



Climate migration between conflictive discourses and empirical realities

Handbook on the Governance and Politics of Migration

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7. Climate migration between conflictive discourses and empirical realities

Ingrid Boas and Hanne Wiegel

INTRODUCTION

Climate change and the environment are amongst the core set of drivers that induce and shape human migration (Black et al. 2011). Yet, precisely how influential climate change is in driving migration, what form the subsequent migrations take, and who they involve, remains highly contested (ibid.). Precisely because of these contestations and uncertainties, there is much space for different discursive understandings that frame the issue in a particular manner and may not always be based on empirically driven insights. This is even more so as much of the debate concerns the future. As argued by Baldwin et al. (2014: 121):

Thus far, the debate about climate-induced migration has been dominated by its futurology. It has led to the question of whether or not predictions about climate-induced migration are true, how many climate-induced migrants will have to be expected and how the consequences of climate change will interact with other drivers of flight and migration.

This chapter offers a critique of the most prominent discourses on climate migration, which have found support by academics, the media and in political circles. On the one hand, there is the dominant ‘alarmist’ discourse (Gemenne 2009) which has largely framed the issue of climate change-induced migration as a potential threat. Simply put, its main storyline warns of millions of people from the global South on the run for their lives, fleeing sea-level rise, extreme storms, water scarcity, trying to reach safe havens in Western Europe or Northern America (for critiques, see Bettini 2013; Boas 2014; Hartmann 2010). On the other hand, there is the migration-as-adaptation discourse, which has framed climate migration as a legitimate individual adaptation strategy which people can use to self-manage their situation under a changing climate (for critiques, see, for example, Bettini 2017a, 2017b). As opposed to the alarmist discourse, the latter presents the subject in more neutral and positive terms (Methmann and Oels 2015).

We argue that these two discourses rely on not always empirically founded assumptions about how the relation between environmental change and migration materializes (for example, assuming there will be mass climate migration); about who the migrant is (for example, a passive and reactive agent, posing a potential threat for receiving societies versus an active and self-reliant migrant self-governing their situation). Meanwhile, such understandings are not neutral but have real repercussions for governance. From the position of the more alarmist discourse, for example, measures could be designed to manage or pre-empt the so-called threat of incoming “climate refugees” (Hartmann 2010) or to protect the passively affected through top-down interventions (McAdam and Loughry 2009). Following the migration-as-adaptation discourse, a governance approach could instead be to refrain from

interventions and adopting a *laissez-faire* approach under which local communities protect themselves (Bettini et al. 2017).

In the remainder of this chapter, we contrast these discourses with the experiences, perceptions and day-to-day realities of affected communities and migrants. We place our critique within a wider set of social theories on mobilities. This mobilities approach highlights that we should not presume what migration looks like in the context of a changing climate, or what its implications are. In contrast, we should critically assess what it means to move, or not move, and how this takes shape in practice. Doing so helps to uncover the diverse ways in which people try to cope with environmental changes through their mobility, and highlights the need for more awareness to underlying social inequalities shaping people's vulnerability and mobile capacities. Adopting such an approach could make political discourse and governance of the environmental change–human mobility nexus more attuned to the diversity of local needs and to capturing underlying inequalities, without neglecting attention to global responsibilities or injustices.

Contested Discourses on Climate Migration

'Climate refugees' and the alarmist discourse

The issue of climate change-induced migration, or environmental change-induced migration more broadly – referring to migrations in the context of significant changes in the natural environment – has gone on and off the political radar over the last two decades. It became particularly popular in the early 2000s when climate change turned into an issue of high politics, particularly in Europe (Boas 2015; Trombetta 2008). At that time, most writings on the climate change–migration nexus, both academic and non-academic, portrayed the issue in what has later been labelled as an alarmist way (see discussions in Bettini et al. 2017; Gemenne 2009). Within academia, most such writings came from those working on environmental studies, seeking to highlight the gravity of environmental change by referring to its implications on society (Gemenne 2009). For example, Norman Myers (Myers and Kent 1995; Myers 2002), as an environmental specialist, warned of 200 million environmental refugees by 2050, largely caused by sea-level rise. Such estimates have later been critiqued for being 'at best, guesswork' (Parry et al. 2007: 365) and have thus far not been supported by empirical evidence (Gemenne 2011). Nevertheless, this estimate has been adopted by several policy documents and NGO reports on climate change and migration (for example, Christian Aid 2007; Stern 2006) and is still today referred to during policy conferences held on the subject.¹ As such, these high numerical estimates have the political function to gain attention and to create a sense of urgency around the issue of climate change-induced migration.

