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## Pluralising climate change and migration: an argument in favour of open futures

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**Abstract:** This paper contextualises the relation between climate change and human migration using the concepts of neoliberalism, sovereignty and race. The paper is intended to provide a general account of climate change and migration research, which seeks to extend understanding of the relation beyond a focus on policy and policy-relevant research. The argument is that because the relation between climate change and migration is so vast, touching on so many aspects of life, the debate on climate change and migration needs to be pluralised. This is especially the case given the future-conditional nature of the relation between climate change and migration.

**Keywords:** climate change, migration, neoliberalism, sovereignty, race, invention

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The relationship between human mobility and climate change is profoundly geographical. It brings to mind the movement of people across territorial borders, the mixing of bodies and places, and the reconfiguration of labour markets. It elicits the spectres of war, violence and humanitarian disaster. And it signifies what is often imagined to be a pending injustice, one in which so-called ‘climate refugees’ will be forced to uproot, relocate, and live through the hardships that often characterise the refugee experience. Far reaching in scope, this relation encompasses all manner of geographical categories - space, place, territory, sovereignty, citizenship, transnationalism, borders, nature, mobility and scale – with implications that cut across an equally vast array of identifications: gender, race, class, ethnicity, Indigeneity, nation, even sexuality. We might even say that the relation between climate change and human mobility is among the most fundamental of our time, signifying a coming epoch of deep geohistorical transformation in which the forces of people and planet are expected to converge, and “all that is solid melts into air.” (Marx and Engels 1986)

So how then are we to make sense of such a complex phenomenon, the relation between human mobility and climate change? If it affects virtually all aspects of life, then what routes into this relation are available to us if our aim is to comprehend and respond to its complexities? And what unique contribution have geographers made to all of this? These

are just some of the questions I address in this short intervention. In particular, the paper argues in support of pluralising the debate on climate change and migration. Indeed, as migration features ever more prominently in climate change policy and politics, it is imperative that scholars develop robust analyses that can help us better appreciate the political, ethical, legal and cultural dimensions of the relation between climate change and migration. With this in mind, this paper contributes to the pluralisation of the debate by reviewing recent research on the relation between climate change and migration from the vantage of three categories: neoliberalism, sovereignty, and otherness. These categories have not been chosen randomly. Rather they reflect just some of the ways scholars have sought to interpret this vexing phenomenon as much as they reflect my own judgement concerning the main issues at stake in the wider discourse of climate change and migration. Here my reasoning is both general and specific to Geography. Migration is, of course, central to contemporary political economy which suggests that analysing migration in the context of climate change could provide important insight into the emerging political economies of climate change. So, too, analysing the relation between climate change and migration through the category of sovereignty allows us to consider how sovereign power is adapting to climate change. And finally inasmuch as the category 'migrant' acquires the status of Other in climate change discourse (Baldwin 2012; 2013), otherness is a category that allows us to conceive of climate change not simply as an environmental or socio-technical problem, but also as a social condition giving rise to new forms of social differentiation. Thus, all three categories – neoliberalism, sovereignty and otherness – provide ample scope to develop new lines of inquiry into this relation and thus pluralise how the relation might be understood. More specifically, though, these three concepts are central to the self-definition of much contemporary geography much of which seeks to understand how power functions in the world today. Indeed, all three categories provide important means for conceptualising power such that any attempt to evaluate how power functions in respect of the relation between climate change and migration would do well to engage with these categories.

