



universität
wien

MASTERARBEIT / MASTER'S THESIS

Titel der Masterarbeit / Title of the Master's Thesis

“Vulnerabilities, climate change and migration: A case
for refugeehood?”

verfasst von / submitted by

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angestrebter akademischer Grad / in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts (MA)

Wien 2023 / Vienna 2023

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt /
degree programme code as it appears on
the student record sheet:

UA 066 642

Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt /
degree programme as it appears on
the student record sheet:

Masterstudium Philosophy and Economics

Betreut von / Supervisor:

Univ.-Prof. Dr. Angela Kallhoff

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1. Introduction

Both climate change and migration pose fundamental ethical challenges to humanity. Climate change has been described as “a perfect moral storm” in the sense that the complexity of ethical challenges that it entails specifically complicate the performance of the required collective action (Gardiner 2006). The topic of migration in turn especially gained momentum in 2015 when the numbers of asylum seekers¹ in the European Union were increasing (Eurostat 2022). Consequently, the treatment of potential refugees by European states and the European border control has fuelled controversies on the rights and responsibilities of states regarding the processes of migration. The phenomenon of climate migration² may therefore appear as a demanding hybrid of both of these challenges. Although popular media increasingly cover the topic by especially referring to the figure of the *climate refugee*, one might wonder whether the effective impact of climate change on migration is that severe.

Having said this, scholars agree that the climate crisis is affecting people’s living spaces in some cases with such severity that they are in some way or another forced to leave their homes.³ Whereas we know that human mobility is affected by climate change, the nature of this link is less clear. In fact, the question of how the relation between climate change and migration is constituted has been influencing scholars’ evaluation of the situation, including their policy recommendations. A dispute among scholars that has been especially dominant in the earlier stages of contemporary research on climate migration but is apparent up to now is often referred to as “minimalist” versus “maximalist” views (Suhrke 1994). Therefore, scholars considered as “minimalist” – such as Black (2001) – have been emphasising that one must not assign primary attention to climate change since the empirical reality of migration is much better described by an intersection of different factors, of which climate change is only one. Moreover, migration is only one possible response to changes in one’s environment. In fact, the high costs of migration may even exclude the most vulnerable individuals from its execution, as they are “trapped populations” (Black and Collyer 2014). In sum, these claims state that climate migration is a heterogenic phenomenon, and one should refrain from invoking terms and

¹ I use the terminology of asylum seeker here as an indication that someone was seeking to get asylum when approaching Europe, regardless of whether her reasons have been aligned with the Convention (1951/1967) definition of refugeehood.

² The working term in this thesis is *climate migration*. This does not entail any commitments regarding how we should refer to this group but is used in an instrumental manner due to its rather broad possible meaning.

³ For an overview on the empirical literature, see e.g. (Kaczan and Orgill-Meyer 2020) or the assessment in Appendix C. Empirical findings strongly depend on conceptual decisions and research designs (Berlemann and Steinhardt 2017). However, empirical evidence tends to agree that the effects of climate change on migration are significant and might increase in the future (Hoffmann, Šedová, and Vinke 2021; Kälin 2010).

concepts that indicate an internal homogeneity and lead one to a belief in a causal relation between climate change and migration patterns.

Furthermore, there is one specific term made famous by earlier scholars of a “maximalist” tradition that plays an undeniable yet contested role in this dispute. Scholars have been predicting a severe increase of migration streams due to the ever-deteriorating environmental conditions entailed by climate change (Myers 2002). They accordingly claim that the numbers of *climate refugees* will increase. However one evaluates the term’s current popularity in scientific engagement, it has found its way into various societal spheres and cannot be expected to go away (White 2019).

Whatever anyone’s position on how to empirically make sense of climate migration, scholars from different camps can agree that there is a “protection gap” (Türk and Dowd 2014). This means there are individuals suffering from climate change and responding by leaving their homes due to lacking access to protection. This in turn implies two related questions: 1) What should protection look like? 2) How can protection be effectively achieved? I accordingly believe that climate migration requires us to consider both normative and empirical questions. However, this thesis aims at developing a foundation to specifically approach normative questions of climate migration.

In light of the *climate refugee*’s popularity, the prevalence of scholars who argue for an extension of the refugee Convention to allow for climate refugees (Nawrotzki 2014; Lister 2014b), and the normative implications of refugeehood considered as an ethical concept, I want to consider whether one should in fact adhere to such a terminology when assessing the ethics of climate migration. This leads to the following research question: *Should one refer to those displaced by climate change as climate refugees?*

The question is furthermore answered piece by piece throughout the chapters of this project. In chapter 2, one gains a more nuanced overview of the mentioned dispute between “minimalist” and “maximalist” scholars and the role of the *climate refugee*. It is moreover shown that the term *climate refugee* is used ambiguously, whereby it even appears that it is deployed with recourse to different meanings. Accordingly, one might wonder what it means in this project. An intuitive option is to consider its meaning regarding that of *refugee*. Refugeehood is moreover a prominent concept in the political philosophy of migration and scholars have intensively engaged with its fundamental normative meaning. As one remembers, this thesis is specifically devoted to normative questions of climate migration. It is accordingly proceeded by specifically elaborating on the philosophical underpinning of refugeehood.

Chapter 3 thus aims at providing a philosophical foundation to understand both the nature of migration in general and refugeehood specifically. Chapter 4 deals with different proposals of what it means to be a refugee. Chapter 5 determines the according empirical relevance of climate refugees that one would derive from the previously-discussed normative proposals. However, it is only in chapter 6 that refugeehood is finally assessed by virtue of providing an adequate ethical framework to portray climate migration.

2. Climate migration: Conceptualising a heterogenic phenomenon

Scholars have approached the phenomenon of climate migration from different fields and by making use of a variety of different concepts and a broad range of terminology.⁴ Accordingly, in the course of engaging with climate migration, one encounters terms ranging from *climate induced displacement*, *environmental* or *climate refugees* to *climate mobilities* (Baldwin, Fröhlich, and Rothe 2019). In fact, some of these differences are due to the complexity of the climate change–migration nexus, the diversity of empirical methods used in the field and the heterogeneity of the phenomenon itself (see Appendix C).

However, I want to consider another option that allows making sense of some of these differences. The relevant claim is that “minimalist” and “maximalist” scholars do not disagree on the adequacy of the term itself but rather what the term means, and thus they partake in “metalinguistic negotiations” (Plunkett and Sundell 2021). This perspective in turn allows identifying the logic of the proposed argument of this thesis, namely that we do not have access to an unambiguously used definition of *climate refugee*. This may prompt us to wonder whether we should use it in the context of assessing ethical questions. One way to evaluate the adequacy of *climate refugee* is in turn to consider the meaning of *refugee*.

2.1 Minimalist and Maximalist approaches

Climate change is and will increasingly affect individual lives, including their geographical mobility. However, how one evaluates (1) the severity of the phenomenon, and in relation with this its (2) urgency to in turn (3) determine adequate policies has been discussed controversially. In fact, terminological differences have been marking such controversies in the sense that

⁴ There is a broad philosophical discussion on the relation of concepts and terms/words (Margolis and Laurence 2021). However, there is no space for discussing this issues in detail. Nevertheless, I want to refer to a broadly accepted understanding of their relation. In philosophy, concepts are mostly understood as abstract ideas that represent a class of things, properties, or relations (Margolis and Laurence 2021). Words or terms are furthermore symbols (linguistic items) or sounds that are used to express concepts. Concepts in turn can be understood to assign meaning to a term (Väyrynen 2021). In this thesis, if something is referred to specifically by it being a term, this might be indicated by it being written in *italics*. However, there is not clear-cut distinction and *italics* is as well used for other purposes.

scholars or political agents argue for or by reference to specific terms. Thus, although the question of whether climate change is affecting human mobilities is not contested, concerns regarding the appropriate conceptualisation and associated with this the normative implications of the phenomenon have been vividly discussed.

