entire apparatus through unresolved clashes during application.[168] These sorts of clashes, contradictions, collisions, or interface conflicts are almost inevitable in emergent norm clusters in complex environments; however, it is agents who have the power to frame them as problematic or resolvable and thereby cope with or utilise these dynamics.[169] For both stretching and reproducing strands for weaving, the measure of success will depend on how the contestations are received by the target audience – broad acceptance and intersubjective convergence of ideas is what signals the promotion of the woven collection of stretched or reproduced norms has been a success.

In terms of the specifics of the norms that have been stretched and copied, Table 1 provides a comprehensive, but not exhaustive list to highlight what this style of weaving looks like. Here I do not seek to contribute a complete mapping of each norm in the emerging climate mobilities cluster in minute detail – especially as this fluid and emerging area is subject to constant contestation and change. Due to the acknowledgment that norms do not exist in isolation, I also resist focusing too narrowly on identifying single norms. Instead, these illustrations highlight

[165]Fehl 2023; Fehl and Rosert 2020.
[166]Price 1998, 628.
[167]Fehl 2023.
[168]Staunton and Ralph 2020.
[169]Gholiagha et al. 2020; Kreuder-Sonnen and Zürn 2020; Lesch 2021; Lesch and Loh 2022.

Table 1. Building blocks of the climate mobilities norm cluster

Cluster type	Normative principles copied	Key places norms are copied from	Key norms copied
Human rights cluster	Core rights	UDHR, ICCPR, ICESCR	Right to life, right to an adequate standard of living
	Indigenous rights	UNDRIP	Right to not be disposed of lands, right to practice and maintain cultural traditions, right to dignity and diversity of cultures
	Gender equality	CEAFDAW	Right to freedom without discrimination, right for women to enjoy adequate living conditions
	Environment rights	UNFCCC, UNGA/76/L.75	Right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment, principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, polluter pays principle, principles of loss and damage
Humanitarian assistance cluster	States hold primary protection obligations	UNGA 46/182	Affected states have the primary obligation to initiate and provide protection
	Protection of civilians during disasters	GCIV, IASC operational guidelines on protection of persons in situations of natural disasters	Protection based on need, requirement for people to participate in their solutions, states as holding primary protection duty
	Protection from foreseeable hazards	Sendai and Hyogo frameworks, PDD, SDG 13	State obligation to take urgent action to address the drivers and impacts of climate change, state obligation to take preventative action to prepare for displacement before disasters occur, state obligation to integrate risk reduction across all sectors

(*Continued*)

Table 1. (*Continued.*)

Cluster type	Normative principles copied	Key places norms are copied from	Key norms copied
	Obligation for international community to assist states to fulfil their duties	UNFCCC, WIM	International community's obligation to assist states to protect, international community's obligation to intervene when states fail to protect
Refugee cluster	Rights and protections for the displaced	Refugee convention, UNHCR	Right to flee, right to protection from the international community if you cannot claim protection from your state, right to specific assistance and protection when displaced across borders
	Durable solutions	Refugee convention, guiding principles, IASC	Principle that displacement should last no longer than required by the circumstances, Right to a durable solution
IDP cluster	Rights and protections for the internally displaced	Guiding principles	Equal rights for the internally displaced, right to have all alternatives to displacement explored beforehand, right against displacement for those with a special dependency on their land
	Rights and protections for the environmentally displaced	Guiding principles, IASC, Sendai and Hyogo frameworks	Rights and protections for those displaced by climate change and disasters

the broader dynamics of norm weaving and how it sits in relation to other theories of norm contestation and change. It helps us to understand how collections of norms are contested and created, while the norms in their original clusters are left largely unchallenged.

In this instance, we can see that Fiji and Vanuatu have stretched key norms around state responsibility and individual rights from human rights regimes, while principles of protection for those on the move have been taken from areas of forced displacement. More specific ideas have been reproduced and extended

as well. The recognition that environmental hazards can trigger rights and obligations around displacement and mobility has been reproduced from the Guiding Principles but then placed within the broader context of this new localised behaviour guide. In the humanitarianism space, norms around minimum standards of rights during a crisis have been copied from documents including the Fourth Geneva Convention, while other elements such as the idea that some rights take precedence over others temporarily have also been incorporated – particularly around evacuations and immediate relief from disasters. More specific ideas around the protection of specific groups and protection in certain circumstances have also been taken and incorporated into the respective policies and approaches to climate mobilities of Fiji and Vanuatu. Norms from areas of Indigenous rights, gender equality, environmental rights, cultural rights, and sustainable development have all been scavenged and woven together to create a focused framework of protection and practice around climate mobilities, as Table 1 shows.

The diffusion of weaving and its implications

Contesting norms does not guarantee change. Norms' suasion comes from their sharedness. Therefore, normative change only occurs when the intersubjectively agreed-upon notions of what practices are or are not acceptable in a certain situation change. In the case of climate mobilities, several recent developments suggest the weaving contestations of Fijian and ni-Vanuatu actors have been successful and are precipitating a new climate mobilities cluster. This is reflected in similar policy developments in Solomon Islands, New Zealand, and most significantly the establishment of a regional framework on climate mobilities in the Pacific.

