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REVIEW ESSAY

Towards a Definition of Climate Migration

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Abstract: Within the present contribution, the origin and development of the debate on defining and estimating migrations driven by environmental and climatic causes will be traced. The analysis of this discourse allows an understanding of the perspective through which the figure of the climate migrant has been constructed. Simultaneously, by revisiting this debate, an examination is intended to explore how this type of human mobility urges a reconsideration of traditionally employed categories for describing and classifying migrations.

Keywords: Migration; Climate Migrant; Human Mobility

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1. Introduction

The scientific evidence gathered in the latest report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2023) highlights that "human activities, principally through the emission of greenhouse gases, have unequivocally caused global warming, with the global surface temperature reaching 1,1°C above 1850-1900 in 2011-2020. Global greenhouse gas emissions have continued to increase, with unequal historical and ongoing contributions arising from unsustainable energy use, land use and land-use change, lifestyles and patterns of consumption and production across regions, between and within countries, and among individuals (high confidence)" (IPCC, 2023:4).

Within the climate change contest, each additional degree signifies an increase in extreme meteorological and climatic events, with catastrophic consequences for the environment and people. In this context, the anthropogenic responsibility for climate alterations is described by the IPCC as an indisputable fact.

Given the close connection between climate change and industrial activities, is the adjective *anthropogenic* truly appropriate to describe the complexity of the current climate crisis? The impression is that the formulation of discourses on the climate crisis, in their historical-political development, has evolved in symbiosis with the exercise of neoliberal power, inheriting its traits and perspectives. The discourse on climate change solely from a techno-managerial and financial standpoint has indeed contributed to the neutralization and depoliticization of the issue. However, to what extent is it possible to identify in the *Anthropos*, in generalised humanity, the culprit for the climate crisis? Conversely, to what extent should this crisis be attributed to those who have disproportionately benefited from the economic development that is also responsible for these alterations?

In the 2020 report, OXFAM estimates that "the richest 10% of the world's population were responsible for 52% of cumulative carbon emissions […]. The poorest 50% were responsible for just 7% of cumulative emissions and used just 4% of the available carbon budget. The richest 1% alone was responsible for 15% of cumulative emissions, and 9% of the carbon budget – twice as much as the poorest half of the world's population. The richest 5% were responsible for over a third of the total growth in emissions, while the total growth of the richest 1% was three times that of the poorest 50%" (Gore, 2020:2).

In this context, attributing *anthropogenic origins* to climate change generalizes the responsibilities and consequences of the crisis to a fictional homogeneous humanity, obscuring power dynamics, discriminatory processes, and the governance of inequalities. As highlighted by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Poverty and Human Rights "climate change is, among other things, an unconscionable assault on the poor" (ONCHR, 2019:19). This is because, according to the report, the world's poorest countries will bear between 75% and 80% of the cost of climate change (ONCHR, 2019:4).

This data depends partially on the fact that the impacts of climate change do not have a uniform spatial distribution but vary in extent, timing, and manner across different geographical areas of the planet. Furthermore, social, economic, and political aspects overlap with geophysical and climatic factors, resulting in diverse impacts of climate change. The impacts of global warming result from the complex interaction between physical events and the vulnerabilities of territories (Bagliani, Pietta, Bonati, 2019).

The IPCC (2014) defines vulnerability to climate change as the "propensity or predisposition of exposed elements to be negatively influenced. The term encompasses a variety of concepts and elements, including sensitivity or susceptibility to damage and the lack of capacity to cope and adapt" (IPCC, 2014:5). Vulnerability informs the unequal capacity of communities to respond to the impacts of global warming. Vulnerability to climate change brings into question the social characteristics of territories, such as economic and educational poverty, processes of marginalization, and situations of discrimination. In other words, vulnerability to climate change is closely linked to social and economic inequalities.