An often-cited academic dispute that leads back to the first blossoming of modern discourse regarding the effect of a changing environment on migration in the 1980s is between so-called “minimalist” versus “maximalist” views (Suhrke 1994; Klepp 2017).

“Minimalist” approaches have been arguing for abandoning any terms that seemingly assign primary influence on environmental variables when dealing with migration. As such, Black (2001) states that instead of environmental, political and socioeconomic factors are much more likely to induce migration. This furthermore represents the claim that even though environmental factors such as climate change may contribute to displacement, the phenomenon is much more constituted by an intersection of different factors that are foremost of a social and political kind. Accordingly, one should be careful when addressing the phenomenon since many terms that create a unified appearance of *the* climate migrant may veil the complexities of the climate change–migration nexus. In fact, its reality can only be grasped by observing the intricate interplay of vulnerabilities. Furthermore, scholars in this tradition question forward-looking quantification endeavours, claiming that the complex nature of the phenomenon makes future predictions concerning the extent of environmental migration⁵ specifically difficult and unlikely to be accurate (Baldwin, Methmann, and Rothe 2014).

By contrast, “maximalist” views aim at emphasising the demanding challenges that climate change entails when it comes to existing migration protection schemes (Morrissey 2012). Such approaches often recite estimations by Myers (2002; Myers 1997), who claims that the numbers of “environmental refugees” – namely all of those “who can no longer gain a secure livelihood in their homelands because of drought, soil erosion, desertification, deforestation and other environmental problems, together with the associated problems of population pressures and profound poverty” (Myers 2002, 610) – already exceeded the number of political refugees in 1997⁶ (Myers 1997). Furthermore, he asserts that especially in the light of climate change, the numbers of environmental refugees may even more drastically increase in the course of the 21st century. With unifying the phenomenon under the term of the *environmental refugee*, Myers

⁵ See a definition of environmental migration and its relation to climate migration in Appendix C.

⁶ Myers (1997) estimated there to be 25 million environmental refugees compared to 22 million political refugees.

(2002) conceptualises climate migration as a core demanding challenge to existing protection schemes and emphasises the severance of the problem that we are facing, and which will successively intensify. According to Morrissey (2012), scholars associated with the “maximalist” view often conduct their research based on the aim of promoting politics of environmental protection and conservation. Thus, it is unsurprising that next to academics, especially NGOs and international organisations have been attracted by “maximalist” frameworks (see e.g. Baldwin, Methmann, and Rothe 2014).

Concerning the current standing of these positions, scholars have claimed that “maximalist” views are more or less out of fashion and that one can identify an increasing consensus emphasising the complexity of the phenomenon (Baldwin, Fröhlich, and Rothe 2019). These tendencies are furthermore reflected by empirical research on climate migration, where the intersection of vulnerabilities is increasingly acknowledged by a growing number of researchers (Hoffmann, Šedová, and Vinke 2021).⁷ However, another perspective on the topic prompts us to question whether the differences between these approaches rest on empirical and methodological concerns that allow identifying a superior approach by virtue of its empirical adequacy.

Morrissey (2012) argues that it is no disagreement over scientific facts regarding the complexity of the phenomenon that has led to diverging views; rather, one should much more strongly locate the tension between these positions in their differing evaluations of the challenges that climate migration entails. Furthermore, I argue that an expedient way to understand this tension is that the positions are not necessarily incompatible but operate by means of a different conceptual repertoire. One can understand this in relation with Morrissey’s (2012) argument that it is not different perceptions on the nature of the relationship between the environment and migration but rather the mode of representation that defines the dispute between maximalist and minimalist approaches.⁸ He furthermore argues that many components of their approach seem in fact compatible. We shall further investigate this line of thought by discussing the role of a prominent term used by scholars from both traditions.

The *environmental refugee* or *climate refugee* presents a focal manifestation of the disagreement between “minimalist” and “maximalist” approaches. The question of whether one should make use of the word *refugee* when talking of the phenomenon of environmental or climate migration has been – albeit often implicitly – answered in manifold ways. One can even

⁷ Consider Appendix C for a more detailed discussion on the empirical reality of climate migration.

⁸ This argument can be re-read on page 40 in Morrissey (2012).

structure the dispute between “minimalist” and “maximalist” views along either accepting or rejecting any such terminology (Neuteleers 2011). In this vein, “maximalists” are said to dismiss the terminology due to its lack of making the phenomenon’s complexity theoretically comprehensible. Along these lines, Lonergan (1998) highlights that in the light of vulnerabilities created by uneven development, it is invalid to separate environmental from social, political or institutional factors. Accordingly, speaking of *environmental refugees* simply does not make *sense* since hardly no one is displaced solely by environmental factors. Another provocatively titled rejection of the term comes from Black (2001), who concludes in his paper *Environmental refugee: myth or reality?* that due to similar reasons the figure of the *environmental refugee* is theoretically misleading.

As one can observe, the term represents a tension between these approaches. In the following section, I want to shed light on the nature of this tension by applying a philosophical perspective to terminological and conceptual decisions.

2.2 *Climate refugees*: A conceptual disagreement?

Scholarly as well as public engagement with the environment migration nexus has been extensively making use of the *climate refugee*, and one cannot expect the term to go away (White 2019). While there are many definitions of *climate refugee*, many observers of the discourse retrace the term’s significance back to a report by Essam El-Hinnawi (1985) published by the UN, in which defines “environmental refugees [...] as those people who have been forced to leave their traditional habitat, temporarily or permanently, because of a marked environmental disruption (natural and/or triggered by people) that jeopardized their existence and/or seriously affected the quality of their life” (Hinnawi 1985, 4).

Another famous definition describes “environmental refugees” as those “who can no longer gain a secure livelihood in their homelands because of drought, soil erosion, desertification, deforestation and other environmental problems, together with the associated problems of population pressures and profound poverty” (Myers 2002, 610).

Along with increasing societal awareness of the dangers of climate change, the subset of climate refugees is gaining growing attention (Behrman et al. 2018).⁹ However, the aforementioned definitions are very broad and rather congruent with climate migration in general (Appendix C). This point has been brought forward by “minimalist” scholars by asking why one would

⁹ Consult Appendix C on the relation between environmental factors and climate change.

use such a concept in the first place if it does not entail any further explanatory capacities (Black 2001). Nevertheless, such arguments may not address the origins of the disagreement.

I want to consider a possible “linguistic diagnosis” (Belleri 2020) of the previously-described tension, namely that “minimalists” and “maximalists” partake in a “metalinguistic negotiation” (Plunkett and Sundell 2021, 2013). This claim results in wondering whether the parties in this disagreement mean the same thing when talking or writing about *climate refugees*. Regarding the relation of concept and word, one may wonder whether they in fact express different concepts by making use of the term *climate refugee*.

A “metalinguistic negotiation” is – put briefly – a linguistic dispute where the parties do not simply “talk past each other” by referring to different concept but disagree on how we should use a term in a specific context (Plunkett and Sundell 2021, 144–45). This diagnosis may inform the observation proposed by Morrissey (2012), namely that many positions from the different approaches are in fact not incompatible but rather differing views on the meaning of *environmental* or *climate refugee*. Accordingly, “minimalists” reject a different concept than that what “maximalists” adhere to. The insights from Neuteleers (2011) complement such a diagnosis, since he claims that proponents of adhering to the *environmental refugee* notion aim at emphasising the responsibilities of industrialised countries, while opponents reject any such terminology based on the aforementioned difficulties to provide an adequate classification of climate migrants towards whom policies can be targeted. Thus, in the first case *environmental refugee* is used as a heuristic to emphasise a normative bond between those displaced by climate change and responsible agents in the Global North, while the second arguments remain focused on the terms capacity to allow an adequate empirical representation.