On 28 July 2022, the Cabinet of Solomon Islands approved a set of Planned Relocation Guidelines,[170] making it only the second state in the world to adopt a climate relocation-focused policy – after Fiji.[171] These guidelines share the same title as the initial Fijian policy, yet their makeup is an amalgamation of the structure and principles of both the Fijian and ni-Vanuatu policies. Interviews confirmed that despite the policy being specifically tailored to the Solomon Island context, the pathways taken by Fijian and Vanuatu were considered during the initial drafting process of the Guidelines.[172] The process to develop a climate mobilities policy is also underway in New Zealand. Consultations have been conducted and the government intends to conduct an inquiry into climate adaptation that is due to report back in 2024. Its findings will inform the development of a Climate Change Adaptation Bill and specific policy focused on the process of 'community-led retreat' – which is a localised term for planned relocations.[173] In these cases, the newly adopting actors have no need to engage in significant weaving themselves. Rather, they are simply adopting a new norm cluster – with all the variations of localisation, interpretation, translation, and implementation that generally occur.

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[170]International Organisation for Migration 2023.

[171]Gini et al. 2024.

[172]Author interview with Rex Solo of the International Organisation of Migration in Solomon Islands on the 15th of August of 2023.

[173]Ministry for the Environment 2023.

The woven contestations of Fiji and Vanuatu are also having regional impacts. At the 2023 52nd Pacific Islands Forum, held in Rarotonga, Cook Islands, Pacific leaders endorsed a world-first regional agreement on climate mobility.[174] The Pacific Regional Framework on Climate Mobility is a document designed to 'guide Pacific Islands Forum governments, communities, non-state actors and partners in ensuring rights-based and people-centred movement in the context of climate change'.[175] Significantly, a draft of the framework specifically noted Fiji and Vanuatu's policies as part of the 'inspiration' behind the document's development.[176] While these references were edited out of the final text, the framework does reflect many of the principles set out in the domestic policies and specifically calls for the sharing of lessons and collaboration between Pacific states.[177] This suggests the weaving done by Fiji and Vanuatu is beginning to have success in persuading other states and actors to adopt similar views on how to manage climate mobilities. This is unlikely to signal a firm consensus on the issue, but rather a broad acknowledgement of the terms of reference moving forward and a commitment to manage tensions and collectively work towards a solution.[178]

I argue this framework could mark the genesis of a Pacific-led norm cluster on how to manage climate mobilities. It is a nascent cluster, but as instances of climate mobilities continue to increase and governments look at policy solutions for related issues, these ideas are likely to be shared more widely and frequently. More broadly, as well, it offers an example of successful norm weaving. It is unlikely this style of contestation is localised to just these Oceanic actors. Future work is needed to assess where else weaving has been used to extend normative governance into undergoverned and emerging issue areas. It is likely these cases will involve other small states, but it is also important that we reflect on how similar methods of contestation can be used by non-state actors to express their agency and power.

Conclusion

The actions of Fiji and Vanuatu in developing policies to address climate mobilities offer archetypal examples of norm weaving. These actors have engaged in weaving contestation by variously stretching and reproducing several strands of existing norm clusters, before weaving them together to create new, stronger behaviour guides in areas with previously limited or inadequate governance. In this instance, the contesting actors of Fiji and Vanuatu borrowed the ideas – and attached legitimacy – from adjacent norm clusters, like the human rights, humanitarian, internal displacement, and refugee protection clusters. These norms were then stretched or copied, before being woven together – in similar, but still contextually specific ways – to create a new woven collection of norms.

Fiji began by stretching norms to create a set of Planned Relocation Guidelines, before these themselves were woven into a larger tapestry of climate

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[174]McAdam 2023.
[175]Pacific Islands Forum 2023b.
[176]Pacific Islands Forum 2023a, 12.
[177]Pacific Islands Forum 2023b.
[178]Shiu et al. 2023.

mobilities-related policies, practices, and law. Vanuatu, in contrast, focused on a single document that contextualised a range of issues relating to climate mobilities and specifically displacement. By reproducing and pulling together a range of different ideas based on established norms, Vanuatu was able to weave together a new behaviour guide for climate mobilities from norms that previously only explicitly applied to other issues areas. Despite differences around how practices should be funded and levels of implementation, the similarity between the Fijian and ni-Vanuatu policies on managing climate mobilities suggests there is a great deal of consensus on these issues. As greater intersubjective agreement emerges around which norms should govern climate mobilities and how they should be clustered, the practices of early adopters will likely shape the basis for this norm cluster and the starting point for contestations around its meaning.

While the conceptual foundations of this paper were laid by the actions of these key Pacific Island states, there is the potential for the theory to be used to understand a range of other cases across contexts. These two cases initially appeared unusual, as they had invested disproportional efforts into extending obligations into spaces where governance was previously limited, and obligations were unclear. Yet it is unlikely these are isolated cases. Borrowing the framing of roots and routes, the norm weaving concept is rooted in the Pacific, but it may travel many routes around the world to illuminate other examples of norm cluster change and emergence.[179] Further research is required to identify other examples of norm weaving being utilised by other actors – both state and non-state – and in other emerging, changing, or inadequately governed issue areas. Identifying and exploring more cases of weaving will help scholars to further develop this new conceptual tool and allow us to better understand how clusters of norms emerge and change.

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[179]Bonnemaison 1984; Hau'ofa 1994; Farbotko et al. 2018, 395.

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