

Tracing the geographies of displacement and loss in an era of climate change



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Introduction

‘To know the world that progress has left to us, we must track shifting patches of ruination’ (Anna Tsing, 2015).

- Need to go beyond paying solemn witness to harm
- Must fortify and amplify a politics of climate justice focused on responsibility, restoration and reparation.

Paper aims:

- bring into conversation ideas from ‘loss and damage’ and the environmental humanities
- draw on a longitudinal study of adaptation
- trace geography of vulnerability through the themes of loss, absence, substitution and surprise as related to displacement
- reflect on contributions of development studies



Climate-related displacement

Continuation of patterns of development-induced displacement

Climate-related displacement takes various forms:

- forced or distress migration
- state-led, planned resettlement
- community-led relocation.

The global map of climate-related displacement ‘hotspots’ conveniently doubles as a map of countries historically least responsible for greenhouse gas emissions.

Amitav Ghosh (2016) writes that climate change reverses the temporal order of modernity in that,

“those at the margins are the first to experience the future that awaits us all”.



Negotiating 'Loss and Damage'

...failure of mitigation, limits of adaptation

Establishment of Warsaw International Mechanism (WIM) for Loss and Damage at the UNFCCC COP(13) in Warsaw (2013) and re-endorsed in the Paris Agreement (2015)

Barnett et al. (2016) identify loss as encompassing:

phenomena that constitute the meaning of entire societies, for example landscapes (such as ice fields); places (such as neighbourhoods); cultures (such as those of indigenous peoples); and social cohesion (such as belonging to a community of knowledge or practice). They also include... daily practices (such as gardening); and occupational identities (such as those of farmers and fishers)".

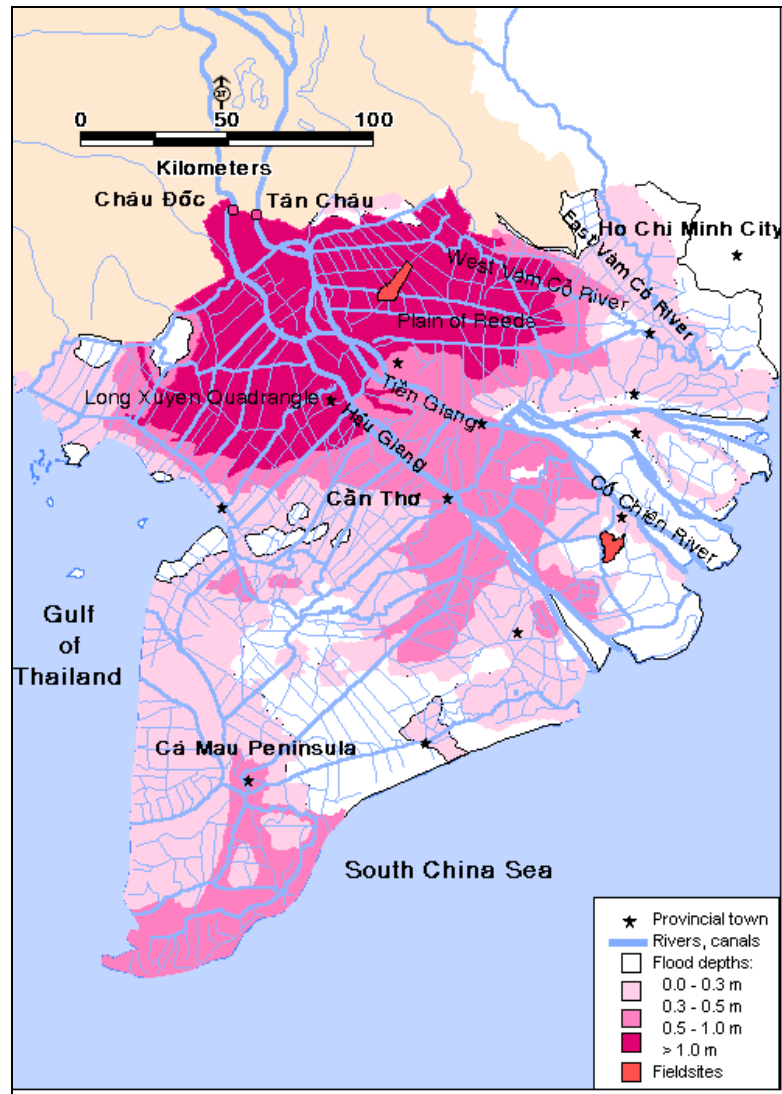
Val Plumwood's (2008) idea of '**shadow places**' seeks to illuminate the multiple unacknowledged, disregarded places that are unwittingly harmed.