There are, however, limits to how we might analyse this relation, but these are limits less to do with the shortcomings of analysis or theory, and everything to do with the limits of the relation itself. For if anything can be said about it, the relation between human mobility and climate change is impossible to disaggregate. Indeed, as many have long insisted (McGregor 1993, Black 2001, McAdam 2012), establishing any sort of causal relation between environmental or climate change and migration is extremely problematic inasmuch as climate change can never be said to be the principal driver of migration decisions. Too many other factors – power, land tenure, labour markets, conflict and so forth - also account for migration decisions. At best all we can do is speculate from existing social and geophysical knowledge that climate change will entail some deep geohistorical transformations in which human mobility will figure prominently. Anything more than this would be conjecture. So rather than provide a unifying theory that aims to overcome the speculative nature of climate change and human mobility discourse, my goal here is to make a case for pluralising the debate on climate change and human mobility. Or to put this in slightly different terms, whereas it is often assumed that the key to deciphering the relation between climate change and migration is more and better research,<sup>1</sup> my aim is to hold this relation open to all manner of theoretical and methodological perspectives in a way that allows for it to become the basis for imagining new worlds and new possibilities for collective life.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This is precisely the assumption that lies at the heart of paragraph 14(f) of the Cancun Adaptation Framework which was agreed at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change COP16. The provision invites parties to the agreement to undertake “measures to enhance understanding, coordination and cooperation with regard to climate change induced displacement, migration and planned relocation, where appropriate, at the national, regional and international levels.” We can interpret this provision as admittance on the part of national governments that knowledge about this relation is actually very weak. For more on this provision, see Warner 2012. Subsequent to COP16, human mobility and climate change are addressed in two distinctive domains of international policy making. Migration is now being taken up in the UNFCCC Working Group on Loss and Damages, reflecting in part how migration is framed as an issue of climate change adaptation. But human displacement, a subset of migration, is also being addressed through the Nansen Initiative which is a consensus-building exercise initiated by the governments of Switzerland and Norway to develop legal protections for people displaced over an international border as a result of environmental disasters, including climate change.

<sup>2</sup> I wish to thank Noel Castree for this insight and for pushing me to look beyond critique as the primary mode of engaging with the topic of climate change and migration.

## Some background

Talk of the relation between human mobility and climate change may seem relatively new. After all, it only first appeared in international climate change law in 2010 in a provision of the Cancun Adaptation Framework which calls on national governments “to improve and enhance understanding” of the relation between climate change and “human migration and displacement” (Warner 2012).<sup>3</sup> Prior to this, speculations about the relation between human mobility and climate change really only began to surface in the media and in security and humanitarian discourses in the mid-late 2000s. Yet in spite of the apparent newness of the discourse on climate change and human mobility, such speculations reach back at least several decades. Thus, we can safely argue that such speculations merely repeat a longer standing set of discourses to do with environmental migration and so-called ‘environmental refugees’. For example, the rhetorical practice of using the threat of mass migration to cultivate environmental awareness, a practice widely used today in popular media and much Western political rhetoric,<sup>4</sup> finds clear expression in Essam El-Hinnawi’s (1985) classic statement *Environmental Refugees* published nearly 30 years ago by the United Nations Environment Programme. Recent research suggests that such mass migration events are highly improbable (see, for example, UK Foresight 2011), and yet the rhetorical appeal of their imagery is hard for many to resist, which is as much the case now as it was in the 1980s. So, too, then as now, the environmental or climate migrant is assumed to be both threat and victim. I argue later that this is a deeply problematic assumption, but it is one with enduring appeal nevertheless. And one further consistency between early discourses on environmental migration and those now underway on climate change concerns their grammatical form: it seems that the relation between human mobility and climate change is universally represented in the future-conditional tense (Baldwin 2012). The common

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<sup>3</sup> See note 1.

<sup>4</sup> One recent example comes from the UK Labour MP Chris Bryant who recently claimed “that if we get climate change wrong there is a very real danger we shall see levels of mass migration as yet unparalleled.” The full transcript of Bryant’s speech can be found here: <http://www.labour.org.uk/effective-action-on-immigration-not-offensive-gimmicks>.

assumption across much of the literature is that under conditions of future environmental or climate change human mobility *will likely* increase.

Two further issues on the relation between human mobility and climate change warrant mention. But since both are widely rehearsed across the literature on human mobility and environmental change, not least in an essay by Nick Gill (2010) in this very journal, I will touch upon them only briefly. First, there is the issue of definition and terminology. Here, the most important thing to point out is that at present no agreed definition exists of what precisely we mean when we say there is a relationship between climate change and human mobility, and consequently no universal term exists to characterise people who relocate or migrate as a result of environmental or climate change. Instead, all manner of terms are in wide circulation, all with varying degrees of appeal. So, for example, in his inaugural address to the United Nations General Assembly in 2009, US President Barack Obama (2009) referred to a class of people called 'climate refugees,' a concept with no legal basis, but one with strong rhetorical appeal. Also in circulation are the terms climate change-induced migrant, climate-induced migrant, environmental migrant, environmentally-induced migrant, and climate migrant. In another example, political scientist Gregory White (2011) studiously avoids making reference to such a person or group, preferring instead to reference the *phenomenon*, what he calls climate-induced migration. Importantly, for White, this phenomenon and the terms used to describe it are 'essentially contested', meaning that people cannot agree on how to define the phenomenon, but nevertheless acknowledge that it is a phenomenon worth speaking about. My own preference is to describe this essentially-contested phenomenon as a *relation* between human mobility and climate change. I use the term relation because it designates a relationship between the two terms but without ever falling into the trap of referring to this relationship as determinist or causal by which I mean a relation in which climate change *causes* or *determines* human mobility. Instead, the category 'relation' allows for us to talk about the phenomenon as comprised of any number of ontological forms, as complex, co-relational, or even future-conditional, all of which are important but which avoid specific