Indeed, supported by a discursive lexicon of alarming phrases, such as 'climate refugees', 'mass migration', 'climate conflict' and 'chaos', national governments, the United Nations, NGOs, think tanks, and some academics also tried to put the issue of climate change-related refugees and migrants on the political radar (Bettini 2013; Boas 2015; Warner and Boas 2019). One of the authors of this chapter employed this framing in previous work, emphasizing the vulnerability of 'climate refugees' in order to stress the existing lack of legal protection (Biermann and Boas 2010). This was (perhaps naïvely) done without considering the discursive implications of framing the subject in such a fashion, which, rather than helping refugees by signalling the gravity of the situation, can support a fearsome imagining of 'climate refugees' as 'barbarians at the gate' trying to make their way into Europe (see Bettini 2013 for this

critique). Such a framing can result in an apocalyptic imagining of the subject matter through which the ‘envisioning of an ultimate threat (the tsunami of climate refugees), ... raises the imperative “If I don’t do this ... some unspeakably horrible X will take place”’ (Žižek, cited in Bettini 2013: 65). A number of humanitarian NGOs such as Christian Aid have, in trying to convince policy-makers to act on both climate change and migration to avoid a future crisis, indeed adopted such a scaremongering discourse by framing climate refugees as the threatening ‘Other’ posing risks to the stability of the international community (Bettini 2013; Boas 2015). It is on this basis that they have then argued for more interventionist action in the fields of climate mitigation, adaptation and conflict prevention work, with the rationale to prevent future risks from unfolding (for example, Boas and Rothe 2016).

Yet, in this discourse, ‘climate refugees’ are not only framed as a threat, but simultaneously as passive victims of changes in the environment (on a similar discursive tension between migrants as threat or victims, see Thibos and Howard in this volume, Chapter 12, on human trafficking). To make the argument that the international community should help protect affected ‘climate refugees’ (for example, Biermann and Boas 2010), these so-called ‘refugees’ are often depicted as having low adaptive capacities and limited agency to protect themselves. This framing has received much criticism, not least by those being framed in such a manner. For example, inhabitants and politicians from the Pacific small island states of Kiribati and Tuvalu reject the label ‘refugees’, since for them it ‘evokes a sense of helplessness and a lack of dignity that contradicts their very strong sense of pride’ (McAdam and Loughry 2009). Furthermore, the definition of refugees in the 1951 Geneva Convention signals persecution or lack of protection from one’s government, which is not necessarily applicable in the case of climate change-induced migration (cf. Hart, Chapter 8 and Crawley and Setrana, Chapter 16, both in this volume).

These concerns about the alarmist discourse have been supported by a wave of criticism coming mainly from academics specializing in migration studies or in discourse theory. Migration scholars highlighted the multi-causal nature of migration and the persisting scientific uncertainties around the impact that climate change, or environmental changes more broadly, have or can have on migration (Black 2001; Castles 2002). These scholars argued that other factors, such as economic, political, demographic and social factors, are intertwined with environmental drivers of migration in a complex manner, so that in most cases it is impossible to single out the impact of climate change on migration decisions (Black et al. 2011).

In addition, many migration studies have noted the multiple and diverse ways in which people respond to climate impacts: whereas some may decide to migrate to more distant places, many others prefer to stay or to move only temporarily or locally, whilst again others may remain unwillingly ‘trapped’ in dangerous situations as they do not have the means to move away (Foresight 2011). For instance, in New Orleans, USA, those most affected by Hurricane Katrina in 2005 were those without access to a car, who, having to rely on a failing public transport system, got ‘trapped’ in New Orleans when the hurricane hit (Hannam et al. 2006). This shows that moving away does not necessarily reflect vulnerability. Instead, it is the ability to move or to stay, and the inequalities experienced in that process, which are crucial to understand (Gill et al. 2011).

Several scholars have also demonstrated that the political effectiveness of the apocalyptic framing of climate change-induced migration is questionable (Boas 2015; Hulme 2009; O’Neil and Nicholson-Cole 2009). Presenting an issue as a major threat does not necessarily result in more action. Indeed, it can further induce scepticism amongst an already sceptical audience

(Boas 2015), or make people and decision-makers feel that climate change is too big an issue for them to manage (Hulme 2009; Methmann and Rothe 2012; O'Neil and Nicholson-Cole 2009). As argued by O'Neil and Nicholson-Cole (2009: 371), it can lead to 'denial of the problem and disengagement with the whole issue in an attempt to avoid the discomfort of contending with it'.

