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**RESEARCHING THE REPUBLIC OF NAURU:
A SURVEY ON KNOWLEDGE GAPS**

Bachelor's thesis

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I hereby declare that I have compiled the paper independently and all works, important standpoints and data by other authors has been properly referenced and the same paper has not been previously presented for grading.

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this research is to fill gaps in existing knowledge concerning the Republic of Nauru (or simply Nauru). Taking into consideration the multidimensional nature of the Nauru case, this thesis claims that academia has failed to grasp a complete picture on the issues concerning the small Pacific island-state. The main clusters of current knowledge, represented in **eleven peer- reviewed scholarly articles**, are systematised and then summarised in order to reveal those elements that are left out as academically ‘unattended’ and, furthermore, contribute to the general debate in the field by providing for an important value-added component. Two knowledge-gaps were discovered, and they indicated a lack of academia-driven discussion on global warming and the effects of it concerning Nauru, as well as a lack of a common standpoint in International Relations (IR) to analyse de-territorialised, or drowning islands states. Inevitably, Nauru ought to be discussed within the same framework as other drowning islands, due to the existential threat that global warming poses on the nation, but also the potential that lays in its unique characteristics to find a common ground for discussions in IR.

Keywords: The Republic of Nauru, Australia, the Pacific Solution, de-territorialisation, climate change, drowning islands

INTRODUCTION

The Republic of Nauru (or simply Nauru) is a small island state, 21 square kilometers to be exact, situated in the Pacific Ocean, 300 kilometers away from its closest neighbours. This small island with only slightly over ten thousand inhabitants could, from the first glance, be thought of as a charming safe haven far away from troubles of the external world – at least, its nickname, the ‘Pleasant Island’, suggests on it. However, reality could not be further from that. Nauru’s colorful history consist of various occupations by greater powers, human-caused natural disasters, extreme wealth followed by extreme poverty, human rights violations, diplomatic bargaining and offshore banking. Consequently, Nauru has become an object for a close-up interest for not only within academia and policy-makers, but also for international media and human rights organisations. For example, Nauru is an interesting case study to research the impact of colonial control on the sense of identity amongst Nauruans (Ratuva 2011), or the country can be approached in regards of its inter-relations with Australia (Firth 2016).

In journalism, Nauru as a topic is often discussed in terms of the Australian offshore refugee processing center situated in and hosted by the country. The aforementioned centre, where asylum seekers attempting to reach Australia are brought, has been widely criticised for various human rights violations concerning the living standards, treatment and mental health of the centre’s refugees. In 2016, *The Guardian* leaked a set of over 2,000 reports from the centre, completed by its staff, which revealed continuous cases of violence, sexual abuse and child abuse conducted by staff members or other detainees, various mental health issues amongst refugees, and child suicides (‘The Nauru Files’ 2016).

Inevitably, the situation on Nauru has prompted actions from the United Nations (UN) as well as human rights organisations, such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch that have been constantly criticising the Australian Government, while pushing for immediate removal of children from Nauru. Several human rights organisations have also condemned Nauru for curbing the freedom of speech, by attempting to prevent the use of Facebook, suspending parliament opposition members, and restricting access to the island (Radio New Zealand 2015, b).

On the other hand, the arrangement between Australia and Nauru concerning the offshore refugee centre have inspired policy-makers on an international scale tackling with increasing amount of asylum applications. For example, the Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban, and the United Kingdom Independence Party leader Nigel Farage, have also vouched for a similar arrangement to that on Nauru to process refugees arriving to Europe (O'Grady 2016; Miller 2015). The interest in the arrangement is shared amongst other right-wing politicians in Europe as well.

From an academic perspective, there is inefficient research on Nauru to effectively determine the best courses of action concerning the country. In other words, the author claims that International Relations (IR) fail to grasp a complete picture on those challenges that are of concern for Nauru. Thus, the aim of this paper is to contribute to the academic discussion by portraying a survey on existing academic research on Nauru, while detecting gaps in existing knowledge, as well as filling them. To tackle these issues, the following research questions were formed: 1) what are the main clusters of contemporary academic discussions on the Republic of Nauru?; and 2) which aspects have been missed or neglected in the existing academic discussion up to this day?

The first research question will be tackled by using the methods of discourse analysis and modelling. A thorough literature review from peer reviewed articles will be conducted to reveal which themes in academic literature get the most attention and in what way they are represented. Discourse analysis was chosen as the appropriate methodology for this purpose specifically, for it reveals socially reproduced representations of reality (Neumann 2008, 61). Furthermore, as Neumann (2008, 62) put it, through discourse analysis we are able to reveal “[...] how the stuff that the world consists of is ordered, and so how people categorize and think about the world”. The second research question will be tackled through critical analysis of the existing narrative and by comparing academic literature concerning Nauru's neighbouring island states in the Pacific, Kiribati, Tuvalu and Fiji, to the literature on Nauru.

1. DEFINING EXISTING CLUSTERS

Although the Republic of Nauru (further – Nauru) has been researched from several different as well as distinctly specific angles (climatology, earth science or medical research), when it comes to social sciences, overlapping themes are often present in the academic discussion. In order to determine the existing knowledge and reveal gaps in academic literature concerning Nauru, a search on peer reviewed articles with the key word “Nauru” was conducted in the EBSCOhost database. The search was refined to only portray articles that were written in English and published within the past ten years (2009-2019). The search was performed within the time period of 8 to 28 February 2019, detecting 104 samples, which were further categorised according to their designated area of research and relevance to social sciences. Eleven (11) articles were thoroughly surveyed, systematised and analysed for this research, and the main clusters in existing academic literature were identified as follows: the economy of Nauru, poor governance of Nauru, and the battle between resettlement and rehabilitation. The sub-chapters will present an overview of the findings, concluding in a model that demonstrates overlapping themes within the three clusters.