reference to determinism. And this leads immediately to the second issue, which is to do with causality.

It is now common practice for researchers to distance themselves from the language of causal determinism when writing on the topic of human mobility and climate change. This is for at least two reasons. First, the language of determinist causality bears the weight of early twentieth-century environmental determinisms according to which differences between groups of people were said to be pre-given by environmental conditions, a belief that underwrote early expressions of racism. No surprise scholars nowadays refuse determinist reasoning. But second, and equally important, no evidence exists that could substantiate a determinist claim. For as is now widely accepted across the field of human mobility and climate change research, human mobility cannot be explained solely in reference to environmental or climatic factors alone, since so many *other* intervening factors can also explain human mobility - labour markets, war and civil conflict being some of the more obvious. This is an argument often traced to earlier interventions by Richard Black (2001) and Astri Suhrke (1994), one that has become almost *de rigueur* in recent years, and it echoes the widely-held position in migration studies that migration is never mono-causal (Massey, Arango et al. 2005). But it also suggests that signifiers like 'human mobility and climate change' 'climate migrant' or 'climate-induced migration' have no underlying referent, no specific set of material relations to which they refer. Consequently, we might understand them as 'floating signifiers' (Bettini 2013) by which I mean concepts with no inherent meaning. Instead, what seems to have emerged in the recent discourse on human mobility and climate change is that the relation is being described less and less as determinate and more and more in the language of complexity, or at least applied systems ecology. Here, I take complexity to refer to the quality of a system in which cause (environmental change) and effect (human mobility) are said to be neither linear nor predictable but characterised by iterative feedbacks and thresholds and in which the systems themselves are said to be self-organising, adaptive and resilient. A good example of this discursive shift is found in a recent *Nature* commentary, which argues that migration can have both beneficial and harmful

effects on human well-being (Black, Bennett et al. 2011). Thus, for the authors of the commentary, migration can be considered adaptive, for example, if it can be said to contribute to the resilience of a population or a community. By framing adaptive migration as an index of resilience, the comment piece thus appears to privilege the 'complex system' as the principle unit of social-ecological organisation for evaluating human mobility as opposed to, say, the nation-state, the individual, or the city. This is not to suggest that states, bodies or cities are somehow irrelevant for understanding human mobility. It does, however, imply that such entities are conceived as smaller systems or nodes embedded within wider systems or networks. Another example is found in recent work by Richard Black, Dominic Kniveton and Kerstin Schmidt-Verkerk (Black, Kniveton et al. 2011) who describe human mobility as context-sensitive and nonlinear in the sense that the variables that coalesce to generate mobilities in one context may yield significantly different, unanticipated mobilities in another. The UK Foresight Report (2011) on migration and global environmental change is also noteworthy for characterising mobility as non-linear and counterintuitive. In pointing out that the discourse on human mobility and climate change has undergone a shift from determinism to complexity is not to suggest that this shift has been complete or total. Indeed, pronouncements that frame the human mobility effects of climate change in determinist language continue to be made by the media and within popular debate. It is simply to identify that the discourse on human mobility and climate change appears to be undergoing a shift in the very ontology by which its underlying (absent) referent is imagined, at least amongst academic researchers.

### **Pluralising the debate on human mobility and climate change**

But if the relation between human mobility and climate change is contested, speculative, and complex, then how else might it be understood? What kinds of analytical resources are also available to us that will help us better appreciate what is at stake when we talk about this relation? How can we gain purchase on this rather evasive relation? To answer these questions I want to foreground three concepts that loom large throughout much of the

discourse on human mobility and climate change but with which geographers and other social scientists are only just beginning to come to terms: neoliberalism, sovereignty and otherness.