Despite the strong criticism, the alarmist discourse continues to be influential. In particular, the 2015 'European refugee crisis' brought projections of 'future waves of climate refugees' firmly back on the radar of influential organizations and governmental agencies. It has resulted in numerous news headlines, ranging from those emphasizing the dangerous impacts of climate change (for example, 'Climate change key in Syrian conflict – and it will trigger more war in future' (*The Independent* 2015)²) to those using it to warn about future migration (for example, 'Calais migration crisis is a taste of what a warmer world may bring' (*New Scientist*, 2015)³). This shows that the apocalyptic imagining continues to re-emerge as a strong political message, even when it has been shown to be empirically unfounded (Bettini 2013).

The migration-as-adaptation approach

In response to the alarmist discourse on migration in the context of climate change, several migration scholars in conjunction with specific migration and development organizations (such as the International Organization for Migration, and the Asian Development Bank) proposed an alternative approach to migration in the context of climate change (see, for example, Kniveton et al. 2008; McLeman and Smit 2006; Warner and Afifi 2014; for critical reviews, see, for example, Bettini and Gioli 2015; Methmann and Oels 2015). It highlights that migration should not be considered an exceptional or alarming phenomenon. Rather, they argue, it should be considered as a legitimate adaptation strategy through which affected people self-manage their situation. For example, a central narrative is that through seasonal migration, migrants can diversify their skill sets and income sources, providing options to send remittances home, which could in turn strengthen the resilience of those in places of origin (see also Medland in this volume, Chapter 22). In Ghana, for example, where fish stocks are increasingly scarce as a result of several environmental changes, fishery communities migrate seasonally within or outside the country in response to seasonal and spatial distribution of fish stocks, such as during upwelling events in coastal waters (Kraan 2009). Migration is thus seen as a mechanism of adaptation to (environmental) changes.

This so-called migration-as-adaptation discourse has gained much support, particularly from 2010 onwards when the critique on the alarmist discourse became more pronounced. It has, for example, shaped much of the focus, framing and outcomes of one of the largest and most influential studies that has been conducted on this subject: The Foresight Report on Environmental Change and Human Migration, issued by the UK Government for Science, led by the migration specialist Richard Black (Black et al. 2011; Foresight 2011). The migration-as-adaptation discourse became the underlying logic of many policy initiatives and academic articles that focus on livelihood diversification and resilience-building in local contexts (for example, ADB 2012; IOM 2014; Warner 2012; Warner and Afifi 2014).

However, while this migration-as-adaptation rationale has been important in widening the focus on climate migration studies beyond the alarmist discursive frame, it also faces its own problems. For example, even under such neoliberal narratives of self-responsibility, the migration-as-adaptation discourse is far from promoting free movement. Instead, it assumes the figure of a 'docile, resilient migrant' (Bettini 2017a: 85) who follows the pre-described

governed paths of labour migration agreements in order to send home remittances to self-fund resilience-building. Experiences from literature on the migration–development nexus show, however, how such assumptions of remittances decreasing local vulnerabilities are often too simplistic to represent complex local realities, including power inequalities within communities (see also Kabbanji in this volume, Chapter 6).

Another main point of critique is that this approach locates the responsibility to adapt with the individual household or community (see critiques by Bettini 2013; Bettini et al. 2017; Bettini and Gioli 2015; Methmann and Oels 2015). Ownership of the problem is thereby shifted from the state to private actors and individuals (Joseph 2013). ‘Whereas alarmist climate conflict storylines [...] legitimize sovereign forms of power, such as state-driven migration management or political/military interventions in climate hot-spot regions (Hartmann 2010), resilience promotes government at a distance’ (Boas and Rothe 2016: 616–17; see also Methmann and Oels 2015). Failure to adapt then becomes individual failure (for a wider discussion of the resilience discourse in EU migration governance and its framing of migrants as needing to adapt locally, cf. Paul and Roos 2019).

Under this neoliberal discourse of self-responsibility, global inequalities between greenhouse gas emitters and those most vulnerable to the effects of climatic and environmental changes are largely neglected, as are local inequalities that render some people more vulnerable than others (Bettini et al. 2017). As Bettini (2017a, 2017b), Klepp and Herbeck (2016) and others have highlighted, the migration-as-adaptation approach is de-politicizing in that it does not address the underlying power structures that determine vulnerability patterns as well as adaptive capacities. Thereby, the issue of climate justice and global responsibility is muted.