The UN Special Rapporteur, in the "Climate Change and Poverty" report (2019), describes the colonial, violent, and racial nature of this distribution of vulnerability to climate change by introducing the concept of "climate apartheid" (ONCHR, 2019:12). The concept of "climate apartheid" delineates a context in which economic, political, and social resources have historically been unevenly distributed among various regions of the planet. The outcome of this unequal distribution is that, to date, one part of the world lacks the economic, social, and political resources to address the impacts of climate change, while the wealthier part does. In contrast, the other part is left to endure the most acute consequences of the crisis. According to IPCC "climate change has caused widespread adverse impacts and related losses and damages to nature and people that are unequally distributed across systems, regions, and sectors. Economic damages from climate change have been detected in climate-exposed sectors such as agriculture, forestry, fishery, energy, and tourism. Individual livelihoods have been affected through, for example, the destruction of homes and infrastructure, loss of property and income, human health, and food security, with adverse effects on gender and social equity. In urban areas, it is observed that the climate change has caused adverse impacts on human health, livelihoods, and key infrastructure. Hot extremes have intensified in cities. Urban infrastructure (transportation, water, sanitation, and energy systems) has been compromised by extreme and slow-onset events, leading to economic losses, disruptions of services, and negative impacts on well-being. Observed adverse impacts are concentrated amongst economically and socially marginalised urban residents" (IPCC, 2023:6).

In this context, "mobility is emerging as the human face of climate change" (Clement, Rigaud, Sherbinin, Jones, Schewe, Sadiq, Shabahat, 2018:1). Water stress, food insecurity, loss of livelihoods, homes, and

employment resulting from the impact of climate change are increasingly driving people to migrate. According to the authors, "the literature shows that water scarcity and declining yields, along with sea level rise, are among the major impacts facing low-income countries, these impacts will also likely play a significant role in driving migration. Water deficits can also have wider impacts on the economy, as households curtail spending and agricultural-processing industries and other businesses retrench. There is less evidence about what might occur in regions where rainfall increases over time. Households may send one or more members to cities or other rural areas in search of an alternative livelihood, or they may abandon farming or other rural livelihoods altogether, as has happened in rapidly urbanizing countries such as China. The literature suggests that extremes are more likely to cause short-term displacement than long-term migration" (Clement *et al.*, 2021:26).

Within the following document, an exploration of the origin and development of studies on climate migrations is undertaken to comprehend the evolution of the climate migrant concept. The aim here is to retrace the discussion around the concept and estimates of climate migrations, with a focus on the various interests and underlying analytical categories.

The sociological analysis seeks to understand how labelling influences reality. The act of labelling, defining, and quantifying is fundamentally political and never peaceful (Foucault, 1971).

The significance of a sociological analysis of this definitional debate arises from the recognition that "environmental migration as a social phenomenon is generally apprehended through its definition, which bears high responsibility for the development of normative frameworks and policy responses" (McAdam, 2012:44). The framing of the discourse has a substantial impact on political actions and decisions. To properly discuss climate-related migration, it is important to address its complexity; otherwise, there is a risk of it remaining unnoticed in legal and bureaucratic terms (McAdam, 2012).

The analysis mainly focuses on the studies offered by several organizations that have addressed environmental migrations from different and unique perspectives. Specifically, it encompasses the frameworks provided by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Internal Displacement Monitoring Center (IDMC), the European Union (EU), the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), and the World Bank.

The choice to focus on documents from international institutions and NGOs stems from specific methodological considerations. First of all, these actors have played a prominent role in the development of the grey literature on climate migrations. The main definitional proposals and estimates emerge from these organizations before being integrated into academic discourse. Even within the academic domain, studies conducted by these organizations serve as an authoritative source of information on the phenomenon. Finally, it is through the work of these organizations that the debate regarding the legal recognition of climate migrations is outlined, involving UN agencies in the field of migration (IOM) and international protection (UNHCR), as well as European governance, through research promoted by the European Commission. In other words, the use of these documents has been essential to the research objectives for two reasons: first, to draw from well-known sources in academic and broader contexts; second, because they provide material that explains the conditions of existence (Foucault,1969, 1971; 1975) that have allowed the assertion of specific definitions over others.