### ***Neoliberalism***

Neoliberalism is perhaps one of the most widely analysed and debated topics in contemporary geography (Harvey 2005, Peck 2010). My intention here is not to rehearse all the many important ways geographers have sought to understand neoliberalism, except to say that neoliberalism is broadly conceived as a mode of reason that gives primacy to the market in the organisation of economic, social, political and cultural relations, and, not surprisingly, one that partly organises the relation between human mobility and climate change. In a rather compelling thesis, Romain Felli (2012) observes how the unfolding policy narrative which promotes migration as a form of climate change adaptation bears some ideological resemblance with neoliberalism. Felli arrives at this insight by tracing out a shift (not unlike the one proposed above) in the institutional discourse on human mobility and climate change in which an increasing number of institutional actors, most notably the International Organisation for Migration, refer to human mobility in the language of migration and migration management as opposed to refugee-ism. That is, whereas institutions previously might have referred to 'climate refugees' to designate a subject victimised by climate change, nowadays more and more institutions refer to 'climate migrants' to designate a subject whose mobility is partly (but not exclusively) a function of climate change. Felli accounts for this shift by suggesting that it occurs within a wider discourse of international migration governance in which migration is conceived as an object managed by the state in the interest of capital accumulation (Geiger and Pécoud 2010; 2012). His point is that for many policy makers unless otherwise managed through, for example, border restrictions, human mobility threatens to undermine the conditions for capital accumulation (i.e., workers might pass freely over borders). The shift from the language of 'climate refugees' to that of 'climate migration', argues Felli, performs a similar function. It reconceives climate change

migrants not as victims but as a form of mobile labour power that can be redeployed through, for example, circular migration schemes, as various accumulation regimes themselves adapt to climate change. (Think, for example, how the seasonal labour requirements for a sector like agriculture, which relies heavily on migrant labour, might change as climate change takes hold.) But for Felli this shift can also be viewed as part of a “broader trend toward the neoliberalisation of adaptation to environmental change” (p.350) in which adaptation is individualised. In this way, responsibility to adapt to climate change is said to rest with individual migrants whose adaptive capacity is directly proportional to their embrace of entrepreneurialism and their willingness to assume risk i.e., to migrate, in the strategic interest of their own survival.

We could take exception with elements of Felli’s important thesis. As he readily admits, much of his analysis derives from a discursive analysis of international policy texts as opposed to specific *in situ* material relations. Consequently, we are left wondering about its material implications. We might also wonder what would happen to his analysis were he to take seriously the future-conditional quality of climate change and migration discourse; doing so would surely force us to reckon with the temporalities of the climate-migration nexus. But in spite of these shortcomings, Felli’s thesis is extremely important to the debate on human mobility and climate change because it analyses the expanding discourse on human mobility and climate change within the wider context of neoliberalism.<sup>5</sup> In other words, it historicises the idea that migration can be a legitimate form of climate change adaptation by locating this idea within circuits of capital. His thesis tells us that in order to diagnose this idea properly – to understand which actors have the greatest stake in it, why and with what sorts of material consequences - requires that we attend to the ways in which the idea is being formulated in accordance with the exigencies of capital. Or put differently, for capital to be productive, for capital to circulate, requires that labour power be distributed and managed in a way that meets the needs of various regimes of accumulation, whether, for example, the production of French beans, the manufacturing of textiles or the analysis of

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<sup>5</sup> No other study does this, at least as far as I am aware.

big data. Ultimately, then, what Felli provides us with is an interpretation of the migration-as-adaptation thesis that can help us begin to understand how international organisations are actively reconfiguring the conditions that will make these regimes viable as climate change takes hold.