1.1. The economy of Nauru

As a result of the environmental degradation, Nauru today has descended from being the world’s richest state to **a state “highly reliant”** (Fraenkel 2016, 283) **on foreign powers**. In the early XX century, the world’s purest and most easily accessible rock phosphate, or “superphosphate” deposits were discovered on the island (Gale 2016, 333). At the time Nauru was under German occupation, and the discovery of the mineral lead to an immediate establishment of mining industry on the island. Nauruan superphosphate was heavily exported to its neighbours at a low market price (Ratuva 2011, 243), giving an impetus to the establishment of two major agricultural exporters, Australia and New Zealand. In fact, Gale (2016, 333-334) states that without access to Nauru’s cheap superphosphate, the two countries would not have been able to become First World countries, due to their ancient, nutrient lacking soils. By the time Nauru gained its

independence in 1968, 29.6% of their island had been mined out (Gale 2016, 336), after which the newly established Republic decided to continue mining on their island - a decision that led to the exhaustion of the mineral in the 1990s. The exhaustion did not come as a surprise; Nauru and its colonisers were warned of the dangers of exploiting their land to the end of its limits (Tabucanon and Opeskin 2011, 342). Instead, Nauru chose to trade its “biophysical environment for money”, as Growdy and Krall (2009, 257) put it, and is now left with the remains of the old phosphate mines: tall limestone pinnacles occupying 80% of the island’s area, leaving majority of Nauru uninhabitable and non-arable. After the establishment of new and more effective mining techniques, Nauru has been able to extract secondary sources of phosphate from the stone pinnacles and exported its first major shipment of phosphate in 2006 (Gale 2016, 336). Today, Nauru’s economy largely functions on foreign aid, revenues from fishing licenses, mining out secondary phosphate deposits, and diplomatic deals.

Although the exhaustion of the phosphate deposits marks a transition point in Nauru’s economy from riches to rags, Crowdy and Krall (2009, 257) argue that **Nauruans did make the right decision in regard to economic mode of sustainability. Instead, what led Nauru to its current position was not the decision to continue mining but rather mismanaging their economy** (Ibid; Ratuva 2011, 243), or the “short-sightedness” of Nauruans, as Kendall (2009, 34) described the phenomena. For after its independence, the country established the Nauru Trust Fund, where it managed to save 20% of its annual phosphate incomes (Growdy, Krall 2009, 257), resulting in free education and health services, as well as exemption from taxes for all of its citizens. Moreover, it was a series of bad investments and an inefficient social welfare system that led Nauru to its downward spiral.

Firth (2016, 299) and Sharman (2017, 571) have made a clear distinction in a consistent pattern in Nauru’s economy: **the country has since its independence been dependent on rents**. Nauru has rented its lands for the mining industry, rented its land and services for Australia in return for financial aid, rented its marine space for fishing under the Vessel Day Scheme, and rented or sold its sovereign privileges for other states. This pattern worked in Nauru’s favour until their main source of income, the island’s phosphate deposits, were exhausted.

1.1.3. The Pacific Solution

Australia is the largest development aid provider for Nauru. Since development aid contributes to two thirds of their annual budget (Sharman 2017, 568), **Nauru is highly dependent on Australia and remains vulnerable to changes in Australian national priorities** (Fraenkel 2016, 283; Waqa 2018). In return for Australian development aid and investments in Nauru's infrastructure, health and education, Nauru has agreed to host an Australian offshore refugee centre on the island, referred to as the Nauru Regional Processing Centre (RPC). The agreement, also referred to as the Pacific Solution, aims to dismantle illegal immigration and in practice entails that all refugees approaching Australia by boat are brought to the island of Nauru to be processed for asylum. The centre was first established in 2001 at a time when Nauru struggled to make up for lost phosphate revenues, and boosted Nauru's economy by providing a "life-line" (Fraenkel 2016, 283) for the country (Firth 2016, 298). More accurately, Australia provided Nauru AUD 24.7 million in 2017-18 to house the facility (DFAT 2019). Although the RPC was shut down temporarily in 2008, it resumed in 2012 and is currently fully operational, having cost Australia AUD 1,705 million only from 2012 to 2016 (UNESCAP 2015, 14). As Nauru's income levels fell notably during the shutdown of the refugee centre (Fraenkel 2016, 283), it became even more apparent that Nauru's economy relied in the hands of Australian aid as well as Australian national priorities. For if the Australian Government were to decide to shut down the RPC in Nauru, as they already did with a similar centre on Manus Island, Nauru's economy would in all certainty suffer noticeably. Furthermore, changes in Australian national priorities could in fact threaten Nauru's water security, for according to Sharman (2017, 568) foreign aid pays for the island's only source of freshwater.

1.1.3. Selling sovereignty

Nauru has accelerated revenue by selling or renting its sovereign privileges, a phenomenon, according to Sharman (2017, 571), **visible in other micro-states' actions as well.** During 1998–2002 Nauru sold passports worth over USD 11 million, established a tax haven in the 1970s, as well as used its status in the United Nations to 'sell' diplomatic recognition (Sharman 2017, 571; Kendall 2009, 35). Nauru is one of the few to formally recognise the Republic of China and the Russia-occupied parts of Georgia (Abkhazia and South Ossetia), and has reportedly received compensation from Taiwan and the Russian Federation for its cooperation (Keating 2009). Nauru

is also one of the few Pacific Islands not to receive Chinese development aid (Lowy Institute 2016), but remains a recipient of Taiwanese and Russian aid, which only in 2012-13 was worth USD 13.2 million (UNESCAP 2015, 8). Also, Taiwan is consistently brought up by President Waqa in international forums (Everington 2019).

However, selling its sovereign privileges for Nauru entails having sovereignty in the first place and being able to remain sovereign. **Furthermore, in the case of Nauru, selling and renting sovereign privileges portrays a strive for more sovereignty.** Nauru remains absent from the World Trade Organisation (WTO), and only joined the UN when it was truly necessary, i.e. when the country ran out of phosphate. The trend, in fact, with Nauru and other micro-states is to retain “more economic sovereignty than great powers, [...] even if it is to later profit from selling them” (Sharman 2017, 569). The strong strive for sovereignty could be a remnant of colonial control; even Nauru’s administering authorities, assigned to safeguard Nauru’s interests, only compensated Nauru for the sold phosphate tons based on need, not on the market price or rights (Ratuva 2011, 243).

However, in the midst of their strive for sovereignty, Nauru has a little say in matters concerning it. As a small country reliant on two sectors of economic activity (phosphate and fishing), Nauru still remains extremely vulnerable to changes in global markets (Waqa 2018). As President Waqa (2018) put it:

While today we may be considered a middle-income country under certain metrics, our economic situation could change dramatically for the worse overnight owing to forces that are completely out of our hands.