2. Labelling climate migration

Each act of labelling does not represent a simple description but summarizes the cultural, economic, social, political, religious, and juridical conditions that led to its definition (Foucault, 1971). Behind every labelling process, there are collective practices, scientific discourses, expert figures, and legal systems that have named and regulated migratory processes. The production of discourses and the power to label is indeed "a good—finite, limited, desirable, useful—that has its rules of appearance but also its conditions of appropriation and implementation; a good that consequently, since it has an existence, raises the issue of power; a good that, by its nature, constitutes the object of a struggle, and a political struggle" (Foucault, 1969:159-162, AT).

In this context, the debate on the definition of migrations driven by environmental and climatic reasons involves the non-discursive realm, namely the "field of institutions, economic processes, and social relations" (Foucault, 1969:217, AT) within which the conditions for the governance of migrations are determined. In the last decade, this governance has evolved around the imperative to protect the borders of the Eurozone at all costs, to keep people outside European borders, and to minimize the number of entries. The normative and political system built to meet these control requirements organizes the entire migratory experience, regulating the stages of the journey from its origins and controlling its outcomes. In this context, the power to define, categorize, and label represents a central element of governance needs. Falling within the categories of "migrant", "political refugee", "minor foreigner", "trafficking victim", or "illegal migrant" will shape the experience of migration and its outcome. These definitions are prescriptive categories that delineate the subjectivity of the ideal migrant. subjectivity that allows no deviations, risking the questioning of essential requirements for entry and residence.

These labels have characterized the debate on the definition and numbers of migrations driven by environmental and climatic causes. The challenge in finding a shared definition stems from the fact that climate migrations question these labels and necessitate a rethinking of traditional normative and policy structures.

3. The definitional and numerical debate

At the time when this paper was written, there was still no official definition that was widely accepted for migrations caused by environmental or climatic conditions.

There is a general agreement in attributing the first official use of the term to Essam El-Hinnawi, a scientist and militant ecologist, in a report written for the UNEP in 1985 titled "Environmental Refugee." According to the author, the term refers to "those people who have been forced to leave their traditional habitat, temporarily or permanently, because of marked environmental disruption (natural or triggered by people) that jeopardised their existence and seriously affected the quality of their life" (Hinnawi, 1985:4).

The definition presents some of the points of contention in a wide and complex debate over the characteristics, modes, and forms of climate migration. Among the features shaping the definition, alongside the themes of duration (temporarily or permanently) and origin (natural and/or triggered by people), the issue of coercion assumes a central character (forced to leave) and immediately raises questions about the regulatory framework. The element of coercion falls within the scope of international protection, which does not encompass the category of migrations driven by environmental or climatic causes. Hennawi's reference to forced climate migrations, underscored using the term "refugee" (which is attributed to the legal category defined by Article 1-A of the 1951 Convention on Refugees), gives rise to a wide-ranging debate and sharp criticisms. François Gemenne asserts that the report by Hennawi was received "with great interest in the field of environmental studies, and attracted harsh criticism in the field of refugee studies: they had a 'short-lived shock-effected on the public debate but were rejected as unserious by scholars' […]. Irrespective of its legal meaning, the use of the word 'refugee' was criticised" (Gemenne, 2011:3).

The existing dichotomy between coercion and voluntariness in migration is a fundamental element of migration governance, which seeks to limit as much as possible the categories to which protection is granted. It becomes much more relevant when viewed through the lens of legal recognition. Indeed, as mentioned earlier, vulnerability to the impacts of global warming and the push to migrate in the context of climate change link environmental factors with social, economic, political, and technological influences.