Furthermore, it enables large emitting states to render invisible the fact that their greenhouse gas emissions are a primary cause of the climate impacts affecting local communities. Instead, this discourse represents climate change-induced migration as a neutral, local, phenomenon that can be – and should be – self-managed by those affected (Boas and Rothe 2016; Methmann and Oels 2015). Such a framing normalizes the implications of climate change by rendering them manageable and, in the case of migration for adaptive purposes, even positive. This allows major emitters and richer states to evade their responsibilities for both the mitigation of and adaptation to climate change

Despite this critique, the migration-as-adaptation discourse succeeded (at least temporarily) in reframing the issue of climate migration as not being the responsibility of defence and immigration/border control agencies (Boas 2015; Boas and Rothe 2016; Methmann and Oels 2015). As climate migration was no longer portrayed as a threat, but as a mechanism through which communities affected by climate change could adapt locally, the issue became of less interest to governments and the media, at least in the global North (until the 2015 European ‘refugee crisis’). In this way, the climate change–migration nexus became invisibilized as an issue of global political interest. This is illustrated by the following quote from a UK Home Office official, who took a disinterested and distanced position on the subject of climate migration by arguing: ‘People could not afford to come to the UK and why would they? People’s adaptation strategy is to move upstream, locally, and then move back to their places’ (author interview with UK Home Office 2011).

Towards a Better Understanding of Migrants' Experiences: a Mobilities Perspective

With the European 'refugee crisis', the optimism of the migration-as-adaptation approach decreased somewhat as notions of securitization came again to dominate the political agendas (Bettini 2017b; on securitization generally, see Follis in this volume, Chapter 5). Nevertheless, particularly in academia, calls for a re-orientation and re-politicization of environmental migration are becoming stronger. This is in response to both the alarmist discourses about threatening climate migrants and the neoliberal notions of the migration-as-adaptation discourse as outlined above. As Klepp (2017) highlights, this shift is also reflected in the changing research foci applied in this field: whereas the first wave of climate migration literature (1990s–early 2000s) largely concerned itself with (the now heavily criticized) numerical predictions, the second wave (mid-2000s onwards) focused on the complexities of interrelated migration drivers.

Currently, the third wave is mostly concerned with ethnographic work highlighting the voices and perceptions of those experiencing climate change. As opposed to the first two waves, this form of research allows for a detailed understanding of local contexts and zooms into the role of unequal power relations in shaping people's vulnerability to climate change. It seeks to understand the issue from the perspective of those affected, trying to capture what it means to be immobile or having to move in the context of a changing climate. In doing so, it seeks to bring the study and understanding of environment–migration interactions back to the here and now and thus avoids an over-reliance on assumptions about future risks and implications. Instead, by focusing on who is affected, how people are affected and how that relates to human mobility in diverse ways, we can obtain a more empirically grounded understanding of the subject area, allowing migration governance to become better attuned to present and real-life needs.

This third wave of research on environmental migration is embedded in a set of established social theories that aim to provide a more contextualized understanding of migration and adaptation. Examples of these are translocality studies (Keck and Sankdapolrak 2013; Sankdapolrak et al. 2016), transformative adaptation (Klepp and Chavez-Rodriguez 2018), and mobilities (Boas et al. 2018; Gill et al. 2011). In the remainder of this section, we want to demonstrate particularly how the mobilities approach, originating from the disciplines of sociology and human geography, offers several conceptual tools to better capture the day-to-day and diverse realities of migration in the context of environmental changes.

The mobilities paradigm in social theory studies the complex interrelations between mobilities and immobilities of people, materials, knowledge, ideas, technologies, communications, risks, etc. (Hannam et al. 2006; Sheller and Urry 2006). Most importantly, the mobilities approach allows us to understand migration as something more than a linear movement from origin to destination. This implies that in studying environmental migration, it is necessary to inquire how mobility may or may not have been part of people's lives, independent of environmental influences on migration decisions. Persons moving might also be 'repetitively mobile, gradually mobile, seasonally mobile and locally mobile' which 'point[s] towards the development of mobility as a way of life rather than an exceptional event in response to climate change' (Gill et al. 2011: 305). For instance, for many pastoralist groups in Central and West Africa, local or even transnational mobility is a way of life to cope with seasonal changes in the environment. For them, the exceptional event might rather be a prolonged phase of immobility

due to enhanced droughts as a result of climate change, land politics and bordering issues (for example, De Bruijn et al. 2016).