2.2.1 *Climate refugees* as refugees?

One essential conclusion from the above discussion is that users apply the term *climate refugee* by expressing different things. It is not undeniably clear what one means by referring to *climate refugees*. Nevertheless, it remains popular, including among philosophers assessing the ethics of climate migration (Buxton 2019; Lister 2014b; Bell 2004; Eckersley 2015). Moreover, refugeehood is one prominent ethical concept within the political philosophy and an intuitive understanding of *climate refugees* would be via the initial meaning of *refugee*. Consequently, a climate refugee is someone who shares fundamental similarities with a refugee and who is in this position due to climate change-related reasons.

This is furthermore the logic of this project. Remember that our research question is to assess whether we should make use of *climate refugee* in the context of an ethical assessment of

climate migration. A procedure to determine what it means to be a *climate refugee* requires first identifying the meaning of *refugee* (chapter 3, 4). Subsequently, one has to ask whether the concept of refugeehood identified allows there to be climate refugees (chapter 5). Afterwards, one needs to further evaluate the identified concept of the climate refugee (3).

2.2.2 Relevancy

The relevancy of such an approach draws on a variety of reasons. First, the concept of refugeehood has itself been subject to controversies and scholarly engagement. Considering the philosophical discourse on refugeehood allows shedding light on core subjects within the political philosophy of immigration.

Second, refugeehood is a normatively laden concept (Väyrynen 2021). Being a refugee is not only a description of some special characteristics but entails demanding normative implications upon which states are morally required to act. These are not only binding in a moral sense but have been converted into specific legal duties brought along by this special status. Accordingly, claiming that climate migrants – or a subgroup of them – are refugees may involve far-reaching moral as well as legal consequences.

Third, engaging with the travelling term of *climate refugee* sheds light on the overall debate on climate migration. *Climate refugee* remains a prevalent term in the climate change–migration discourse, however contested and rejected by many (White 2019). The philosophical literature has been no exception: philosophers have been discussing the dangers and appeals of policies geared towards refugeehood (Draper 2022), engaging with the underlying purposes of talking about *climate refugees* (Neuteleers 2011), or evaluated to possibility of restructuring the refugee Convention to include climate migrants (Lister 2014a). Other have used the terms in the context of ethically assessing climate migration (Buxton 2019; Eckersley 2015; Nine 2010; Bell 2004).

Accordingly, approaching the ethics of climate migration by accompanying how refugeehood relates to it enables us to achieve insights into the political philosophy of migration (chapter 3 and 4), the empirical relation of refugeehood can climate change (chapter 5) and the very normative nature of climate migration (chapter 6). For a start, the following section will introduce the reader to the philosophy of migration.

3. Political philosophy of migration

Philosophers engaging with migration aim at developing frameworks that allow defining the moral status of those agents involved in the processes of migration.¹⁰ Furthermore, the debate – although rather young in its current form (Song 2018) – is centred around the question of whether states have a moral right to control their borders (Brezger, Cassee, and Goppel 2016). If so, states *pro tanto* are morally entitled to restrict migration while possibly still limited in this by special duties towards a subset of people¹¹ or by demanding, humanitarian, obligations towards a specific category of immigrants such as refugees. Contrasting positions reject such a general right of states to exclusion and have been arguing that it is much more a right to free movement against which states must prove their case of excluding migrants (e.g. Cassee 2016). One way of doing so on behalf of the state is to refer to substantial threats to its own social order or national security (Carens 2013, 155).

In fact, these opposing positions approach the same questions from a different starting point and apply diverging normative perspectives. They both coincide in trying to find answers for one demanding political problem: How and under what conditions can migration selection criteria be normatively legitimate? Scholars have been arguing that states are morally entitled to unilaterally decide who is allowed to cross their borders (Miller 2016). In fact, the normative argument often rests on its function towards a fundamental collective right: border controls may be required to protect a political and cultural community's collective right to self-determination. Then again, scholars have been arguing that such a right cannot outweigh a person's right to freedom of movement, which must not end at a state's border. The legitimacy of one's freedom of movement may in turn rest on its role of protecting someone's individual autonomy (Cassee 2016).

These positions present paradigmatic instances of ideas on which theorists have been drawing to shed light on the normativity of border controls. In chapters 3.1. and 3.2, the reader should gain a grasp of the moral fundamentals of either accepting or questioning the legitimacy of unilateral border controls.

Above that, many arguments include real-world conditions of either border controls or a vanishing of such in their normative arguments. This chapter 3.3 briefly reflects on these

¹⁰ Migration refers to both immigrating (entering) and emigrating (exiting) a country. However, the latter has caused much more philosophical engagement.

¹¹ E.g. Germany towards ancestors of Holocaust survivors.

methodological considerations that enable us to understand the nature of refugeehood in political philosophy.

3.1 Collective self-determination and border controls

Approaches that emphasise the moral legitimacy that states have in controlling their borders to outsiders often do so by consulting a collective right to self-determination. What in popular discourse may come across as a state's "right to exclude" may in fact draw on the value of collective self-determination, which either requires or implies the normative legitimacy of border controls (Fine 2013). This right can be furthermore understood as a group's ability to exercise independent and autonomous power over important aspects of the members' lives, including to enable justice for them (Nine 2010).

Regarding migration controls, it has been argued that this includes the notion that a community has the decision-making competence of excluding migrants (1), which in turn entails a negation of a general moral right to immigrate (2) as well as morally allowing for partiality towards a state's own citizens (3) (Cassee 2016, 27). Although such a line of argumentation claims that states in general have moral legitimacy to decide whether they allow someone entrance, it is no moral claim that they *should* use it. By furthermore considering migration controls as a means to reach some collective goal or preserve some collectively held good, it is asserted that states are not only morally allowed but that at times it is even necessary to perform migration selection.

One such popular argument is put forward by David Miller (2016), who is considered to be a main representer of "liberal nationalism" (Cassee 2016, 130). In developing his argument, he draws on a variety of different components that have been used to demonstrate the legitimacy of and need for border controls. Miller (2016) introduces his argument by investigating the relation between a right to collective self-determination and border controls, for which the latter is an essential means to protect the former.

According to Miller (2016), the right to collective self-determination fundamentally requires a state to have control over some territory including the power to decide who is allowed to enter the respective geographical realms, which equalises an allowance to border control. This is in turn legitimated by the instrumental relation of controlling migration inflows and the political and societal functioning of a state: since the number and composition of migration effects most important policy choices – including those that concern the level of public expenditure in the

welfare state such as education, housing and so forth – migration control is one essential measure to fulfil a people's right to self-determination.¹²

Another way in which border control is fundamental to self-determination rests on its role in preserving a people's identity and *self*. It is these cultural arguments for which Miller's (2016) approach is often considered to be one main proponent. For Miller (2016), having some control over the continuation of a collective culture – next to it being intrinsically valuable - is essential for having some capacity over societies future paths and with that its self-determining abilities. He furthermore specifies this by describing the effects that migration may have on a society. First, migration flows factually influence the composition of a society and thus its *demos*. Such a transformation of a societies body also implies a change in values, which in turn influences fundamental democratic decision-making processes. Second, Miller (2016) argues by reference to empirical findings that the effects of migration on social cohesion may be detrimental, which in itself has far-reaching political consequences.