But if my goal in this paper is to provide an argument in support of pluralising the debate on the human mobility-climate change relation, then one additional aspect of Felli's thesis is important for us to consider: the emphasis he and others place on *depoliticisation* (Bettini 2013). By depoliticisation, Felli refers to a process by which states are constructed in the discourse on climate change and migration in such a way that they "are no longer seen as vehicles for collective political actions aiming at the transformation of external conditions" but instead become "subordinated mechanisms within a global apparatus of governance." In other words, what Felli observes within the discourse is that the role of the state, in particular the "southern state," is reduced to coordinating the technical implementation of migration management as opposed to being a democratic space, one through which competing political claims about climate change adaptation are vocalised and contested. And in this way, Felli echoes an argument that scholars on the Left have been making for quite some time, a concern for what has been called 'the retreat of the political' or the post-political (Marchart 2007, Swyngedouw 2009, Swyngedouw 2010). Glossing these arguments, the post-political is said to be a contemporary condition that characterises Western liberal democracies, one more or less coterminous with neoliberalism in which politics is no longer centred around the contestation of ideas, but has been replaced by what Erik Swyngedouw (2010) describes as a "managerial logic...where decision-making is increasingly considered to be a question of expert knowledge and not of political position" (p.225) Felli's argument is important because it alerts us to a similar managerial ethos organising much of the international discourse on human mobility and climate change to the detriment of understanding this discourse as inherently political. It reminds us that at stake in the neoliberalisation of the human mobility-climate change relation are fundamental questions

about power, democracy, citizenship, and about who decides what role the state will play in processes of climate change adaptation.

### **Sovereignty**

Political sovereignty and its correlate, territory, are two related areas of geography that bear significantly on human mobility and climate change. Political sovereignty commonly refers to the imagined, autonomous political authority that underwrites the nation-state. Territory, on the other hand, commonly designates the spatial extent of political sovereignty, which is often assumed, although not unproblematically, to coincide with state territorial borders. Contemporary political geography, however, poses the problem of sovereignty and territory rather differently, having long argued that sovereignty is never absolute nor territorially constrained (Agnew 1994, Agnew 2009, Elden 2009, Mountz 2013). I would suggest that it is precisely this creative rethinking of the sovereignty-territory relation that should provide the basis for interpreting of how political sovereignty and territory function as key concepts in climate change and human mobility discourse. In this section, I outline two recent interventions on the relation between human mobility and climate change that can help us better understand how political sovereignty and territory are at stake. The first addresses the issue of bordering practices and transit states, and the second addresses how notions of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation might help us conceptualise the condition of statelessness that arises when a state's territory disappears due to rising sea-levels.

In *Climate change and migration: security and borders in a warming world*, Gregory White (2011) provides one of the most comprehensive book-length statements on climate change and migration.<sup>6</sup> His thesis is that while climate-induced migration (his term) is regularly posed as a threat to the national security of North Atlantic states, such a view is unethical inasmuch as it disavows the West's complicity in the wider social, political and economic conditions that contribute to the migrations the West seeks to secure. Securitising

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<sup>6</sup> See also Jane McAdam's *Climate change, forced migration and international law* (Oxford University Press 2012) and Robert McLeman's *Climate and human migration: past experience, future challenges* (Cambridge University Press, 2014).

climate-induced migration, argues White, merely provides impetus for heightened border measures that restrict migration, measures that play well with anxious electorates and hawkish politicians. Against such measures, White poses what might be described as the liberal humanist position on climate-induced migration. This is a view that approaches the future possibility of climate-induced migration as a legitimate, albeit unspecified, phenomenon to be managed through a policy of development, climate change adaptation and governance.

Political sovereignty features centrally in White's argument. The crux of his analysis is that as discourses on climate-induced migration proliferate and as states increasingly accept the speculative claim that climate-induced migration poses a threat to national security, transit states will more and more recognise that imposing border measures will enhance their diplomatic credibility with neighbouring states. For White, this is especially pronounced for Morocco given its transitory position between Europe and Sahelian and sub-Saharan Africa. Here, the assumption is that since the effects of climate change are expected to be most severe in exactly those two regions of Africa, northward migration from those regions is expected to increase which will in turn place migratory pressure on European borders. This is determinist reasoning in its crudest form. Consequently, argues White, this kind of reasoning reinforces Morocco's position as a transit state in which policing migration to bolster its own sovereignty is enrolled in a wider diplomatic strategy to gain concessions from the European Union.<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile, migrants are then regularly criminalised by states newly emboldened by the promise of smooth diplomacy. White rightly characterises this situation as unethical not least given that transit states' 'thickening' of the border is based on entirely speculative grounds.