Nevertheless, this does not mean that we should see migration as necessarily voluntary or even as something positive. Not all people or communities have an equal relationship with mobilities, and while for some it might be a choice to become mobile, for others it might be the only option. As Gill et al. (2011: 304) write, it is crucial to understand that there can be ‘as much un-freedom in mobility as there is in fixity’, romanticizing neither the sedentary nor the mobile.

To study the diverse realities of migration, Gill et al. (2011) write how the mobilities approach is particularly useful in studying how mobility and immobility interact. Indeed, Sheller and Urry (2006) highlight how these condition each other in a dialectical fashion, as, for example, the mobility of some family or community members might require the stability of others. By not victimizing those who move, nor generically celebrating them as some form of cosmopolitan subjects, the mobilities perspective can thus be understood as an invitation to dig deeper into the context-specific motives and interpretations of moving and remaining.

This also gives us more room to understand why people are *not* mobile: while the 2011 Foresight Report introduced the concept of ‘trapped populations’ to describe those most vulnerable to environmental changes desperately lacking the means to move away, the notion that some people might not want to be mobile and decide to remain in their current location has received less attention from environmental migration scholars. A noteworthy exception comes from the research by Adams (2016) who demonstrates how, in the face of harsh environmental conditions (such as both extremes of low and high temperatures and excessive rains), people from highland Peru do not want to leave due to their positive attachment to place.

Approaching environmental migration with the mobilities approach also offers a different political perspective. As opposed to the alarmist discourse, a mobilities lens highlights the everyday and local realities of the migrants in question, showing highly localized, contextualized and diverse patterns of mobility. This stands in contrast to the alarmist projections of mass movements and large-scale intercontinental migration. In contrast to the migration-as-adaptation discourse, the mobilities approach focuses on daily realities of climate vulnerability and human mobility, without labelling these in neoliberal terms such as ‘adaptation’ or ‘self-management. Even more so, this approach explicitly refrains from understanding migration in neutral terms, by paying attention to underlying inequalities and the role of power relations that determine the experiences of mobility. In this manner, a mobilities approach can be a potential starting point for a diversification and re-politicization of the issue of environmental migration.

Furthermore, as argued earlier in other work (Boas et al. 2018), using a mobilities approach helps to understand governance and governance gaps from the perspective of the mobilities, in this case the environmental or climate migrants. ‘A mobilities perspective asks us to look at who is moving, how people are moving, and why they are moving, as the starting point of thinking about governance. When doing so, we can identify multiple profiles of environmental migrants that each have different governance needs’ (Boas et al. 2018: 118).

This allows us to understand why governance structures are in place to address one form of environmental migration, whilst lacking in another case. For example, governance action and assistance are present where people are displaced by sudden-onset disasters, such as cyclones. This is because many people get suddenly displaced for a certain period at time, which is often of such a scale that it receives much media, political and donor attention. Meanwhile,

there is a lack of governance action in cases where people have to move on a more gradual basis, as a result of environmental changes that worsen at a slower rate (for example, erosion or sea-level rise). These slow-onset environmental changes affect populations gradually and therefore attract less urgent attention. As a result, these instances of migration do not receive a similar amount of assistance. Instead, they largely remain the domain of self-governance by the affected communities.

To sum up this final point, a mobilities perspective helps to signal that there are different types of movements associated with environmental change, requiring a varied response, whilst highlighting how and why some become marginalized in global migration governance frameworks (see Boas et al. 2018 for more details on this argument).

Insights from Bangladesh

To briefly illustrate a mobilities approach within the ‘third wave’ of research in environmental migration, we draw on some empirical examples taken from fieldwork conducted by Ingrid Boas in coastal Bangladesh, during August–December 2017. Below we briefly reflect on some general findings from two areas: the island Kutubdia (Chittagong District in South-East Bangladesh), and the local union Char Fasson (South of Bhola Island, Barisal District, Central-South Bangladesh).⁴

To start with, it is important to note how mobility in Bangladesh is not something novel in the context of present-day climate change. Given the dynamic delta it is, mobility – including forced mobility – has long been common in Bangladesh. For centuries, land has been changing, with certain parts disappearing and other parts newly emerging.⁵ On top of that, there are ongoing rural–rural and rural–urban migration dynamics shaping mobility decisions. These stem from a diverse set of factors, including environmental change, economic pressures, urbanization dynamics, and the rise of communication technology facilitating long-distance connections. This also means that under the environmental dynamics and pressures brought about by current anthropogenic climate change, people move in the context of those mobility patterns that have long existed in Bangladesh. Indeed, in many of the migration trajectories traced during the fieldwork, migrants were moving or had moved to places where they have prior connections (Boas 2020). For example, they move to nearby cities where relatives are based, or they move to some of the freshly emerged lands in the rivers (so-called *char* lands) where land is wet but more affordable.