Although there are other ways by which one can plead for a right to exclude,¹³ the value of collective self-determination occupies a central position in at least two more strategies of argumentation. The first one draws on an analogy between states and clubs in the sense that either existence requires freedom of association. This position was prominently put forward by Wellman (2008), based on the logic that if we accept that a state has a right to self-determination, this essentially implies that the members can more or less freely decide who should be allowed entrance. As such, a state is like a club and refusing it such a right undermines the very existence of the political community.

The second argument – often associated with Pevnick (2011) – rests on the relation of collective self-determination and a state's right to collective ownership (Fine 2013). It is namely said that citizens have a right of ownership over their political institutions in virtue of the efforts that have been required to build these. This furthermore includes a right to control future paths of these institutions, incorporating some control over the future *demos*, which in turn defines a right to self-determination (Pevnick 2011, 37–38).

¹² Such economic arguments considering the high cost of migration and integration can be criticised on being imbalanced in not appropriately including the human cost of *not* letting people in (Spijkerboer 2007).

¹³ For an overview, consider for example Wellman (2020).

3.2 Individual freedom of movement and border controls

Despite the fact that border controls are undeniably part of the world in which we live, scholars have been questioning their moral legitimacy. Theoretically speaking, this chapter proceeds with a shift of perspective concerning the onus of proof: instead of individuals being subject to the selection criteria of states or agents who must prove their special status, it is states who are asked to demonstrate the legitimacy of excluding an individual. Migration is a burdensome venture and border controls – becoming significantly enhanced over the last two decades – are arguably the most challenging obstacle in this process.¹⁴ Accordingly, the creation of such obstacles that undeniably entail far-reaching limitations to individuals' freedom should be subject to philosophical scrutiny.

If we look at the consequences of current migration policies, one might detect strong reasons to challenge the status quo. In this vein, scholars have been arguing that border controls hinder achieving justice (Carens 2013) or are in fact limiting to democracy (Abizadeh 2017). Although these may shed light on procedural problems of border controls, they do not imply that the unilateral exclusion of want-to-be migrants is morally wrong nor that states *should* in general allow everyone entry, except there being substantial reasons to not do so. However, arguments have been deployed that ask for a full paradigm shift: there is a right to global freedom of movement that prompts us to essentially question current policies regarding their moral legitimacy (Cassee 2016).

The principles of national self-determination on the one hand and human rights on the other are arguably the most widely recognised global norms (Jones 2000). Considering the ethics of border controls, one may in fact ask whether these are conflicting. In fact, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948, Article 13 in Fine 2013, 256) includes an individual's right to freedom of movement. However, it does not contain a right to enter a country at will but is limited to the right to "freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state" and the right to "leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country" (Article 13).

Such a definition of what freedom of movement should allow for has been questioned by various scholars on different grounds (Carens 2013; Oberman 2016a; Cole 2012). One such argument has been to point to the inconsistency implied by this definition: Why should it be

¹⁴ Consider for example the constant increase in the annual budget of Frontex since 2005 (Statista 2022).

essentially different to travel between Vienna and Innsbruck and Vienna and Bern (Cassee 2016) and how can one be allowed to exit a country without having a right to enter another (Dummett 1992)? In the following paragraphs, three such arguments that a right to freedom of movement in fact includes a right to global freedom of movement are portrayed.¹⁵

Cassee (2016) identifies different strands of arguments that may ground a right to global freedom of movement. One such fundament for a right to global freedom of movement can be found in the application of Nozick's (1973) theory of justice to the ethics of migration as found in Carens (2013). In this vein, migration restrictions undermine the very legitimacy of a state, whose legitimacy rests on its role in protecting individual property rights. This in turn includes one's right over her body, which then again implies a natural right to freedom of movement. States may only be allowed to conduct exclusion if this would otherwise lead to the infringement of individual property rights.

Carens (2013) offers a second argument to manifest a right to global freedom of movement that draws on another grand theory of justice. With recourse to Rawl's (1971) *veil of ignorance*, he questions that the current system of state's privileges to control their borders would be accepted: behind the veil, we are not aware of our socioeconomic position, including the economic and political conditions of the country in which we are born (Leif 2021). Considering the significant impact that the place of birth has on one's life, it appears plausible that a global right to freedom of movement would be accepted as a basic right.¹⁶

These two arguments derive a right to global freedom of movement from an extensive theory of justice. However, Cassee (2016) emphasises the strengths of a final set of arguments that he proposes: the following argument refrains from resting upon an extensive theory of justice and is compatible with a variety of approaches.

The point of departure is the already-discussed right to freedom of movement as proposed in the Universal Human Rights Declaration from 1948 (Article 13). It is hardly controversial to accept one's individual right to freedom of movement within the country that one resides. Cassee (2016) shows that a right to freedom of movement is in fact constitutive to one's individual autonomy, which he considers to hold fundamental inherent value. Without a right to freedom of movement, one cannot exercise her right to freedom of assembly or other essential

¹⁵ The following discussion draws on Cassee's (2016) treatment of a right to global freedom of movement.

¹⁶ Importantly, Carens (2013) uses Rawl's (1971) framework as a tool, since he himself considered the national case as distinct from the international.

civil liberties. Furthermore, a right to freedom of movement is in an instrumental relation with one having access to material resources, which are in turn substantial to leading an autonomous life, as being able to make use of economic opportunities often requires a degree of mobility.¹⁷ Being allowed to enjoy freedom of movement is not only valuable in its instrumental relation but constitutes a fundamental dimension of what it means to live an autonomous life.

Moreover, if one acknowledges the value of freedom of movement, the asymmetry between the domestic and the international case as proposed in the Human Rights Declaration must be further proven. Casse (2016) claims that the asymmetry is not legitimate since many of the freedoms that require there to be freedom of movement are hindered by border controls. As such, exercising freedom of assembly may require one to cross borders. This claim becomes even more substantial under contemporary conditions where both societal challenges and the required collective action blast borders: global problems – paradigmatically the climate crisis – may demand international assembly.¹⁸ Similarly, there is no essential difference between the domestic and the international case considering the relation of freedom of movement and access to material resources. In light of increasing inter-country inequality,¹⁹ the effects of limitations on freedom of movement might even be more severe in the international scenario. Finally, the intrinsic value of freedom of movement in being constitutive to autonomy essentially rest on its limitedness and cannot be bound by more or less random national borders.

Consequently, one identifies Cassee (2016) to argue in accordance with libertarian arguments (Wellman 2020): the right to global freedom of movement is a prerequisite to other fundamental liberties and above that constitutive to one's individual autonomy. Accordingly, if one values individual autonomy, global freedom of movement must be aspired. However, accepting the importance of global freedom of movement does not imply that there should be no borders.

According to Cassee (2016), the relation of freedom of movement and border controls is constituted as follows: everyone holds a right to freedom of movement, which – as a negative right – implies that no state coercion should be used to hinder someone's entry. Although this presents no absolute right – as there obviously are limitation to one's freedom of movement – the state cannot deliberately decide upon desired reasons. The right to freedom of movement is – like a right to free speech or freedom of religion – a guarantee that one's personal sphere must

¹⁷ Consider for example that many people move to have access to better professional options.

¹⁸ Consider for example a demonstration to counter the G8 or a demonstration to counter a meeting of oil companies (Oberman 2016a, 36).

¹⁹ Piketty (2014) for example observes the trend of increasing inequalities between the Global North and South.

be protected from interference. Individual autonomy requires the freedom of choice upon decisions concerning one's very personal sphere and cannot sufficiently be addressed by an appropriate set of options. An interference in this protected sphere should only happen to such a degree that it is necessary for protecting other highly valuable goods, e.g. public order or national security (Carens 2013; (Cassee 2016, 210–32).