Anthony Richmond, in the book "Global Apartheid" (1994), acknowledges that the push for climatic migrations depends on the integration of environmental factors with social, economic, political, and technological ones. Richmond endeavoured to deconstruct the conventional dichotomy between forced and voluntary migration, introducing a continuum model ranging from proactive to reactive migration. From this standpoint, which is consistent with the attributes of climate migrations, every migration endeavour comprises both forced and voluntary elements, which are rarely distinguishable. According to him "the distinction

between free and forced or voluntary and involuntary is a misleading one. All human behaviour is constrained. Choices are not unlimited but are determined by the structuration process. However, the degree of freedom may vary. Individual and group autonomy and potency are situationally determined. It would be more appropriate to recognize a continuum at one end of which individuals and collectivities are proactive and at the other reactive. Under certain conditions, the decision to move may be taken after considering all relevant information and rationally calculated to maximize net advantage, including both material and symbolic rewards. At the other extreme, the decision to move may be made in a state of panic during a crisis that leaves few alternatives but escape from intolerable threats. Between these two extremes, many of the decisions made by both economic and political migrants are a response to diffuse anxiety generated by the failure of the social system to provide for the fundamental biological, economic, and social needs of the individual" (Richmond,1994:55).

The controversy surrounding the concepts of forced and voluntariness strongly implicates the interests of two UN agencies engaged in migration: the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The indiscriminate application of the terms "refugee" and "migrant" is the focal point for institutional actors engaged in migration governance. The UNHCR and IOM are invested in upholding the concept of refugees as defined within the confines of the 1951 Refugee Convention. This Convention (1951) and its Protocol (1967) relating to the status of refugees delineate a refugee as a person who has a well-founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, and who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin (Article 1-A). The mandate of the UN Refugee Agency allows for little room for unforeseen circumstances, imposing strict boundaries on the definition of refugee, within which climate migrations are not included. Despite this, numerous authors have invoked the symbolic potency of the term "refugee" to highlight human rights abuses stemming from climate change.

During the proceedings of the Conference on "Migration and Environment" (1992), which was organised by the IOM, the Swiss Foreign Affairs Department, and the Refugee Policy Group (RPG), the term "environmental refugee" came under criticism from the majority of the fifty participants, precisely due to the diplomatic implications the concept had acquired. The primary discussions centred on the relationship between the UNHCR's mandate and this emergent form of migration. Participants at the event, primarily experts in humanitarian and migration affairs, raised questions about "(a) how to distinguish migrants fitting the UNHCR criteria from those fleeing from areas that are not able to sustain them; (b) which international agencies should be concerned with non-UNHCR migrants; (c) how to determine the relative importance of the various generators, both proximate and ultimate, of non-UNHCR migrants; (d) how to raise the necessary funds and other resources required to deal with those causes; (e) how to allocate funds between pre-emptive actions and rehabilitative ones" (Westing, 1992:186). Considering these reflections, it is recognised that the issues of climate migration "(a) was a highly complex one that required a multidimensional approach to its amelioration; (b) was becoming increasingly serious and increasingly intractable; (c) was inadequately recorded and insufficiently understood" (p.186). Nonetheless, Arthur H. Westing (1992) underlines that despite the criticism "no clearer alternative [about an agreed definition] emerged from the Conference, and (although 'environmentally-driven migrant' was no one of the more acceptable substitutes put forth) no consensus was reached on the matter" (Westing, 1992:185-186).

Four years later, the issues were revisited during the international symposium on "Environmentally Induced Population Displacements and Environmental Impacts Resulting from Mass Migration" (1996). The main objective of the gathering was to propose intervention measures for environmentally driven migration and to comprehend the impact of such migrations on the socio-economic and political landscape. The focus shifted not only on the environmental effects of migration but also on the principles and measures available for preventing, alleviating, and reversing the environmental impact of mass migration. During the symposium, the term "environmental refugee" was replaced with "environmentally displaced persons", which is defined as "persons who are displaced within their country of habitual residence or who have crossed an international border and for whom environmental degradation, deterioration or destruction is a significant cause of their displacement, although not necessarily the only one" (UNHCR, IOM, RPG, 1996:4). These environmentally

displaced persons are categorized into five groups (UNHCR, IOM, RPG, 2019:8-11) based on the type of environmental event and the possibility of returning to their country of origin after the environmental disaster. The identified categories are as follows:

- Movements related to rapid-onset events with the possibility of return: These movements may arise from natural disasters such as floods, earthquakes, typhoons, or volcanic eruptions. They can also result from man-made disasters, such as industrial accidents.
- Movements related to rapid-onset events with no possibility of return: This category applies to persons displaced by nuclear contamination, hazardous waste, or the destruction of their areas by particularly severe disasters.
- Movements linked to slow-onset events, with the possibility of return: These movements are associated with deforestation, deterioration of agricultural areas, reversible desertification, chronic water shortage, and pollution. In such contexts, there is sometimes the possibility of returning to the place of origin if the causes of migration become less severe.
- Movements related to foreseeable slow-onset events with no possibility of return due to human activity: This kind of event may be caused by dams or other large-scale development projects.
- Slow-onset movements with no possibility of return due to natural conditions in the area: The cause of this type of movement includes irreversible desertification, soil erosion, and coastal flooding resulting from climate change and sea-level rise.

Furthermore, the IOM, in collaboration with the European Union, presents a new attempt at defining this type of human mobility in the report "Migration, Environment, and Climate Change: Evidence for Policy (MECLEP)" (Melde, 2014). It is possible to find various definitions within the document's glossary. Reading these definitions helps to understand how the organization has deepened its knowledge on the subject since 1996. The report acknowledges that "population mobility [in the context of environmental change] is probably best viewed as being arranged along a continuum ranging from totally voluntary migration ... to forced migration" (Melde, 2014:13). Based on this premise, it is possible to recognise:

- Environmental migrant: persons or groups of persons who, predominantly for reasons of sudden or progressive change in the environment that adversely affects their lives or living conditions, are obliged to leave their habitual homes or choose to do so, either temporarily or permanently, and who move either within their country or abroad.
- Environmentally displaced persons: persons who are displaced within their country of habitual residence or who have crossed an international border and for whom environmental degradation, deterioration, or destruction is a major cause of their displacement, although not necessarily the sole one. This term is used as a less controversial alternative to environmental refugee or climate refugee (in the case of those displaced across an international border) that have no legal basis or raison d'être in international law, to refer to a category of environmental migrants whose movement is clearly forced nature.
- Migration influenced by environmental change: where environmental change can be identified as affecting the drivers of migration and, consequently, influences the decision to migrate (Melde, 2014:13).

The UNHCR, according to its mandate, has consistently sought to confine the association of the term "refugee" to the realm of climate migrations. Indeed, the Agency's mandate establishes clear boundaries for the recognition of refugee status, excluding any elements attributable to climate and environmental migrations. These boundaries are reiterated within the report "Legal considerations regarding claims for international protection made in the context of the adverse effects of climate change" (UNHCR, 2020). The document, reflecting on the interpretative possibilities of recognising migrations driven by environmental causes within

the framework of the Geneva Convention, acknowledges the impossibility of reducing the impacts of climate change to any of the five categories.

According to the EU Parliament "drawing a line between forced and voluntary environmental migration is highly challenging. As a result, environmentally induced migration is best understood as a continuum, ranging from clear cases of forced to clear cases of voluntary movement, with a grey zone in between" (Kraler, Noack, 2011:32). It is within this grey area that human rights interventions must be delineated. In a 2020 study, the European Parliament discusses the difficulty of identifying a single category capable of summarising the myriad elements that shape climate and environmental migration. The study questions whether certain factors and situations can lead to forced migration not foreseen within European and international law and how to provide a solution to this type of movement: "A key point indeed is that there are several high-impact situations, including but not limited to environmental change, that can influence migration drivers and forcibly displace persons from their habitual places of residence or countries of origin, or, in a related way, hinder their return" (Kraler, Noack, 2011:24).

The difficulty in reaching an agreement on a definition for migrations driven by environmental and climatic causes inevitably impacts estimations and projections.