In a second intervention, Brad Blitz (2011) provides a rather different account of sovereignty. Whereas in White's story sovereignty is said to be intensified in response to a perceived crisis, in Blitz' story sovereignty risks disappearing altogether. His concern is the implications of statelessness that would arise were a state's territory to be submerged under

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<sup>7</sup> For more on the Moroccan border with Europe, see Ferrer-Gallardo 2008 and

rising sea-levels and its sovereignty is called into question. This is of course a scenario specific to low-lying island states, such as Tuvalu, Kiribati, Vanuatu and the Maldives. For Blitz, a number of questions arise in such a scenario. What becomes of the political status of those whose state territory is now submerged? Do they retain their status as citizens of the state, even though the state's corresponding territory is no longer habitable? Or does their citizenship evaporate once the territory is declared uninhabitable? Do they become stateless? Or are they considered to be citizens of their former state? If the latter, what capacity does the state have to protect the rights of its territorially deprived citizens? And what becomes of their political status were the habitants of the now-lost territory to relocate elsewhere? In such a case, are the rights of citizenship transferable to other jurisdictions? And what about the state itself? What becomes of its sovereignty in the absence of a corresponding territory? Does or can the state function in exile while retaining jurisdictional rights over the now submerged territory? Many more similar questions might also be posed in light of this confounding situation.

Ultimately by posing such questions, Blitz is striving to understand how to protect the human rights of those who might be designated as stateless by virtue of climate change. Such questions about statelessness and climate change are extremely important, and by no means do I wish to trivialise them. But for my purposes here, Blitz' concern about statelessness points us to a much more confounding dilemma about the relationship between deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation in the context of climate change. Deterritorialisation, Blitz reminds us, refers to the process by which entities become detached from their 'moorings': bodies dislodged from place; financial markets dislodged from national regulators; concepts whose meanings no longer conform to prior assumptions; or identities severed from citationary structures. For Blitz, deterritorialisation is meant in a more literal sense; the vanishing of territory. Conversely, however, deterritorialisation is never absolute and always implies reterritorialisation. So, for example, deterritorilalised bodies are never just dislodged and wayward. They become reterritorialised through a new set of relations. Blitz' specific concern is to ask what reterritorialisation might mean for the

stateless body, what new 'moorings' might be available to it and with what implications. Blitz suggests that the diaspora might be one such mooring for the stateless body and thus the basis for newly reterritorialised political community.

Answers to these questions are well beyond the scope of this paper. However, what Blitz' intervention provides is a novel vocabulary for reconceptualising the human mobility effects of climate change. It suggests that at stake in the discourse of climate change and human mobility is a politics of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation, a politics whose object referent is the simultaneous undoing and reconstituting of political community. In other words, if climate change implies human mobility (how could it not?), in the sense that people will need or will choose to relocate from their homes in order to adapt to climate change, and if this implies (in both a real and imagined sense) the circulation and mixing of bodies, then the outcome of this deterritorialisation process will be various reterritorialisations, newly configured political communities, some of which may resemble old forms of political community (i.e., nation-states), and others which may not. Thus, one of the most important political issues that arise in light of the future-conditional phenomenon of climate change and human mobility concerns the ways in which individuals, political authorities, and institutions respond to deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation. Are these two processes ones to be embraced? Or are they to be refused? What implications does either their embrace or refusal have for political sovereignty? And what role does political violence play in both processes? Answers to these questions are far from clear at this point. But if, as Wendy Brown (2010) suggests, sovereignty is being deterritorialised from the nation-state and reterritorialised into the realms of capital or religion, then any analysis of political violence in the context of climate change ought to address the complex process of sovereignty's deterritorialisation/reterritorialisation.

### ***Otherness***

And finally, like neoliberalism and sovereignty, various expressions of difference are also deeply implicated in the discourse on climate change and human mobility. Here, we might