3.3 A matter of methodology?

The above discussion is concerned with the very moral essence of border controls. Due to the nature of the subject, the respective philosophical discussion is an issue of balancing individual migrants' and state's interests. On this fundament, the debate has furthermore produced a variety of arguments and counter-arguments that cannot be extensively discussed here, although one final consideration should find space.

Scholars have been deploying different views on how a philosophy of migration should take into account real-world conditions. Thus, differences in the normative standing of border controls may rest on differing perspectives on the role of philosophy in developing a theory of immigration (Stemplowska 2016).

Miller (2016) perceives his political philosophy of immigration to be a realist political endeavour that relies on and includes empirical evidence in its theorising. He argues that this should be a preferable approach since the issue of immigration is essentially one of non-ideal theorising: in an ideal world, neither immigrants in general nor refugees specifically would constitute such demanding political issues. In order to solve this non-ideal problem, one would first have to recognise that it can only be subject to collective solutions, which poses further empirical constraints on our reasoning. Accordingly, for Miller (2016) a political philosophy of immigration should aim at navigating between principles and values that we collectively endorse, containing appropriate evidence about the possibility to warrant individual and institutional change, and overarching moral considerations about global justice.²⁰ A philosophical approach to immigration must be sensitive to real-world conditions to be politically useful.

Such an approach is refuted by other scholars, who emphasise that one should first search for the philosophically sound fundament, which can be enriched but never refuted by empirical

²⁰ For a critic on Miller's (2016) evidence used, one can consult Parvin (2017).

consideration. For example, Cassee (2016) emphasises the importance of philosophical scrutiny of the status quo, regardless of its initial realisability.

We may approach this as different takes on the non-ideal/ideal theorising debate within philosophy.²¹ Non-ideal theorising can be described as a methodological approach that claims that answers given to demanding ethical question should take into account non-ideal circumstances, including the non-compliance of agents in the face of ideal proposals (Stemplowska 2016). This in turn enables us to grasp the nature of the following subject: in this vein, the existence of refugees is non-ideal in the sense that states have already failed to carry out their specific duties (Lægaard 2016). In an ideal world, the topic of refugeehood would not be such a demanding topic.

This methodological question concerning the appropriate degree of non-ideal consideration may be relevant to all of the concepts that one uses in theorising (Burgess, Cappelen, and Plunkett 2020). Regarding the concept of refugeehood, the relation of a philosophical definition and its legal – so to say – real-world counterpart has triggered disagreement. Accordingly, these methodological considerations will accompany the reader throughout this thesis.

3.4 The special case of refugeehood

With this debate in mind, the position of refugeehood within political philosophy becomes graspable. Up to now, it has been discussed under which conditions states are allowed to exclude migrants. However, one might wonder under which conditions migrants are allowed to enter a state's territory. Naturally, stances on this issue are diverging. Nonetheless, there are a group of potential migrants that most scholars consider eligible for entrance allowance, namely refugees (Gibney 2018).

There is agreement that refugees are holders of specifically demanding claims. However, there is no consensus on who counts as a refugee in the first place. Philosophers have been approaching this conceptual question via determining what it normatively means to be a refugee (Oberman 2020). This is subsequently used to approach the research question of this thesis considering the appropriateness of refugeehood when it comes to climate migration. The reframed question then is whether the normative criteria of the concept allow for the inclusion of climate migrants (chapter 4) in an adequate manner (chapter 5)? Subsequently, it can be asked whether refugeehood can and should be used to refer to climate migrants.

²¹ For an overview of the ideal / non-ideal theorising debate, one can consult Valentini (2012).

Many discussions concerning refugeehood have been taking place around the renowned definition of the UN Convention and its protocol prepared by the UN Refugee Agency (1951/1967) in Geneva. Signed or ratified by a large majority of countries,²² the Convention definition is used by many states as a legal guidance to determine who counts as a refugee. However, it is exactly this widely accepted definition that has been becoming the subject of a lively discourse across various societal realms and academic disciplines questioning the appropriateness of the UN definition in protecting those in need.

4. What it means to be a refugee

The term *refugee* plays a central role in the public discourse on migration policies and border controls. Especially in the aftermath of the so-called “refugee crisis” in 2015, it has been used in a highly politicising way.²³ The term’s current significance rests on the UN definition of refugeehood and thus its protection scheme from 1951 (UN Refugee Agency 1951/1967). Accordingly, most philosophical analyses concerned with the appropriate definition of refugeehood engage with this description, often arguing either in its favour or for an alternative.

The substantial passage of the Convention defines a refugee as someone who “*owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such a fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country*” (UN Refugee Agency 1951/1967, Article 1/2) The relevant group of people is furthermore one towards which states hold obligations, defined and distributed by the *principle of non-refoulment*. This means that “*no contracting state shall expel or return a refugee in any manner whatsoever to the frontiers of territories where his or her life or freedom would be threatened*” (UN Refugee Agency 1951/1967, Article 33/1).

Hereafter, I will present three different arguments that aim to put forward an appropriate definition of what it normatively means to be a refugee. This implies the extraction of the very moral fundament of refugeehood. The three proposals are selected due to two reasons. First, they all aim at identifying the fundamental meaning of refugeehood by analysing the normative criteria inherent to the Convention definition, whereby the subsequent discussion implicitly

²² The Refugee Convention or its protocol (1951/1967) is currently signed or ratified by 149 UN member states in contrast to 44 who are not party (Janmyr 2021).

²³ Examples are the differentiation between “real” refugees and economic refugees (“*Wirtschaftsflüchtlinge*”) that have been used in German-speaking countries to label bogus claims (Nassehi 2015). Accordingly, considering someone a refugee may influence how she is perceived by the public (Abdelaaty and Steele 2022).

engages with the role of the philosophical concepts in relation with their real-world implementation. This – for example – includes the question of whether the philosophical concept is indebted to the legal functioning of refugeehood. In general, terms this can be described as issues concerning the relation between a purely philosophically sound concept and implementation.²⁴ Second, they present seminal contributions and cover a broad range of potential arguments and counter-arguments.

4.1 A lack of state protection

Let us first consider the very influential discussion by Andrew Shacknove (1985), who states “*that refugees are, in essence, persons whose basic needs²⁵ are unprotected by their country of origin, who have no remaining recourse other than to seek international restitution of their needs, and who are so situated that international assistance is possible*” (Shacknove 1985, 277).

Such a position has been described as *broad* since it would drastically increase the number of respective refugees when compared to the Convention definition. First, the rejection of *persecution* as the relevant normative criterion extends the basis of who counts as a refugee. To Shacknove (1985), a philosophically sound definition must rather rest on the question whether a person’s basic needs are sufficiently protected by her state of origin. Persecution is then only one instance of this phenomenon.

Second, Shacknove (1985) rejects the requirement of *alienage*,²⁶ whereby he holds a rather controversial position in claiming that refugeehood is conceptually independent from migration: someone can be sufficiently deprived of her basic needs without there being any form of mobility involved. Accordingly, refugeehood is both analytically and normatively independent from migration. This implies that international migration is neither required to understand the nature of refugeehood nor is it essential to assess obligations towards refugees.

This goes along with Shacknove’s (1985) approach towards the so-called conceptual question of “who is a refugee.” As Oberman (2020) identifies, philosophers have often approached this problem by determining the group that has a claim to refuge. By contrast, Shacknove (1985) apprehends the conceptual question to be independent and prior to that of what is owed to

²⁴ Consider for example the distinction between “pure” and “applied” political and legal philosophy (Dempsey and Lister 2017, 314).