1.2. Poor governance: the Nauru case

Nauru’s politics seem to have lately taken a turn for the worse with erosion of democracy, corruption and instability becoming more prominent and apparent features of Nauru’s governance. Nauru has recently curtailed the freedom of speech by hindering the access of foreign journalist to the island, by restricting access to internet and by suspending several opposition Members of the Parliament after their critical statements of Nauru to foreign media (OHCHR 2015). The Government of Nauru has also restricted the independence of their judiciary, placing Nauru’s

commitment to democratic values and rule of law “under question” (Firth 2016, 287). Not long after the election of President Baron Waqa in June 2013 and the accession of a new government in office, several senior public servants were forced to resign varying from secretary of justice and border control to the police commissioner. Consequently, the Waqa-led Government cancelled the visa of their Chief Justice to block his return to Nauru, leaving Nauru without functioning courts to oversee the actions of the government (Firth 2016, 291). In academic literature, poor governance is considered to be an outcome of the relationship between Nauru and Australia, Nauru’s political system itself, and Nauru’s strive for more sovereignty.

1.2.1. The relationship between Nauru and Australia

The Nauru-Australia relationship is seen as a contributing factor in Nauru’s poor governance. In fact, **the relationship of dependency between Nauru and Australia, whether one or two-sided, has de facto allowed further erosion of Nauru’s democracy.** The roots of this relationship lay in the early XX century when Australia, along with Britain, Germany and New Zealand, began to exploit Nauru’s newly discovered phosphate deposits. Although Nauru gained its independence and full control of its phosphate industry in the late 1960s, Nauru has still in one way or the other remained a consistent recipient of Australian aid (Fraenkel 2016, 285) and as illustrated in the previous chapter, remains dependent on Australia for income.

On the other hand, after the establishment of the RPC Australia has also become dependent on Nauru. In fact, Firth (2016, 287) claims that due to Australia’s dependency on Nauru’s compliance, Nauru has been able to restrict the freedom of the judiciary, freedom of expression and human rights without a “fear of criticism from Canberra”. Whereas New Zealand suspended their annual aid for Nauru's Justice Department as a response of Nauru’s actions against the freedom of the judiciary (Radio New Zealand 2015, a), and the US condemned Nauru for attempting to prevent the use of Facebook (Radio New Zealand 2015, b), Australia legitimated Nauru’s actions with silence. Australia’s lack of criticism towards Nauru’s actions is also noted by Fraenkel (2016, 278-279 and 285), who points out that **a shift has occurred in Australian foreign policy from exporting good governance and democracy to acting on the basis of purely national or commercial interests.** With an increased amount of asylum seekers, Australia is more willing to look another way to ensure Nauru’s cooperation, and thus prevent processing refugees on the mainland.

While Firth and Fraenkel argue that Nauru's recent decrease in the level of democracy results from Australian dependency, MacAdams (2017, 14) notes that it is rather the case of "an unhealthy relationship of co-dependency". Whereas Australia depends on Nauru's cooperation on processing Australian refugees, Australia at the same time yet again exploits Nauru's fragile situation, where the island has little choice of not cooperating with its largest provider of revenue (Ibid). In order to provide better living standards to their "cash-strapped electorates", as well as reassure their re-election, Nauru's politicians are expressing less and less resistance on Australia's toll on the island (Fraenkel 2016, 283).

Whether the case is about Nauru's dependency on Australia, the other way around, or mutual dependency, it has become evident that the presence of the RCP has contributed into the emergence of a repressive, authoritarian atmosphere (Firth 2016, 300; Fraenkel 2016, 283). The political instability is likely to prevail as long as the Australian offshore centre resides on the island (Firth 2016, 299).

1.2.2. The system failure

The political system of Nauru in itself is seen to be prone to instability, corruption, and manipulation.

Nauru has a parliamentary system, where the members of the parliament are elected from eight constituencies; six of them send two members, and the remaining two constituencies send three and four. Although Nauru does not have political parties, strong competition exists between factions prior and after elections to gain control of the government, resulting in frequent changes in Nauru's politics (Fraenkel and Grofman 2014, 194). Throughout Nauru's independence, the people have witnessed ever changing governments, various motions of no confidence, with a record made in 1977 when Nauru had four different Presidents in four months (Ratuva 2011, 245; Firth 2016, 290). The long-lasting experience of power struggles, instability and poor governance, as Ratuva (2011, 251) put it, has diminished the trust of the people towards their government and the political system. The distrust of people in the political system has deepened along with economic difficulties, that have portrayed to the general population as poverty and lack of access to fresh food and water (Ratuva 2011, 261-262), for the economic disparities have been blamed

on the elite. In fact, according to Firth (2016, 299), interpersonal relations dominate Nauru's politics and the source of corruption is the centralised power in the hands of a small ruling elite.

The distrust towards their national politics have gone so far as to prevent reforms in the volatile system. Nauru was the first Small Island Developing State (SIDS) in the Pacific Region to be part of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) sponsored constitutional reform (Ratuva 2011, 241). The reform was to be finalised with a referendum, a referendum which ultimately blocked the reform on Nauru - a phenomena largely a result of the "lack of confidence" in their corrupt and unstable political system (Ratuva 2011, 262-262).

Another factor contributing to the system failure in Nauru is the election method in use: the Dowdall rule. The Dowdall rule functions as a points system, which requires Nauruans to rank all candidates with different points from 1 to infinitive upon voting, in order for their ballot to be accepted as legitimate (Fraenkel and Grofman 2014, 190). In a research conducted by Fraenkel and Grofman (2014, 203), the Dowdall rule was discovered to be manipulated by Nauruans with the intent to increase the probabilities of their own first choice candidates, while simultaneously decreasing the probability of their major rivals from being elected. Additionally, in the Dowdall system, the second or lower preferences have a significant impact on voter outcomes, particularly in constituency structures such as Nauru's. Furthermore, the system gives an incentive for the competing factions in Nauru to offer dummy candidates - candidates that are not expected to win but rather "soak up intermediate preferences" (Fraenkel and Grofman 2014, 201).