The first estimate of the phenomenon dates to 1988 when Jodi Jacobson of the Word Watch Institute indicated the existence of 10 million climate migrants (Ionesco, Mokhnacheva, Gemenne, 2017). Few years later, in 1993, Professor of Ecology at the University of Oxford Norman Mayers estimated the presence of 25 million people displaced due to environmental reasons (Ionesco, Mokhnacheva, Gemenne, 2017). This data was subsequently echoed in the summary document of the Conference "Environmentally-Induced Population Displacement and Environmental Impacts Resulting from Mass Migration" in 1996, convened by UNHCR, IOM, and the Refugee Policy Group (RPG), which states, "Today, 25 million people are estimated to be environmentally displaced worldwide. If environmental predictions, which include climate change, prove correct, the total number of environmentally displaced persons will increase markedly over the coming decades" (UNHCR, IOM, RPG, 1996:7).

The issue of predictions is even more delicate than that of current estimations, this has led to disparate figures over time, often with numbers significantly divergent from one another, frequently accompanied by emergency and fatalistic rhetoric. In 1989, UNEP presented a forecast of 50 million displaced persons by 2010. Norman Mayers predicted that due to environmental decline, poverty, and demographic growth, there would be 150 million displaced persons by 2050 (a figure later increased to 200 million by the author). This latter prediction has been widely cited by media, reports, and NGOs, often identified as data presented by the United Nations (Ionesco, Mokhnacheva, and Gemenne, 2017).

A significant data collection effort has been undertaken by the World Bank, as documented in the second volume of the Groundswell report (2021). The estimates provided in this study project are within the context of a scenario marked by high emissions and unequal development pathways among communities, which exacerbate poverty and vulnerability, and the possibility of a considerable number of displaced persons due to the impacts of climate change. According to the authors "the number of climate migrants could reach 216.1 million by 2050; the ensemble average is 170.3 million; the minimum is 124.6 million. Sub-Saharan Africa could see as many as 85.7 million climate migrants (4.2 percent of the total population); East Asia and the Pacific, 48.4 million (2.5 percent of the total population); South Asia, 40.5 million (1.8 percent of the total population); North Africa, 19.3 million (9.0 percent of the total population); Latin America, 17.1 million (2.6 percent of the total population); and Eastern Europe and Central Asia, 5.1 million (2.3 percent of the total population). This represents 2.95 percent of the total projected population by 2050 across these six regions" (Clement *et al.*, 2021: 80).

According to the projections, North Africa is expected to have the highest percentage of climate migrants, estimated at 13 million by 2050 in the most pessimistic scenario. This forecast is linked to the high level of water stress and the impacts of sea-level rise in coastal areas (Clement *et al.,* 2021).

The Groundswell report indicates that even in more optimistic scenarios, with significant reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, the number of people displaced due to environmental reasons is expected to increase.

Since 1998, a comprehensive and reputable source of data is the periodic reports of the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, a non-governmental organization founded by the Norwegian Refugee Council. Since 1998, it has been dedicated to information monitoring, analysis, and dissemination on internal displacement, a term used to describe "Persons who have been forced to leave their homes to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border".

In 2022, internal displacements due to environmental disasters were 41% higher than the ten-year annual average (GRID, 2023). In 2023, 60.9 million internal displacements were recorded across 151 countries, marking a 60% increase compared to 2021 and the highest figure ever recorded. Of these 60.9 million, 32.6 million were associated with environmental disasters (GRID, 2023). Almost the entirety (98%) of the environmentally induced displacements were caused by meteorological events, primarily floods (more than 19 million), storms (more than 9 million), and droughts (more than 2 million). Most of these displacements (25%) were caused by monsoonal floods in Pakistan, while over one million were recorded in Somalia due to severe drought (GRIND, 2023).

One issue with the data presented by the IDMC is that they primarily focus on displacements related to sudden disasters and those that remain within the national borders of states. The provided data are thus limited in considering slow-onset climate events and regarding cross-border migrations.