From a governance perspective, this means that the design of top-down proposals and pre-held assumptions about how and to where people move do not resonate with local realities and do not align with ongoing ways of moving and living in Bangladesh. A fairer and more effective way forward could be to examine essential protection needs from the perspectives of the communities and migrants in question, making sure that assistance and governance schemes are well attuned to the cultural and local ways in which people move and try to stay.

That being said, options on where to move are often constrained. For example, moving to *char* lands can be a highly political matter (Haque and Zaman 1989). It can depend on the person’s political connections and voting preferences whether or not they will be provided a place on these lands. This can be illustrated by the case of a newly built village in Char Fasson for displaced persons, made feasible by NGOs and governmental aid funds. In this case, it was those who had good connections with local chairmen who gained priority in receiving land or

a house, rather than those needing it the most. This case shows that decisions on where and how to move are not just shaped by environmental processes but are inherently political.

Alongside a focus on those having to leave or not being able to do so, many also want to return. For example, in Mohammadpur village in Char Fasson, some of the men who had previously moved to urban centres for work are now actively returning home. This has become possible as the government, after 20 years of a more ad hoc approach, is now working on a permanent river embankment to better protect the area against erosion and floods. This has led to a return of investments and work in Mohammadpur village and is inspiring many who emigrated earlier to return (Boas 2020).

This example shows that in understanding the politics of environmental migration, we need to open up the concept of mobility. Some may want to migrate; some may want to stay or even try to return home. Being sensitive to such diversity in responses, and exploring how government decision-making has local implications, can result in a fairer and more representative framing and form of governance.

These insights from Bangladesh demonstrate how environment-related migration is multi-causal; local, contextual and diverse; a mix of non-movement, forced movement and temporal movement; and above all shaped by existing patterns of mobility and structural power dynamics. It shows how people are often constrained in their choices and that moving away is not necessarily a solution in the eyes of the migrants. This offers a more contextualized understanding of the subject, highlighting the need for global and local governance responses to be better attuned to the diverse needs of those most affected whilst being sensitive to how policy actions and decisions have local implications.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we have outlined the development and contested nature of various discourses around climate change-induced migration. We have discussed the emergence of the alarmist discourse on ‘climate refugees’, which has been heavily criticized for ignoring the multi-causal dimensions of migration and for presenting climate migration as a threatening and mass-like phenomenon possibly causing chaos and distress in receiving areas. It has been succeeded by the migration-as-adaptation discourse, which in turn has later been critiqued for placing the responsibility to adapt with those affected, and as a result disregarding issues of climate justice. The re-emergence of the alarmist discourse as the dominant perspective post-2015, especially in political and policy circles of the global North following the European ‘refugee crisis’, exemplifies how the focus in the field of environmental migration is constantly shifting, strongly influenced by underlying political agendas and processes.

To move the academic and policy debates beyond their entrenched opposition, and beyond semantics into concrete actions, the mobilities approach might well be the alternative way forward with the perspective of the migrant as a common denominator. It seeks to understand and study human mobility from the perspective of those experiencing it, and thus examines what it means to migrate – or not to migrate – in the context of a changing climate, and what its implications are. As such, instead of focusing only on the presumably highly mobile ‘environmental migrant’, this allows us to recognize and attend to a much wider range of relevant cases under the environmental change–im/mobility nexus. This includes sensitivity to the ways in

which immobilities and mobilities are interconnected across local, regional and global scales, and how this is related to questions of inequality and injustices.

This approach, therefore, is in line with the increasing calls for diversification and re-politicization of this field by critical researchers, and is a crucial step towards developing suitable support mechanisms and policy solutions more tailored to the challenges encountered by people facing migration pressures.

NOTES

1. Personal observations during policy conferences on the subject in the Netherlands in 2016–18.
2. See <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/climate-change-key-syrian-conflict-and-it-will-trigger-more-war-future-10081163.html>.
3. See <https://www.newscientist.com/article/dn27989-calais-migrant-chaos-is-a-taste-of-what-a-warmer-world-may-bring/>.
4. Based on regular field observations, explorative visits, and over 50 interviews in these areas.
5. This is well illustrated in Deltares' Aqua Monitor: see <http://aqua-monitor.appspot.com>.

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