1.2.3. Strive for sovereignty

Another contributing factor in Nauru's governance discussed in academic literature is a strive for sovereignty. Nauru's absence from international organisations, lack of military alliances (although it is extremely vulnerable to invasion), and their economy of rents portray their evident aspirations for more economic and political independence (Sharman 2017, 569) – a phenomena largely result of a colourful colonial history. For centuries of colonial control, Nauru's culture and ways of knowing were shaped by foreign influence, not to mention its people were almost distinct in the hands of epidemics and enslavement of over 50% of Nauruans by Japanese during the WWII (Ratuva 2011, 242). It was only after its independence in 1968 that Nauruans for the first time were able to control their own resources and finances (Ratuva 2011, 265). And still

today, many positions in Nauru's government are occupied by Australians (Firth 2016, 298). As Ratuva (2011, 265) noted, "[the] [m]odern day Nauru is the embodiment of such a dilemma".

Nauru's strive for sovereignty is also visible in their strong sense of place. Nauruan land is owned by Nauruans themselves and according to Ratuva (2011, 244), colonial control has strengthened their sense of place and local as a means of self-preservation. In addition to the lack of trust in their national politics, the need to preserve their land has gone so far as to prevent Nauru from reforming and improving its political system, in order to protect what is left of their lands after the environmental degradation (Ibid).

1.3. The battle between resettlement and rehabilitation

Nauru is the most environmentally altered nation in the world (Kendall 2009, 35; Gale 2016, 333). Consequently, starting from the first half of the XX century, talks of resettlement and rehabilitation have been present in the political discourse and academic discussion. The two have been considered as the only viable solutions to overcome the challenges brought by the environmental devastation, such as food and water scarcity, as well as the poor state of Nauru's economy. However, neither have yet taken place.

After it became apparent that majority of Nauru would be destroyed in the hands of the phosphate industry, leaving the island largely uninhabitable, talks began in the 1950s and 1960s to explore the possibility of resettling the Nauruan people to another location. Several possible locations for the "New Nauru" were explored, out of which the Curtis Island was the most probable choice for relocation (Tabucanon and Opeskin 2011, 347). The Australian Government's offer was to relocate Nauruans to Curtis Island where Nauru could be re-established as part of Australia with its own local administration. Since resettling would have entailed living under Australian control, i.e. losing sovereignty, Nauruans rejected the resettlement due to a fear of losing their self-determination and identity (Ibid). In fact, MacAdam (2016, 12) and Ratuva (2011, 245) explain that for Nauruans, land is not merely a source of food or other materials, but also a source of "cultural identity and sense of socio-spiritual validation to being Nauruan". The strong sense of place of Nauruans, as discussed in the sub-section 1.2.3., was reinforced and reconstructed by colonialism, and thus conserving their ancestral lands means self-preservation for Nauruans

(Ratuva 2011, 244). In addition to the question of identity, Tabucanon and Opeskin (2011, 349) note that Australian racism towards Nauruans, and the unwillingness to lose control over their economic resources also impacted Nauru's decision to decline Australia's offer. More significantly, Australia had been running a racially discriminative immigration policy from 1901 to 1973 and reportedly, Nauruan delegation members had been subject to racist remarks in Australia as well (Tabucanon and Opeskin 2011, 351-352).

Understandably, Nauru has chosen to push for rehabilitation of the lands already damaged under the Administrative Authority of Australia, UK and New Zealand, in order to be able to stay on the island. In practice, the limestone pinnacles would be levelled, and soil be imported to Nauru to be placed in the old wastelands - a process that would be very costly (Gale 2016, 337; Tabucanon and Opeskin 2011, 342). Although the idea of rehabilitation was rejected by the League of Nations when it was first explored in 1934, a few decades later in 1992 the International Court of Justice ruled that Nauru is in fact eligible to pursue reimbursement for their lost lands from its Administrative Authorities. Consequently, the governments of all three settled and the process to rehabilitate Nauru's lands was inaugurated with Australia. However, rehabilitation of Nauru has still not begun. Instead, Australia established the RPC on Nauru, and mining of the secondary phosphate resources continues (Gale 2016, 341).

On the other hand, although rehabilitation of their lands would be the most preferable choice for Nauruans, it is also problematic – and not only due to its high costs. If the wastelands were rehabilitated, Nauru would still face challenges stemming from global warming, such as rise in sea level, coastal erosion, ocean acidification, droughts, and violent weather effects. In fact, according to President Waqa (2016), climate change poses an existential threat for Nauru:

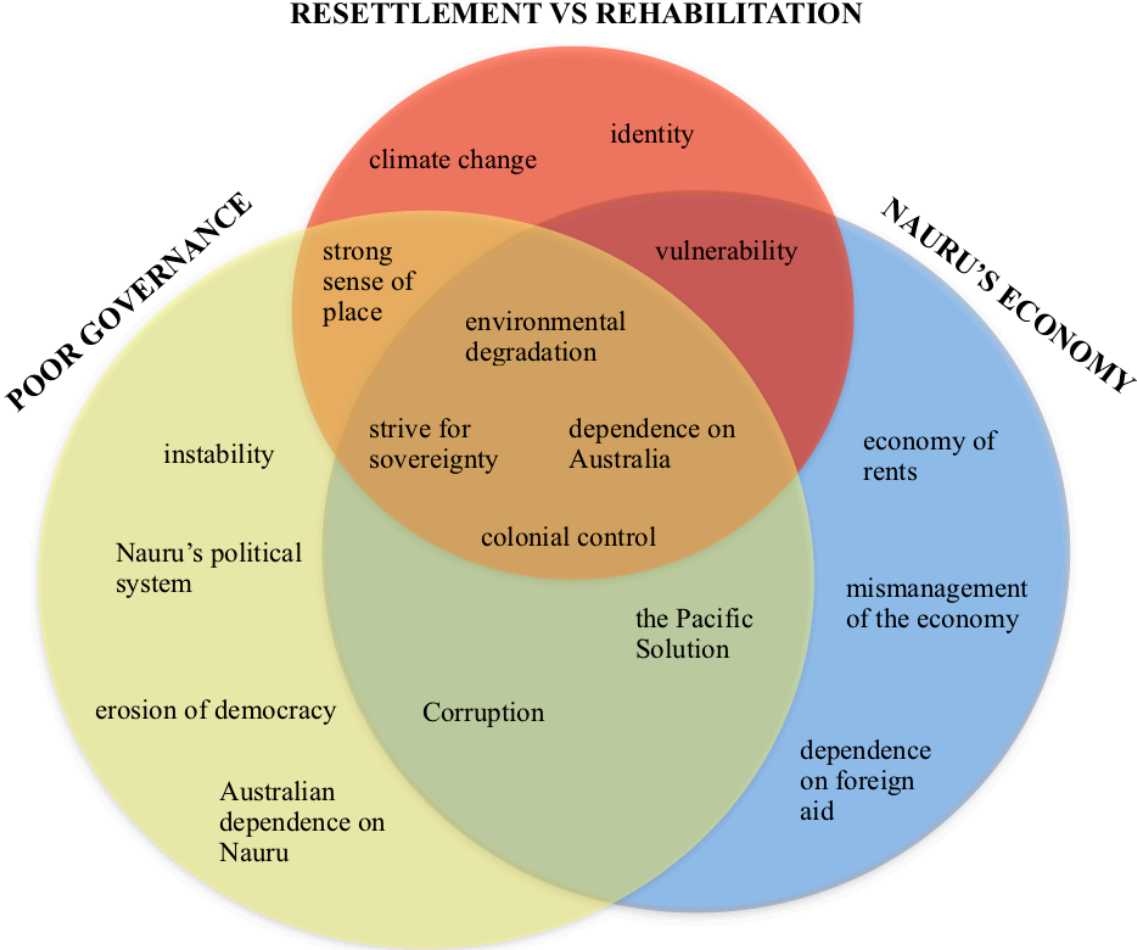
From the perspective of my small island nation in the Pacific, climate change is our greatest humanitarian crisis. It is our war, and while Nauru will be among the first to experience the worst impacts, climate change will be the rest of the world's humanitarian challenge as well.