The definition of the methodological framework for constructing this data is central and explains the differences among the various statistics listed. As elucidated by the authors of "The Atlas of Environmental Migration": "The truth is that even if it can be supposed that the environment is one of the principal factors of migration throughout the world, a precise figure is impossible to establish. That would, first, suppose that a strict definition for these migrants exists; and, second, that the environment could be isolated as a distinctive factor for migration – something that is not always the case. The average number of people displaced every year due to natural disasters is 25.4 million, or one every second. In addition to this figure, the figure relating to the number of people displaced by more insidious environmental degradation would also be needed, degradation that includes sea level rise or deforestation, but this figure is not known. Finally, the number of environmental migrants is difficult to be estimated as it combines both voluntary and forced migrants, and both short and long-term displacement" (Ionesco, Moknacheva, Gemenne, 2017:12).

The challenge in developing a robust methodology is intrinsic to the complexity of the underlying issues characterising climate migrations, which also populate the debate on the definition. These issues concern the duration and distance under consideration and, most importantly, the multi-causality of this type of human mobility. To quote the words of Ionesco, Mokhnacheva, and Gemenne (2017) "Predictions generally ignore the multi-causality of migration, and, much like estimates regarding the population of current migrants, are based on the number of people living in at-risk regions. Therein lies their profound determinism, whereas in reality human migration between now and 2050 will be influenced by a multitude of other factors such as the evolution of the global population and climate change adaptation policies. Moreover, trends in environmental or demographic change are themselves uncertain; there are huge discrepancies between scenarios of demographic growth and greenhouse gas emissions, according to the policies that will be implemented" (Ionesco, Mokhnacheva, and Gemenne, 2017:14).

4. Conclusions

In the context of climate-related migration, the most pressing issue is not the absolute number of climate migrants but the percentages that reveal the inequalities behind global warming. Race, class, and gender are the characteristics that draw social differences in disaster response. Everyday news delivers dozens of events that are not perceived in the same way and do not tell the same story. The flooding on the Bangladesh coast does not tell the same story as the flooding in Italy. Hurricane Katrina illustrates how the effects of cyclones

are not uniform in cities but exacerbate race and economic discrimination (which are often correlated) (Belkhir, Charlemaine, 2007). When a disaster occurs, mostly the uninsured die, the uninsurable are left homeless, and the most fragile environmental and social ecosystems pay.

According to the report "Climate Change and Poverty" (2019), developing countries will bear 75-80% of the cost of climate change (p.4). This is because the degree of vulnerability of territories and populations to the consequences of the climate crisis is highly uneven and responds not only to climatic factors but also to local socio-economic characteristics. The risk zones are those where rainfed agriculture is predominant, arid areas, and regions of the world that already suffer from water stress and food insecurity.

The risk zones are deduced from the history and distribution of environmental disasters and the geography of poverty. The analysis of the definitions and numbers of climate-related migration makes clear the real issue at the heart of the debate: the lack of livelihoods characterising many climate migrations. Migration governance has pushed economically motivated migrations into the realm of illegality. The need to secure a better life for oneself and exercise the right to live in dignity by moving across state borders is only acknowledged for political reasons, and poverty is not one of them. Similarly, climate change has long been excluded from the discourse of rights. Climate policies address measures to counteract and mitigate the impact of climate-changing emissions, such as actions outlined in the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement. It has been less than ten years (since the preamble of the Paris Agreement) since the subject of rights and inequalities became part of the discourse on climate change.

Nevertheless, when the climate issue intersects with the migration phenomenon, the distortion of the capitalist economic and political system emerges in its complexity and violence. Economic migration is never considered as forced migration; therefore, it is not afforded protection. This principle forms the basis through which attempts to construct a definition of climate/environmental migrants have developed. These attempts have encountered the challenge of isolating the environmental element from the political and economic aspects. This separation is not feasible for climate and environmentally-driven migration. The challenge of defining and describing climate migration conceals a lack of political will to address the underlying causes of the many complex issues that this phenomenon reveals.

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