come to understand the relation between climate change and human mobility by attending to the way in which the figure of human mobility i.e., the migrant, the refugee, asylum seeker, the nomad, and so forth, acquires the status of Other within climate change discourse. Regularly the figure of the climate change migrant is positioned as Other to, or different from, the otherwise unmarked universal subject of climate change advocacy (Baldwin 2012). For example, the climate change migrant is regularly said to represent a threat to national and international political stability (Hartmann 2010). This is especially the case in a wider set of discourses concerned with climate security where the figure of the climate change migrant, or in some instances, the climate refugee, is routinely said to catalyse political violence. But the figure of the climate change migrant is also Othered in humanitarian discourses in which it is assumed to be victimised by a pending set of climatic catastrophes (Farbotko 2010, Farbotko and Lazrus 2012). The argument has also been made that when positioned as either a threat or as a victim, as Other to an otherwise normal, unmarked subject of climate change discourse, the figure of climate change migration takes on racial connotations (Baldwin 2013). This argument draws from Paul Gilroy's (1991) claim that threat and victimhood are defining attributes of racialised bodies. It also draws from David Theo Goldberg's (2009) observation that racial connotations are regularly conceived in modernity as the "threat, the external, the unknown, the outside." However, when conceived as Other, the figure of climate change and human mobility discourse exhibits a very peculiar kind of alterity. Whereas otherness is most often conceived in cultural studies in the idiom of *different from* (Hall 1992), in climate change and human mobility discourse otherness is, perhaps, better conceptualised as *yet-to-come*. In other words, we might conceive of the figure as originating in the future, albeit with implications for how we live in the present. This reflects the fact that the discourse on climate change and human mobility is almost always written in the future-conditional tense (Baldwin 2013). But it also reflects the fact that the relation between climate change and migration is not actual, but virtual, by which I mean the relation is real but that it does not coincide with any actual presence or phenomenon. Consequently, I would suggest that the figure of the climate change migrant is the potential

embodiment of racial otherness, or the potential embodiment of threat, external, unknown, outside, as the potential to be out of place. This is not to suggest that subjectivities like ‘asylum seeker’, ‘refugee’, or ‘migrant’ are not already racialised. They are. It is simply to emphasise that otherness in the context of climate change and migration discourse exhibits a very different temporality than it does in other spatiotemporal contexts.

Much can be made of this analysis, but two related ideas are worth considering in light of my argument about the need to pluralise the debate on climate change and human mobility. The first concerns the fluidity or mutability of the concept of race. Whereas it is commonplace to assume that race itself is a floating signifier, an idea with no corresponding ontology, we also know that racisms persist; we can see their effects everywhere. Consequently, even though we are regularly told that we live in a post-racial world, a world in which race is no longer said to matter as an object of thought, the persistence of racisms’ effects suggest quite the opposite. They suggest that racisms continue to operate but without explicit reference to the category that gives these systems of prejudice their name. So, rather than a repudiated category, race has the odd quality of being continuously rewritten, albeit through proxy categories that are made to stand in for racial difference and through which new racisms become articulated. This is a quality that has elsewhere been referred to as racisms’ “polyvalent mobility” (Moore, Kosek et al. 2003, p.4), or what Ann Stoler calls racisms’ “power to rupture with the past and selectively and strategically recuperate it at the same time” (Stoler 2002, as quoted in Moore et al. 2003). To give an example, Sherene Razack (2008) argues that “race thinking reveals itself in the phrase ‘Canadian values’ or ‘American values,’ uttered so sanctimoniously by prime ministers and presidents when they refer to what is being defended in the ‘war on terror’” (p.8). Her claim is that Canadian and American values are here made to designate an innocent identity, i.e., whiteness, which needs to be shielded from the terrorist i.e., the racial other. Racism is at work here through a racialised language that refuses any reference to race. Indeed, as Razack (2008) goes on to argue, “when we look for signs of racism’s presence, then, it is not simply to be found in the racial hostility some individuals bear towards others not of their

race, but also in the ideas that the state must protect itself from those who do not share its values, ideals of beauty, and middle-class virtues” (p.11). What Razack’s account illustrates, then, is an example of racism in which race is left implicit, and one with immediate consequences for how we might analyse the relation between climate change and human mobility. For if we accept the reasoning that the figure of the climate change migrant bears implicit racial connotations, then the discourse on climate change and human migration becomes an integral site through which race thinking becomes rearticulated. Understanding how exactly this happens thus becomes an urgent task.