1.4. Modeling the situation

The discussion found in the academic literature on Nauru roughly falls into three larger categories: the economy of Nauru, poor governance in Nauru, and the battle between rehabilitation and resettlement. **In the centre of academic discussion are environmental degradation, Nauru's dependence on Australia, strive for sovereignty and the impact of colonial control on Nauru's actions.** The exhaustion of the island's phosphate deposits resulting into the destruction of their environment, marked an end of a period of wealth and the beginning of an era of various challenges. Significantly, the destruction of Nauru's natural resources created a spillover effect, with Nauru's strive for sovereignty as an important driving force. Nauru's economy was to be completely revitalised and new ways of generating income had to be found, resulting into a dependence of Nauru on Australia and vice versa. Consequently, Nauru's governance became more unstable with the erosion of democracy, largely a result of economic difficulties and the co-dependent relationship between Nauru and Australia. Finally, as a result of environmental degradation, along with climate change, Nauruans will in all probability have to relocate from their homes in the future. The three themes, along with their overlapping areas of discussion, are portrayed in *Figure 1*.

Figure 1. Themes discussed in the academic literature on Nauru.

Source: Author.



2. FINDING GAPS IN EXISTING KNOWLEDGE

Analysing the wide range of existing knowledge and views in academic literature, two significant gaps were discovered that, when filled, can contribute to not only the formation of a complete picture on Nauru, but also contribute to the discussion of other Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in the Pacific region. The first gap concerns the discussion of global warming in academic literature on Nauru, or in fact the lack of it. In comparison to other Pacific SIDS, global warming has been neglected as a major contributing factor concerning Nauru in academic literature, although the effects of it pose an existential threat to the island. The second gap concerns the academic discussion of all Pacific SIDS facing increasing climate change threats. More significantly, IR lacks a common basis for discussing the SIDS under the threat of drowning under the rise of sea level – the ‘drowning islands’. The discussion circles mainly around three questions: how can drowning states hold their legal status and sovereignty as a state without territory?; What happens to the marine rights of either partially or drowned islands?; and can the people of drowning states maintain their citizenship as well as be perceived as refugees? These questions are mainly tackled within a legal framework and answers to them are mainly speculative – how international law will interpret the situation where a state loses its territory due to climate change. Rather than joining the speculations, this paper (see sub-chapter 2.2.) discusses from which perspective international relations should approach the issue of de-territorialisation of Pacific Islands, such as Nauru. Furthermore, this paper argues that characteristics of Nauru portrayed in the first section could serve as a key to answer the three questions.

2.1. Climate change threats concerning Nauru

The discussion on the effects and threats of global warming on the Republic of Nauru is missing in IR-related academic literature designated on the island. Yet, global warming is a visible factor in academic literature concerning other Pacific states, such as Tuvalu, Fiji, and Kiribati. Through a similar research in EBSCOhost, the author discovered various articles discussing the impacts of climate change, such as immigration, loss of territory and marine space, concerning Fiji, Kiribati and Tuvalu (see McAdam 2014, Hermann and Kempf 2017, Allgood and McNamara 2016, and

Farbotko and McGregor 2010). Moreover, whereas global warming is a major theme in academic literature concerning Nauru's neighbours, it has not been given emphasis in the academic literature on Nauru. Although the impacts of global warming on Nauru are not discussed in academic literature, they are not unclear.

Nauru is a member of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) and the Pacific Islands Forum – two organisations that relentlessly push for climate change action and protection of the oceans. Nauru, like other members of AOSIS, categorises as a first adapter to climate change and vulnerable to any further rise in global temperature. In fact, the International Panel for Climate Change (IPCC) has concluded that climate change threats, such as sea level rise, coastal erosion, changing rainfall patterns, sea surface temperatures, and tropical typhoons, are particularly critical for small islands. More significantly, the IPCC report on climate change (2013, 1619) states