²⁵ Shacknove (1985, 281) defines basic needs as including “physical security, vital subsistence, liberty of political participation and physical movement.”

²⁶ Shacknove (1985, 275) defines alienage as referring to cases where “a person who is outside the country of his nationality, or if he has no nationality, the country of his former habitual residence” (Convention, art. IA [2]).

refugees. One should first consider what it means to be a refugee before engaging in discussions of obligations and management. This is furthermore a logical consequence of his rejection of alienage: if refugees are not necessarily subject to international displacement, a *principle of non-refoulement* might not always be the adequate protection mechanism. However, as soon as one has shed light on the essence of refugeehood and conceptual confusion is diminished, adequate measures can be derived.

He comes to this conclusion by showing that although the Convention definition points at some normatively relevant aspects, it is logically flawed. To him, refugeehood must and implicitly has been fundamentally derived from the – to him rather uncontroversial – claim that there exists a morally substantial social bond between every human and some collective. This can be framed as some right to be part of a society, whereby a lack of this right makes one a refugee. As it has been mentioned, persecution is then only one instance of the relevant phenomenon, which is the absence of a state to care for one's basic needs. Furthermore, alienage is no necessity to be a refugee either since one's basic needs can be relevantly deprived within the territory of the state of origin: "It is exclusively a political relation between the citizen and the state, not a territorial relation between a countryman and his homeland" (Shacknove 1985, 283).

Another core element of Shacknove's (1985) proposal is to grasp the universal elements of refugeehood. This becomes especially apparent when one considers two aspects of his discussion. First, he emphasises the context dependency of the Convention definition when it comes to both persecution and alienage. The focus on persecution would be obviously related with European totalitarianism especially in the first half of the 20th century when predatory states aggressively executed persecution. Furthermore, alienage to him rests on an after-war tradition of positivistic legal norms that aim at minimising interventions into a foreign state's affairs to maintain international stability.

This search for a universal definition also becomes visible in his critique on narrower approaches towards refugeehood. An often-mentioned argument in favour of narrower definition rests on its supposed political feasibility. Shacknove (1985) counters that such claims are invalid in contesting the conceptual adequacy of his definition, which should not depend on any specific institutional framework. The conceptual question is not subject to non-ideal theorising but a prior basis for any further such considerations. Shacknove's (1985) approach then is to define refugeehood in a decontextualised and universally valid way.

4.2 The only available option

4.2.1 Lister's approach

Matthew Lister (2012) presents an influential argument in favour of the Convention definition. In response to Shacknove (1985), he emphasises the importance of *persecution*, *alienage*, and the *principle of non-refoulment*.

He claims that both persecution and alienage are required to demarcate refugees from other individuals in need, because the pair of persecution and alienage enables understanding why refuge is the only appropriate mode of protection. It is then the *principle of non-refoulment* that defines this mode of protection, whereby states owe refugees the provision of refuge. Again, the conceptual question of who is a refugee is answered via a normative question, albeit a different one: What is owed to refugees (Oberman 2020)? Refugees are those who can only be protected by the means of refuge.

Let us now portray the role of *alienage* in more detail. According to Lister (2019), this criterion ensures that only the most effective means of protection are chosen. Consider the case of someone suffering from severe poverty within the territorial boundaries of her country of origin: to Lister (2012), financial support should be preferred to any form of entrance allowance in such scenarios. The reasoning is that justice claims might be relevant to everyone who is deprived of basic needs, although only cases of international displacement *necessitate* refuge. Without the involvement of international migration, other measures appear to be more appropriate in helping the person in need. This “better alternative argument” implies that alienage is essential to refugeehood (Oberman 2020). Lister (2012) identifies this claim to rest on a morally relevant distinction between the fundamental justice principles and the obligations that arise from it in a particular context and situation (Lister 2012, 659). Thus, refugeehood – located in the sphere of obligations – is only relevant in the context of migration.

To Lister (2016), “the place of *persecution*” regarding refugeehood is different to that of alienage. He concedes that broader definitions rightfully question whether refugeehood is essentially tied to persecution. However, he does not claim that the correct way is to fully erase its prominent position in a definition. Persecution is relevant in the sense that it is *the* paradigmatic case of refugeehood that allows deriving the respective normative criteria of what it means to be a refugee. Persecution is the most obvious case requiring refuge. Moreover, in accordance with the Convention definition, it is *a well-founded fear of persecution* in contrast to actively being persecuted that makes someone a refugee. The persecuting agent must not only be the state of origin. The persecution criterion can also manifest itself in any

discriminatory practice such as refusing a specific group in need the necessary protection. An example concerned with the specific agenda of this thesis would be if a state refuses an ethnic minority the required help in the case of natural calamities. With such an understanding of persecution, Lister joins politically practised interpretations by e.g. the UNHCR or the EU (Ammer 2015, 88). He identifies this to be a “wide reading of a narrow definition” in contrast to interpretations that adhere to a stricter notion of persecution²⁷ (Lister 2012, 661).

In a final step, Lister’s (2012) methodological take on the relation between philosophical, political and legal components of refugeehood should be portrayed. To him, a definition of refugeehood must be expedient to its essential function, namely being a legal and political tool. Accordingly, he claims that one should not try to distinguish in such a strict sense between the underlying philosophical principles and the derived management considerations. Refugeehood cannot and should not be separated from its functions and its origins as a protection mechanism. Accordingly, a definition should enable the provision of help to those in need of refuge. A first step towards this endeavour is naturally the differentiation between refugees and others. Thus, the concept’s extension should be easily identifiable to in turn facilitate its legal application. Lister (2012) indicates that Shacknove’s (1985) definition does not fulfil such legal and political objectives.

4.2.2 Miller’s approach

The final position is that of David Miller (2016, 76-94), who outlines a definition of refugeehood in the course of his political philosophy of migration. He defines refugees as the group of “*people whose human rights cannot be protected except by moving across a border, whether the reason is state persecution, state incapacity, or prolonged natural disaster*” (Miller 2016, S. 83).

In accordance with Lister (2012), refugeehood is considered to be normatively tied to migration. Consequently, the criterion of *alienage* is retained and remains essential to what it means to be a refugee. Here, he argues along with Lister (2012) by claiming that refugeehood can only be invoked in cases where it in fact is the only available option.

Lister (2012) and Miller (2016b) both resemble the logic of the Convention to a substantial degree. Nevertheless, Miller (2016b) rejects the *principle of non-refoulement*. This rests on his take on the role of philosophy in defining refugeehood. A philosophical definition must uncover

²⁷ As such Lister (2012) refers to Price (2010, 104) who grounds his definition of persecution in a “political approach to asylum”.

underlying principles, although these must be considered distinct from what is specifically owed to refugees. Accordingly, the provision of refuge is no essential component of refugeehood. To him, the *principle of non-refoulment* much more strongly rests on the idea that refugees must be protected from human rights violations, which implies that they cannot be sent back to any country where those are under threat. Refuge is only one way of adhering to the normative “spirit” of *non-refoulment* (Miller 2016, 86). This implies that there cannot be a general obligation to provide asylum, whereas other forms of providing protection may also be valid.

Analogous to Shacknove (1985), the *persecution* criterion is refuted. It is then a human rights-based solution that takes this place. Consequently, refugees are those whose human rights are under threat and who cannot hope for any other form of protection. However, Miller (2016) acknowledges the paradigmatic function of persecution: it is the most obvious case of human rights violation that requires leaving one’s country of origin.