And this leads directly to the second idea: the pending conjugation between race thinking, the Anthropocene and the crisis of humanism. Not only is there an urgent need to understand the racial dimensions of climate change and human mobility discourse, but doing so also requires that we attend to the way in which the very category of the ‘human’ is being reconfigured in the context of climate change. One of racism’s most ensuring features is the way it dehumanises people, the way it designates bodies as outside the category of the human. However, as we collectively enter an epoch often referred to as the Anthropocene, a geologic time in which the earth’s geo-bio-physicality is said to be as much an expression of some innate force as it is an expression of humans’ earth-shaping potency, the very category of the ‘human’ seems no longer certain. If the ‘human’ of humanism is said to have been founded upon the Enlightenment faith that the Human is distinct from Nature given the Human’s agency to direct historical time, then we might say that the Anthropocene designates a ‘post-human’ epoch,<sup>8</sup> a period of geologic time in which the Human and Nature are now said to be fully imbricated (if, indeed, they were ever distinct (Latour 1993)). Consequently, it seems that the arrival of the Anthropocene, inaugurated in part by anthropogenic climate change, calls into question some of racism’s founding categories (i.e., human, nature), in turn, forcing us (once again?) to consider whether and how racism is written in relation to or through what Kay Anderson (2005) calls the ‘the crisis of humanism’.

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<sup>8</sup> For more on posthumanism see, for example, Braun, B (2004) “Querying posthumanisms,” *Geoforum*, 35(3), pp. 269-273.

At this particular conjuncture, then, the significance of the relation between climate change and human mobility, at least from the vantage of critical race theory, lies, partly, in the way the category of 'race' finds expression in the relation at a moment often characterised as simultaneously post-racial *and* post-human.

### **Pluralising the debate: towards invention**

The foregoing presents three different perspectives through which we might begin to make sense of the relation between human mobility and climate change. Up until now my aim has been to suggest that this relation can be analysed from any number of perspectives each of which hones in on and emphasises a different sub-set of relations. It is almost as though the relation between climate change and human mobility resembles a skein - the entanglements of earth, climate, economy, identity, state, ethnicity, and so forth - which can never be fully disaggregated but through which one can trace out a network of interconnecting sub-relations. Neoliberalism, sovereignty, and otherness merely represent three unique vantages one can take to identify the significance of the relation. But one could also examine it using any number of other approaches and come up with an equally significant range of insights. Feminist geopolitics, political geography, and globalisation immediately come to mind as additional possible routes into the relation.

I want to end, though, by taking seriously the plurality of approaches that have been used to analyse the relation between climate change and human mobility. This range of perspectives is important precisely because it allows us to see how the relation between climate change and human mobility is open to wide interpretation and, thus, a relation that can be, or better yet *should be*, contested, debated and challenged. And here I wish to suggest a rather different ethical stance we might adopt in respect of the relation between migration and climate change. Rather than assume we can overcome political disagreement by closing it down, by building a consensus around a singular ontological form (i.e., complexity vs determinate causality) or method of analysis (i.e., ethnography vs scenario planning), perhaps we should hold open the relation of climate change and migration. For,

as Judith Butler (1992) argued long ago, to install foreclosure as an analytical feature of the political “enforces the boundaries of the domain of the political in such a way that that enforcement is protected from political scrutiny” (p.4). This, Butler suggests, is an “authoritarian ruse” by which political contestation becomes “summarily silenced” (p.4). Indeed, it is precisely this type of argument that animates much of the post-political critique of climate change to which I alluded earlier. Thus, I would argue that the very contestability of the relation between climate change and human mobility suggests that we should refuse to foreclose this relation so long as we value democratic forms of social organisation. Democracy, after all, is predicated on difference, contestation and refusal.

And finally, the need for contestation is all the more pressing given that the one thing we *do* know about the relation between climate change and human mobility is that it is fraught with uncertainty. At the outset of my argument, I suggested that our epistemic understanding of the relation is thoroughly future-conditional; we conceive of it almost exclusively through future scenarios, modelling, forecasting and quantitative prediction, even magical realism and science fiction. But what these forms of knowledge tell us is that the full range of human mobilities, migrations and displacements that may arise under changing climatic conditions can never be known in advance. So here let me finish by paraphrasing Noel Castree (2013): if the future is by definition uncertain, albeit constrained by various path dependencies, then the future is ours to make. That is, we can invent the future we want, rather than merely prepare for the futures that the experts tell us we should expect. And this is why pluralising the debate on climate change and migration is so important; we need a vast array of perspectives in order to help us stretch our thinking into the future. If the human mobility effects of climate change are to conjugate with existing unequal divisions of labour and territorial distributions of power and prejudices, then it would seem pertinent that whatever worlds we seek to invent should avoid reproducing existing forms of inequality and prejudice. One way to do this might be to remain faithful to the future as a site of infinite contestability, to conceive of this future as a site of infinite potential rather than foreclosure.

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