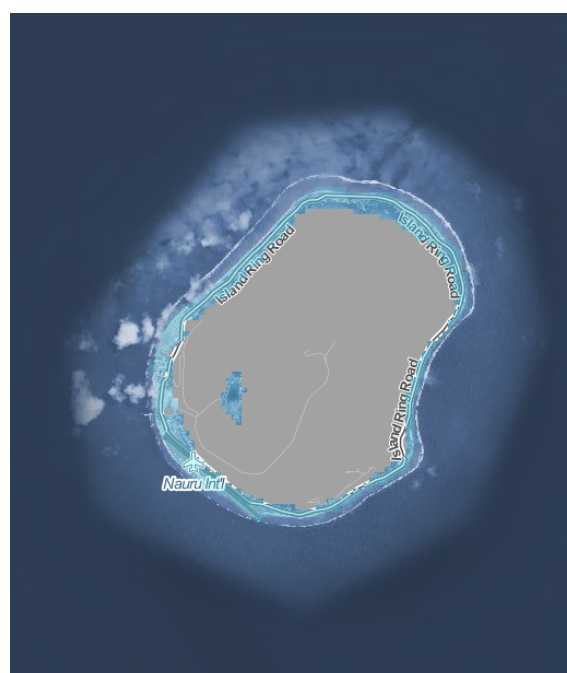
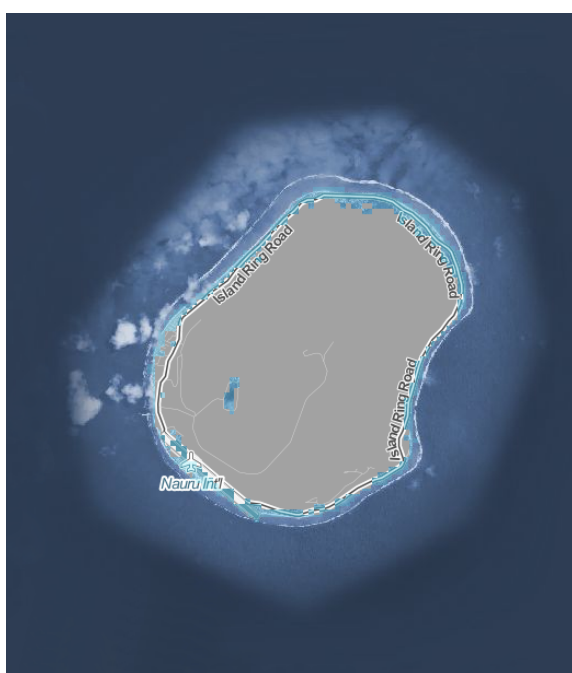
[sea level rise] poses one of the most widely recognized climate change threats to low-lying coastal areas. This is particularly important in small islands where the majority of human communities and infrastructure is located in coastal zones with limited on-island relocation opportunities, especially on atoll islands.

Indeed, Nauru, similarly to many other small islands, is an atoll island with the lowest elevation points directly at sea level and the highest point at 70 meters situated closer to the center of the island (CIA World Factbook 2019). Compared to Tuvalu, the highest point of which is at 5 meters (Ibid), it would seem that the negligence of discussing global warming in Nauru literature can be explained with the immediacy of the threat of extreme flooding on Tuvalu. Also, whereas Tuvalu, Fiji and Kiribati exist in tropical typhoon zones, Nauru does not face as prominent threat from extreme weather effects as some of its neighbours do. However, the immediacy of the threat to Nauru rises from the fact that the entirety of their infrastructure and population is situated in the coastal areas that are extremely vulnerable to flooding and erosion. More significantly, Nauru's only road, the Ring road, is situated on the coast, as well as are Nauru's government facilities, schools, hospital and all living residences (Sillanpää 2018). According to the IPCC (2013, 1628) report, economies of small islands are at greater risk from the rise in sea level compared to other states, for their infrastructure and population are situated in the coastal areas. In fact, Nauru is among the top five most affected economies due to climate change (Ibid). As it would be virtually impossible to relocate Nauru's infrastructure further towards the center of the island situated on much higher grounds than the coastal areas, even Nauruan people will not be able to relocate further up. For, as discussed earlier, 80% of the total area of the island, and the central island in its entirety, is occupied by tall limestone pinnacles and has been made uninhabitable. Climate Central,

an American research institute entirely dedicated to climate change research, has provided directional pictures of how Nauru will be impacted by the rise in sea level, if global warming reaches 2 Celsius and 4 Celsius level pre-industrial era. Pictures of two scenarios are provided in *Figures 2* and *3*. In both scenarios, the islands main road, the Ring Road has been either partially or fully flooded as has the nation's only airport, the Nauru International Airport.

Figure 2. Level of 2 °C rise in temperature.

Figure 3. Level of 4 °C rise in temperature.



Source: Climate Central 2015.

The two Figures represent scenarios where the level of 4 °C or 2 °C increase in temperature from pre-industrial times have occurred. Warming of 2 °C (international target) would entail a sea level rise of 4.7 meters and warming of 4 °C would entail a sea level rise of 8.9 meters (close to our current direction).

Nauru is not under the threat of complete drowning, but the threats of global warming ought not be bypassed when discussing the island. On the contrary, Nauru should be considered and discussed within the framework of drowning states, for climate change threatens its habitable lands. Moreover, if global warming reaches a level of 2 or 4 Celsius, Nauru's habitable lands – the coastal areas where Nauru's infrastructure and population exists – will be flooded and Nauruans forced to relocate from their homes. This, in international law, has virtually equal consequences than complete drowning has, for if a state is not capable to hold sovereign power over a territory, have permanent population and government institutions there, as the Montevideo Convention

demands, the state no longer exists. Whether a state still has a few square kilometers of limestone pinnacles left above sea level, has no sufficient impact on the legal status of the state (Lal 2017, 250). However, in the designated literature, the future challenges of Nauru are mainly seen as products of bad governance, economy and natural destruction caused by Nauruans themselves (or their colonisers).

2.2. Determining the optimal basis for discussion in International Relations

Academic discussion in IR tackling the Pacific SIDS under the threat of drowning has still to answer the three questions, (1) how can states hold sovereignty when territoriality is lost from the picture, (2) what happens to marine boundaries when territory above sea level is lost either completely or partially, and (3) what happens to the citizenship of the people of drowning states? Rather than joining the discussion where the fate of drowning state's sovereignty and territory, marine boundaries and citizen rights are speculated in terms of the existing international legal framework, this paper will attempt to define a common basis for discussing the three issues in IR. In order to do so, a decent look at some of the key characteristics drawn out in the first section of the paper will be made. When it comes to Nauru, in the roots of their actions regarding all aspects of their economy, governance and foreign policy, lays their **strive for sovereignty** and the **strong sense of identity**, and more significantly **the connection between identity and place**. These characteristics have risen to be detrimental for Nauru as a result of cultural factors and their history of colonisation. Ironically, these are two major areas affected by climate change since the three main challenges for drowning states are territoriality, marine boundaries and citizenship.

Firstly, climate change challenges the very core principle of political sciences: territoriality. Traditionally, statehood and sovereignty have been irreplaceably linked with territoriality. More specifically, the Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States notes that "The State as a person of international law should possess the following qualifications: (a) a permanent population; (b) a defined territory; (c) government; and (d) capacity to enter into relations with other States" (United Nations 1933, Article I). Moreover, statehood is dependent on all of the four criteria and losing one has significant impact on the legal status of the state. Since further sea level rise on islands such as Nauru, Tuvalu, Kiribati and Fiji, will most likely push their population and government in exile in the future, and thus will not be occupying a territory any more, their existence as states is threatened (Vaha 2015, 209). Moreover, global warming threatens the existence of Pacific SIDS. What is at stake for Nauruans is not only the loss of their sovereignty

as a state, but their identity as well, which is strongly linked with place (as discussed in the first section of this paper).