Finally, Miller’s (2016) take on the relation between the philosophical concept and its legal implementation should be considered. Miller (2016) refrains from claiming that the legal definition must be in accordance with the philosophical principles underlying refugeehood since they are subject to different quality criteria. The function of the philosophical definition is to provide moral guidance. However, the legal definition of refugeehood should allow developing an appropriate and realistic legal mechanism. Accordingly, there must not be one definition of refugeehood across all disciplines and societal realms since definitions may be subject to different constraints and purposes.

4.3 Interim conclusion

The above discussion has shown that the normative content of refugeehood is a matter of controversy. By considering the Convention definition as a point of reference, we have been discussing a broader definition (Shacknove 1985), a wide reading of the Convention definition (Lister 2012) and a middle position that shares similarities with both other proposals but fundamentally adheres to the conceptual tie of refugeehood and migration (Miller 2016).

Furthermore, it is especially the defining function of persecution for refugeehood that is contested within political philosophy and leads to varying results (Gibney 2018). Although Lister (2012) argues for maintaining the Convention definition, he also deviates from persecution in a strict sense. A wide reading of this criterion should be preferred. Both Miller

(2016) and Shacknove (1985) reject using the terminology of persecution in a philosophical definition of refugeehood.

Comparing the scholars' position regarding the criterion of alienage, their different methodological stances on refugeehood become apparent. By rejecting the conceptual tie to migration, Shacknove's (1985) definition essentially revises what it normatively means to be a refugee. What is owed to refugees is a matter of an obligation to assist those in need. Both Lister (2012) and Miller (2016) reject such an analysis: everyone in need might be entitled to forms of assistance, although this is simply not what refugeehood is about. Refugees are specifically entitled to refuge (Lister 2012) or measures that provide equal protection (Miller 2016). It is argued that in cases where people suffer from severe deprivation within the territory of their original state, other means to fulfil potential moral duties towards those in need would be more appropriate (e.g. financial assistance).

In relation to the previously-discussed issue, one can determine a third aspect where the theories diverge. They all understand their definitions as fulfilling different functions. Shacknove (1985) aims at providing a universal and context independent definition of refugeehood. This in turn should then be used to 1) diminish conceptual confusion and subsequently 2) derive relevant legal and political measures. Thus, his definition should provide moral guidance for legal frameworks, which in turn implies an extension of a Convention definition. He argues that if we find ourselves in a world where refugee status is refused to some who would be entitled to it, the legitimacy of the policy is fundamentally compromised. One such proposal that he considers to be more aligned with the underlying philosophical principles of refugeehood is the definition provided by the Organization of African Unity (1969). Although maintaining that someone can only be a refugee outside the territorial boundaries of her state of origin, the definition acknowledges that the "the normal bond between the citizen and the state can be severed in diverse ways, persecution being but one" (Shacknove 1985, 276).

By contrast, Lister (2012) considers it to be neither necessary nor useful to develop a further definition of refugeehood, even though persecution in a strict sense might not be the appropriate criterion either. One can simply proceed by applying a wide reading of the Convention definition without changing its logic, which has the advantage of already being legally practised and politically accepted. In this way, refugeehood can be expedient to its essential function of being a tool to help those in need. Shacknove's (1985) account lacks such an ability to provide practical guidance, partly due to the attested ambiguity of who counts as a refugee. Lister (2012, 656 - 57) namely claims that the deprivation criterion resting on basic needs in combination

with the selection criteria that a refugee must be “*so situated that international assistance is possible*” are too vague to provide practical guidance. An argument in favour of such a position could therefore claim that regardless of the philosophical definition of refugeehood, it should be possibly to translate it into the binary code of law that must rely on clear demarcation criteria (Ammer 2015, 82). Furthermore, one could argue that an expansion may even lead to greater political inertia considering states’ current attitudes towards admitting refugees (Ferracioli 2014). According to Lister (2012), refugeehood is a non-ideal concept *per se* and one should not aim at a decontextualised, universal version of it but always have in mind its practical purpose.

To Miller (2016), a philosophical definition that uncovers the fundamentals of what it normatively means to be a refugee should not be confused with its legal application. The normative proposals that aim at grasping the underlying principles of refugeehood are not subject to those considerations that a legal definition must fulfil and *vice versa*. Although his definition would imply an extension of a Convention definition in the direction of the one postulated by the Organization of African Unity (1969), he fully refrains from formulating such claims. In fact, he even indicates that international law should maintain the Convention definition (Miller 2016, 83). It can be derived from this discussion concerned with the function of a definition that it may strongly influence the outcomes of one’s proposal. The question of whether a definition adequately represents the normative aspects of a group can be considered as distinct from how this should be translated into other societal realms. Nonetheless, this must not necessarily be the case and someone’s take on the relation of these questions may influence their proposals.

At this point, I do not want to argue in favour of one of these definitions. The purpose of the above discussion concerning refugeehood lies in its role for the overall project. One should have an idea of how philosophers have been approaching the conceptual question of what it means to be a refugee. Furthermore, it should be clear that this question is at least analytically distinct from arguments of the adequate political action when it comes to refugee protection. It is not obvious that a renegotiation of the UN Convention may be expedient towards reducing the protection gap of those in need considering the current political climate (Ferracioli 2014).

For now, since the quest of this thesis is to achieve some conceptual clarity regarding the appropriateness of referring to *climate refugees*, it is proceeded by asking what it means to be a climate refugee considering the above proposals. Thus, the question approached in the following section is whether the normative limits of refugeehood intersect with climate

migration in such a way that one can speak of climate refugees. Put differently: Do the normative criteria of refugeehood allow for the inclusion of climate migrants? Obviously, it can be expected that looking at different definitions of refugeehood results in different conclusions.

5. What it means to be a climate refugee

The guiding question of this section is whether the normative criteria of refugeehood include cases of climate migration. Initially, one may wonder whether the current legal practice allows there to be climate refugees (5.1). The subsequent sections are concerned with the extent to which different normative proposals overlap with cases of climate migration.

5.1 Current practice and future possibilities

Scholars have been arguing for an extension of the legal framework associated with the Convention definition (UN Refugee Agency 1951/1967) to allow for some of those displaced by climate change to claim refuge (Nawrotzki 2014). However, one may wonder about the framework's initial endowment to do so. Ammer (2015) shows that the potential of the Convention's application is very limited when it comes to climate change-induced migration.

Coming from a strict reading, it appears that this potential is not only limited but hardly existing: on the one hand, the Convention definition does not refer to any form of environmental or climate change-induced hazards, while on the other hand climate change displacement often lacks any reference to a persecuting agent. However, such an interpretation would do no justice to the Convention's capacities. To recap, it is widely interpreted that the persecuting agent must not be one's state of origin. The relevant criterion is namely much more that someone is subject to discrimination or persecution in virtue of her "race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion" and where there is no state who provides protection (UN Refugee Agency 1951/1967, Article 1/2). The persecutor can accordingly be the state of origin itself or another institutional agent from which the state has no power or is not willing to protect the refugee. However, the Convention framework could also be applied in cases where a state acts discriminatory towards a salient social group. An example that has been already mentioned is that of the state actively excluding someone from aid supplies after a climate change-induced disaster, which would then entitle someone to be a refugee. Such an interpretation of the Convention (1951/1967) – including a broad understanding of persecution – is recommended by the UNHCR, for example (1992, 51–53). Concludingly, it can be said that some climate migrants could potentially claim refuge although there have been no accepted cases until now. In order to claim refuge based on the refugee Convention, one can not only

refer to climate change but must have been subject to some form of discrimination as defined in the Convention (Ammer 2015, 86–89).

Furthermore, the kind of threat must be relevantly severe, which makes it specifically difficult for cases other than those that are easily identifiable and clear-cut (e.g. sinking island states) to prove their case. Forms of gradual environmental deprivation lack access to the refugee protection scheme as they would usually appear to be mere migrants in search of better life opportunities under international law (Ammer 2015).