Concept of '**sacrifice zones**' captures a sense of intent. Sacrifice zones are "spaces, areas, habitats and tracts of land that have been destroyed, poisoned or otherwise rendered uninhabitable *in return for* some sort of benefit" (Reinert, 2018).

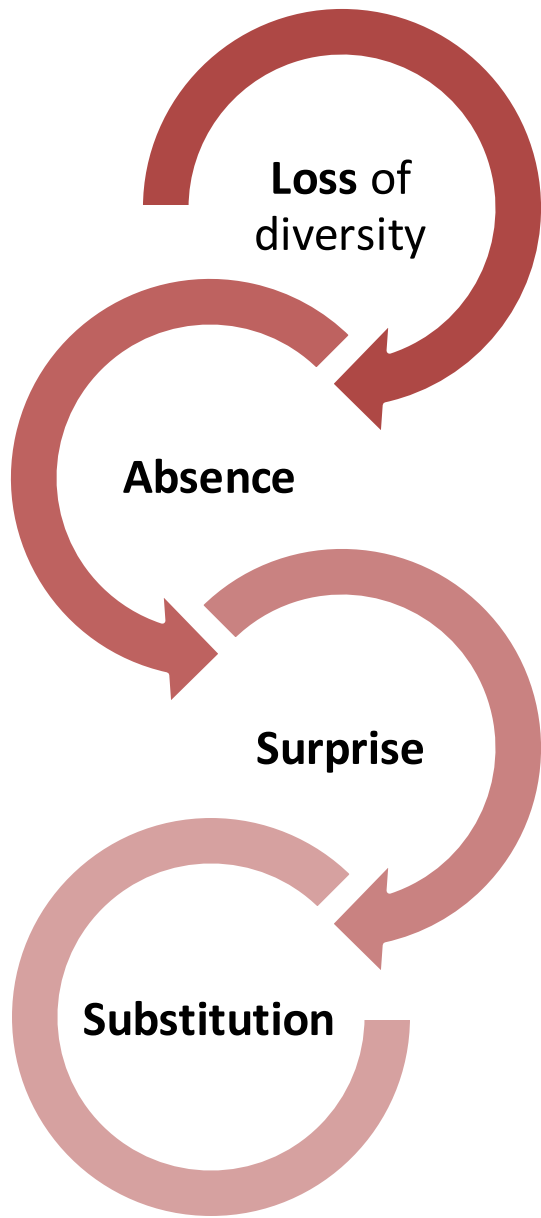


Development in the shadow of climate change

‘climate hotspot’ of the Mekong Delta, Vietnam



Encountering the geographies of loss at the limits of adaptation

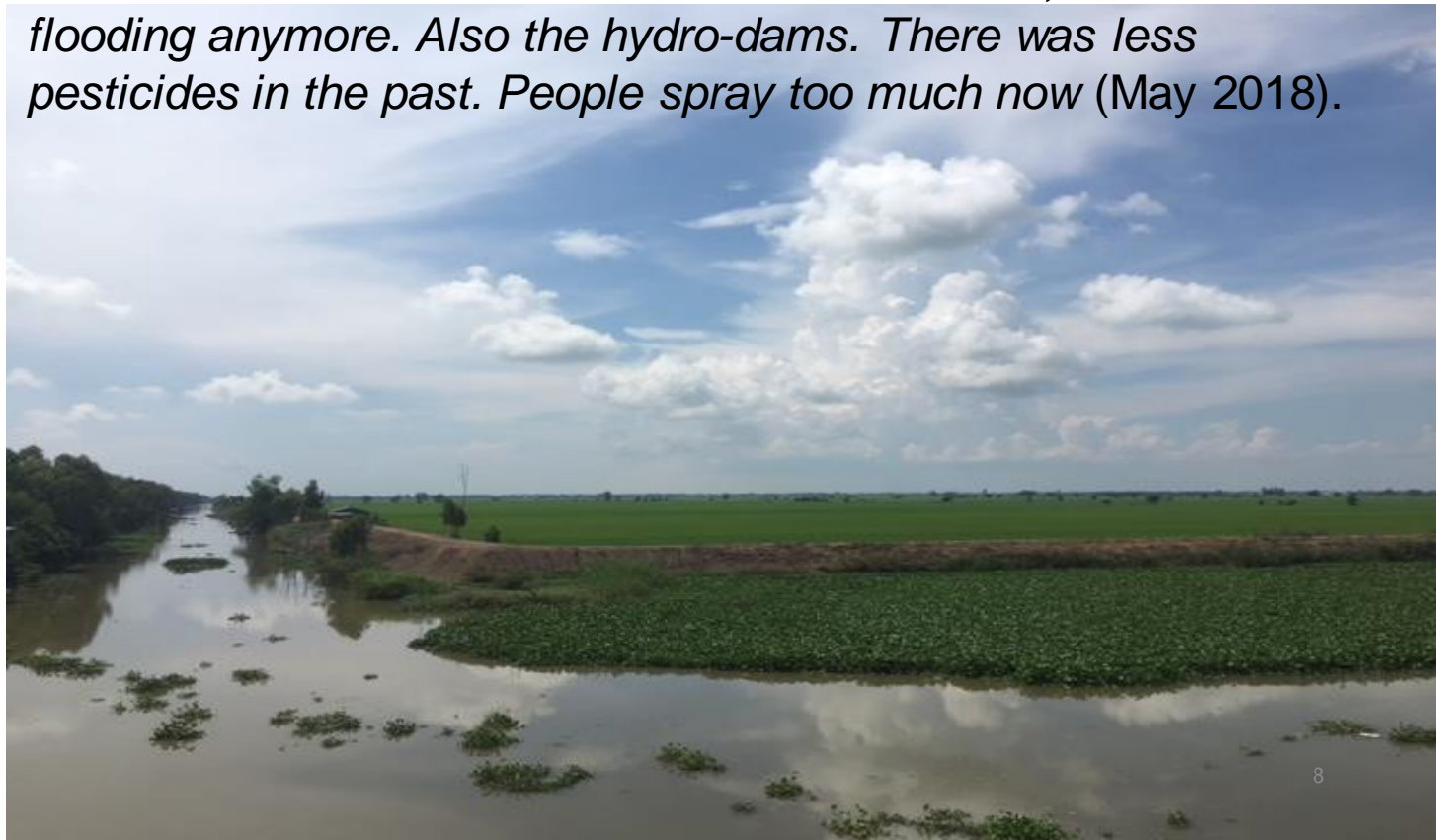


Mr Van's reflections (#28):

I moved here in 1966 and never really had land. I've always done labouring and fishing. In the past, I used to get work harvesting the rice but now it is all by machine. I used to go out in a small boat and could catch fish all year round, but not anymore. In the past, when there were no high [flood] dykes you could go by boat on the fields but now with the dykes, you can't catch fish anymore. The fish numbers have gone down, so I swapped fishing for catching crabs and snails. The fish have declined because there is less water than before, there is no flooding anymore. Also the hydro-dams. There was less pesticides in the past. People spray too much now (May 2018).



Loss of
diversity



**Absence
and the
uncanny
landscape**



Co Diep explained:

I try to make enough money by catching fish and making baskets from the water hyacinth I collect with my small boat. I don't fish in the canals – there are not enough fish anymore, so it is not worthwhile. When people here had two rice crops we still had fish in the fields, but now because people [grow three crops and] use chemicals the fish have disappeared. My husband and I work as labourers, making just 100 000 vnd (A\$6) per day. When labouring work isn't available I make baskets, averaging about 2 a day which brings in about \$4.5 dollars. (May 2018).

**Surprise –
menace and
opportunity
of water
hyacinth**



**Substitution
of natural
commons
with human-
made capital**



Rise in climate-related displacement

Planned resettlement – ‘living with the floods’

Challenges with resettlement:

Debt and dependency

Increase in cost of living

Disruption of social networks

Decline in labouring opportunities

Deterioration in environmental conditions

Limited off-farm employment and livelihood diversification opportunities




Rise in climate-related displacement

Rise in outmigration – to the city and overseas



Conclusion

Reflections for development studies



It is through carefully listening, documenting and sharing stories of loss and displacement, as well as hopeful stories of recovery and renewal, that ethical connections can be forged, understandings deepened, and responsible actions taken to avoid, or at least minimise, future harm – this is the promise of climate justice storytelling.

Thank you
@fionapmiller
@shadowplacesnetwork



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