Secondly, the threat posed to states territoriality also affects the territorial sea of states. States' marine boundaries are laid down in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which states that the territorial sea of states is to be 12 nautical miles measured from the baseline of the state. States can also claim up to an additional 24 nautical miles from their territorial sea, referred to as the contiguous zone, in order to protect their customs, fiscal and immigration policies. Finally, states have a right under the UNCLOS to claim an exclusive economic zone (EEZ) up to 200 nautical miles from their baselines, where the state has sovereign rights to 'explore and exploit, conserve and manage' natural resources. (UNCLOS 1982, Part II) Since maritime boundaries are linked with baselines, i.e. states defined territory above sea level where they hold permanent population and government, climate change also poses a threat on Nauru's claim to their marine space (Lusthaus 2010, 116). As Lal (2017, 235) quite aptly put it: "Under contemporary legal frameworks, Pacific peoples face a double harm where climate change deprives them of their land and international law deprives them of their seas".

The potential loss of their marine space is particularly problematic for Nauruans (as well as other SIDS), for their marine space is an important source of revenue and identity. Nauru's maritime claims are all the above mentioned – territorial sea, contiguous zone and EEZ – (Nauru Maritime Administration 2018), contributing to a total of 308.48 square kilometers of EEZ. Thus, most of Nauru is actually sea. As Nauru's Ambassador to the UN, Marlene Moses, put it at a recent UN Ocean Conference "We are 99.99 percent ocean" (Woody 2017). This characteristic is shared by other Pacific Islands as well. For example, Kiribati, Fiji and Tuvalu with similar claims to that of Nauru's, hold EEZs of 3.44 million square kilometers (Kiribati), 1.28 million square kilometers (Fiji), and 751,797 square kilometers (Tuvalu) (World Bank 2018, 14). The EEZs of Pacific Islands contribute to a significant amount of revenue, for on a yearly basis they hold up to 34% of the world's tuna catch (Tuna Fisheries 2018, 7). Also, Nauru is at the center of the Nauru Agreement Concerning Cooperation in the Management of Fisheries of Common Interest (also referred to the Nauru Agreement), an axis of the management of tuna fishing in the tropical western Pacific (for further information see Nauru Agreement). Hence climate change not only threatens Nauru's and other PNA's sovereign control over their current marine space, but also a particular amount of the Pacific people's livelihoods, for rise in ocean temperature and increased ocean acidification will cause a significant shift in tuna stocks (World Bank 2018, 67). Alongside economic gains, oceans are also culturally important for Pacific people. Pacific people spend

significant amount of time by the ocean and are emotionally attached to the oceans (Stratford *et al.* 2013, 69), and Nauruans, for example, identify themselves as the “ocean people” (News Deeply 2017). Thus, if Nauru loses its marine space, it will also lose the last drips of its identity.

Finally, the third major challenge portrayed in the discussion on drowning islands is emigration and nationality. The Universal Declaration on Human Rights (1948, Article 15) states that all people have a right to a nationality. If Nauruans were forced to relocate from their homes due to a significant rise in sea level and other impacts of climate change, their statehood is at risk. And since only states can have citizens, their citizenship of Nauruans becomes questionable as well. In other words, the citizenship of Nauruans, as well as rights over marine space, is tied with territoriality. Traditionally, when a state loses its territory, it is as a cause of war and the territory of the state has been succeeded by another sovereign state. In this case, citizenship is transferred from the old to the new state in power. However, since the Nauruan case will entail their territory to be occupied by water, there is no succeder to replace the Nauruan nationality. Additionally, climate change poses another challenge for the citizens of drowning islands: the UN lacks a uniform understanding of climate or environmental refugees. Traditionally, to be considered a refugee entails being under the acute fear of persecution for reasons of “race, religion, nationality, membership of particular social group or political opinion”, as well as being outside of the “former habitual residence as a result of such events, [and] is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it” (Convention and Protocol relating to the status of refugees 1951/1967, Article I). Hence people emigrating as a result of climate change induced threats do not necessarily meet this criteria. Therefore, Nauruan citizens in the future are also under the threat of losing their nationality or citizenship without a guarantee of the right to refuge, and thus are threatened to become stateless persons.

The question remains, how can Nauruans preserve their sovereignty, citizenship, and at least part of their identity without territory? Nauru has already been recognized by the international community, remains a member of the UN and has extraterritorial places (embassies and consulates) in nine countries, which will not be affected by rise in sea level. From the Montevideo criteria, the only one affected by rise in sea level is territoriality, which is directly linked with statehood and marine boundaries, and furthermore citizenship with statehood (no state – no citizenship).

Clearly, the matters concerning Nauru and other drowning islands are mainly to be resolved within a legal framework, and the three questions on the future of drowning states have been widely discussed in academia. For example, Burkett (2011, 347) argues for a new post-climate change

conception of nations without territory, the ‘Nation Ex-Situ’, and Lal (2017, 259) suggests states could live in exile through their extraterritorial places such as embassies, or form federations with other drowning states. However, the current discussion is generally speculative on how existing international law could be interpreted, usually ending with a conclusion that in these cases, territory as a factor probably ought to be rethought. It is worthwhile mentioning that there exist a few examples of states holding legal status without territory, among them, for example, the Sovereign Military Order of Malta, once recognised by the Pope and still today considered as a sovereign state (the EU among others recognises this state). However, it is unlikely that territoriality would simply be removed from the requirements of state’s existence, at least without a replacement, for that could grant quasi- or failed states legal statehood as well. **Thus, territoriality should not only to be rethought but also replaced with something immaterial that is as detrimental for states as territory, in order for island states like Nauru to hold on to their sovereignty, and at least part of their identity.**

Looking at the characteristics of Nauru drawn out in the first section, **such immaterial criteria to replace territoriality could for example be the feeling of identity**, which is exceptionally strong amongst Nauruans as well as other Pacific SIDS. In fact, Milla Vaha (2015, 217) suggest that rather than focusing on states’ right to territory, the academic discussion should focus on the state’s right to exist. The right to exist would be similar to individuals’ right to life and would entail the ability to maintain the sentiment of themselves: “the capacity to have continuing political unity and identity over time” (Ibid). In this case, drowning islands are likely to have stronger claim to statehood than, for example, failed or quasi-states, having not lost ‘themselves’ in the process of extinction, whereas failed states have (Vaha 2015, 216). Although Vaha ends short in exploring the possibilities of her suggestion, this paper argues that her concept should act as a common basis for discussing Pacific SIDS. For only by rethinking territoriality as a criterion of legal statehood, and replacing it with the state’s notion of identity, islands states such as Nauru are able to hold on to their sovereignty and at least a fraction of their identity. Even though Nauruans and other Pacific people are most likely forced to relocate in the future due to global warming, if their legal status as a state is preserved and territoriality replaced with the states notion of identity, they will be able to hold sovereign rights over their marine space, exploit natural resources and accelerate revenue, as well as preserve their identity as the “ocean people”, not to mention Nauruan people will be able to remain citizens of Nauru. However, this criterion should only apply to states that are threatened by extinction due to climate change – drowning or under the threat of desertification – that have not played part in the reasons leading of their extinction.

3. ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS

The claim of this paper was that there has been inefficient research conducted on Nauru in the field of IR, should the international system have an academia-backed desire to grasp a full picture on the challenges concerning the island. In contemporary academic literature on Nauru, the main clusters or themes discussed are bad economy, poor governance and the battle between rehabilitation and resettlement, as presented in the first section. The three clusters are used as frameworks to gain better understanding on where Nauru's various challenges arise from and how they could be tackled. However, the designated literature has failed to give the proper emphasis on climate change threats concerning Nauru. **The first gap** discovered from existing knowledge was the absence of climate change as a factor in matters concerning Nauru. For as a result of climate change, Nauru is threatened by rise of sea level, coastal erosion, water acidification, droughts, extreme weather effects, and spread of waterborne diseases, to name a few. The threats are not unknown, and have been addressed by the IPCC, the Pacific Islands Forum and the AOSIS, as well as Nauruan government itself. Not to mention, climate change is widely discussed in academic literature on Nauru's neighbouring island states, Tuvalu, Fiji and Kiribati. Hence the question remains, why has IR not discussed climate change threats when it comes to Nauru?

The question can be approached from many different angles, and with all likelihood is a sum of many factors. Arguably, there are quite a few issues the island struggles with (bad economy, corruption, curtailed freedom of speech, dependency on Australia, human rights violations, etc...), that are likely to have overshadowed the presence of climate induced threats. The Nauru case is multidimensional and very complicated, and due to all the different aspects of the case, it is easy to oversight some pieces of the puzzle. On the other hand, the aspect of climate change could have been left purposely unacknowledged. Since the matter of drowning islands has been already discussed in accordance to other SIDS, then when it comes to Nauru, perhaps the issue has not been viewed necessary to yet again conduct research on. Or in other words, SIDS may count as one coherent region in academic literature and are viewed to automatically share the same threats. Thus, scholars in IR might have not found it detrimental to discuss climate change threats in terms of Nauru.

Secondly, it can also be argued that Nauru is not getting the right attention when it comes to climate change threats, due to their bad economy. For example, Tuvalu is described as a small state having received “remarkable social and economic stability” (Stratford *et al.* 2013, 68). Simultaneously, the world system is considered as largely economy-led (Ibid). Since economy-wise Tuvalu has performed better than Nauru, it seems that it is considered to be more ‘worthy’ as a state and thus academia is more drawn to discuss climate change threats concerning Tuvalu than Nauru. To take this scenario a little bit further, another suggestion for the negligence could be the mere conception that Nauru as a state would not deserve to exist. Vaha (2015, 206) discusses the states’ right to exist in accordance to Tuvalu and assimilates drowning states with drowning, innocent children that we are morally obliged to help. Tuvalu, for example, has not played any part in causing climate change but yet is existentially threatened by the ramifications of it. Clearly, it is not *just* that Tuvalu would cease to exist as a state for reasons of not its own doing, opposite to failing or failed states that have played part in their extinction. However, when it comes to Nauru, climate change is not the only existential threat concerning the island. Due to the environmental degradation on the island, Nauruans will not be able to move further to the higher grounds on the island, and due to mismanaging their economy, Nauruans are not able to provide any independent solutions to the threats they face. Additionally, issues with upholding rule of law accompanied by several human rights violations on the island, certainly do not invite to consider Nauru as a vulnerable state suffering from climate change. Although climate change clearly is a prominent threat for Nauru, its absence in the IR discussions on Nauru could be explained with doubts in Nauru’s ‘right to exist’, for it is not completely blameless in causing the challenges it faces. Nevertheless, whether climate change has been neglected as a factor in Nauru-related literature due to its poor performance economy-wise or politics-wise, or whether Nauru indeed has the right to exist or not, the findings of this paper demonstrate the importance of discussing Nauru within the same framework as other drowning islands. For even partially drowning states, with bad economies and poor governance, are threatened to lose their sovereignty, territory, marine rights, statehood and citizenship rights as a result of climate change – and these mere facts should not be left unnoted.

The second gap discovered was the absence of a clear and common basis or standpoint to discuss all drowning islands in IR. The three major issues concerning drowning islands are mainly legal: how to understand statehood without a territory; can a state have marine boundaries without a territory; will citizens of drowning states have a right to asylum, since they are not refugees of war or conflict? So far, these questions have been tackled within a legal framework, or more accurately, how will the existing international law interpret de-territorialised, or drowned islands. Rather than

joining the discussion where the fate of drowning states' sovereignty and territory, marine boundaries and citizen rights are speculated in terms of the existing international legal framework, the author proposes IR approaches the questions from another angle. For in order to make sure that the criteria on statehood remains explicit, the concept of territoriality should not be bypassed, but rethought and replaced. Therefore, this paper suggests that when it comes to drowned islands, territoriality as a criterion of statehood ought to be replaced with an immaterial concept. Since Nauruans, as well as other Pacific people, have a strong sense of identity that resonates to their ancestral lands and the ocean, the concept and sense of **identity** could be used to replace territoriality, as Vaha (2015) also claims. Intriguingly, the small Pacific island state, which has been left out of the academic discussions on climate change in IR, could essentially be the key to determining a common standpoint for discussion on de-territorialised states in IR.

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