As has been shown, climate migrants can only in very rare cases invoke refugee status. Moreover, there has not been such a case until today. Nevertheless, a shifting tendency in international law can be identified: the UN human rights council defended a decision in 2020 that climate change reasons can function as a claim to refuge (UNHCR 2020). Not following this would in turn be a human rights violation on the part of the refusing state.

5.2 Under the logic of the Convention

5.2.1 Lister's approach

Lister (2014b) argues that for relevant cases of climate migration, the refugee framework can be an effective tool to provide protection. This does not require a fundamental change of the Convention's logic, yet some adaptation when it comes to its selection criteria.

Lister (2014b) claims that the logic of the Convention ultimately allows there to be “climate change refugees.” However, for these relevant cases to have access to the protection mechanism, some slight modifications must be effected. This then is a small but promising contribution to close the “protection gap” when it comes to climate migration (Türk and Dowd 2014). Let us now consider who should be allowed to claim refuge following Lister's (2012, 2014, 2016) account.

To recap, refugees are those to whom refuge is owed and who can only be helped by these measures. The respective subgroup of climate migrants comprises those who face a threat due to climate change that is (1) “indefinite in duration”, (2) such that only international migration can help and (3) appears in such severance that a decent life – and not just one's favoured or traditional life – is at stake (Lister 2014b, 621) To Lister (2014), it is these limits that parallel with the logic of the Convention definition in such a way that no underlying principles must be refuted, and a normative relevant set of climate migrants can reasonably be selected who are entitled to the refugee status.

The first two limits demarcate refugeehood from other humanitarian entitlements: refuge must be the only appropriate measure to help. By the third proposed limit, Lister (2014, 2016) substantially departs from a persecution criterion. He furthermore argues that this distinction relevantly corresponds with a required level of severance. Through an analogy between the international and national case he furthermore hopes to prove his case: since one cannot even claim a right to live her favoured or traditional life *within* her society of origin, deriving such obligations towards non-citizens seems even more implausible. According to Lister (2014), suffering a loss from climate change cannot imply a general right to enter another country. This loss must be substantially severe.

“Climate change refugees” are accordingly cases where the climatic event is of unlimited duration and one cannot expect a future improvement (Lister 2014b). This excludes cases of sudden-onset events such as floods or hurricanes, where those displaced can be expected to return in the near future. The remaining conceptual tie to migration excludes any cases where protection can be provided internally. The third criterion reflects a demarcation intention between forced displacement where one has only a single option at her disposal and migration as one response among other options. Such a criterion results in excluding a broad set of climate migrants that sit on the continuum between voluntary and forced migration. In fact, most cases of indirect links between climate change and migration are excluded (see Appendix C). Nevertheless, the sinking islands due to climate change present paradigmatic cases where those displaced are climate change refugees. They should furthermore have access to the relevant protection scheme.

According to Lister (2014b), such an understanding of climate change refugees is not only normatively valid but empirically effective. He namely considers the protection framework associated with the Convention definition to provide a feasible contribution to the much wider endeavour of protecting those displaced by climate migration. Feasibility considerations are furthermore even more demanding in cases where ideal proposals may possibly result in “inaction, inertia and” with that even “greater injustice” (Lister 2014b, 619). This draws on a compliance requirement, which is in fact essential to enable greater justice. Lister (2014b) argues that any philosophical proposal of justice can only be effective when it encounters a substantial agreement among the relevant agents. Ultimately, proposals can only initiate change when they become implemented. Thus, he concludes that less controversial premises are in many instances preferable. Feasibility is accordingly more than a mere asset to an approach but a “fundamental concern” (Lister 2014b, 619).

However, this argument itself is subject to feasibility constraints. It appears that we are already facing the “pertinent problem of non-compliance” in the realm of refugee protection (Brezger, Cassee, and Goppel 2016, 138). Accordingly, one may question the feasibility of any proposals geared towards extending the legal framework of refugee protection.

5.2.2 Miller’s approach

Aground on Lister’s (2016) adjustment of a definition in the course of climate migration, a significant convergence with Miller’s (2016) approach can be detected.

To recap, Miller (2016) adheres to a conceptual tie between refugeehood and migration: refugees are those subject to a threat of their human rights who can only be helped by crossing borders. However, the persecution criterion is refuted, and the relevant deprivation can either be a result of human agency – including persecution, outside invasion or discrimination – or external events such as natural calamities.

Despite these significant similarities in representing the logic of the Convention definition, Miller (2016) has been identified as holding a different stance on the relation between philosophical concepts and their legal counterpart. Knowing what a concept fundamentally means does not imply that we should aim at implementing a copied legal scheme. Philosophical guidelines should provide moral guidance. Legal tools are subject to different considerations and fulfil other purposes. Accordingly, Miller (2016) refrains from arguing for an extension of the Convention scheme, in contrast to Lister (2014). Let us now consider what it means to be a climate refugee regarding Miller’s (2016) limitations.

Miller (2016) emphasises that a threat towards one’s human rights must be “immediate” (Miller 2016, 94). This excludes most cases where climate change appears in the form of slow-onset events and is favouring cases of a direct link between climate change and migration (see Appendix C). Furthermore, one common linkage between climate change and migration is via agricultural income (Cai et al. 2016). In cases where individuals depend on agricultural income, which is successively diminished by e.g., desertification, they may never be able to recite an immediate threat even if their poverty may at some point jeopardise their human rights. However, for Miller (2016) this does not present a normatively valid claim since one would

have potential access to more appropriate measures.²⁸ It is sufficient that one has a satisfactory option to be protected, and hence it is not required to have free choice over all possible options.

This distinction is manifested in Miller's (2012) differentiation between refugees and economic migrants. An "economic migrant" is described as "drawn in by the advantage that their new society has to offer" (Miller 2016, 94). These two categories are furthermore analogous to Lister's (2012) differentiation between a decent and favoured life: if there are other options within one's territory to live a decent life, the person cannot legitimately claim refuge.²⁹

However, Miller's (2016) definition is more inclusive towards fast-onset events. As indicated, the origin of the relevant deprivation can be the result of natural calamities. In contrast to Lister (2014), assigning climate migrants a refugee status does not rest on a duration requirement. However, one could assess the relation of a duration and a sufficiency argument: Is migration the only possible option to receive protection for those displaced by fast-onset disasters? Consequently, cases where climate migrants *are* climate refugees become comparatively limited.

5.3 Under a broad definition

Shacknove's (1985) definition implies a general extension of those who count as refugees. However, in what sense does this amount to climate migrants *being* refugees?

To recap, Shacknove's (1985) definition of refugeehood rests on stating that there has always existed a morally relevant bond between an individual and some greater collective. It is then the absence of such a bond – the "negation of society" – that makes one a refugee (Shacknove 1985, 277). Definitions adhering to a migration and persecution criterion fail by excluding relevant manifestations of this fundamental requirement.

To understand in which form relevant manifestations may appear, it is expedient to consider the conditions and purpose of this protective bond. The logic of Shacknove's (1985) argument suggests that an individual entering a society can expect to reduce her vulnerability to every other person in this society. Partaking in a society is thus a tacit agreement on mutual and peaceful co-existence. Accordingly, one can expect to benefit from being part of a society. The sovereign is moreover legitimated by this purpose: if it fails to protect the existence of such a

²⁸ Nevertheless, one may question other forms of assistance in light of a forward-looking perspective and the long-term nature of environmental degradation. Nobody can expect climate change to go away. Can financial assistance be an effective assistance in such scenario?

²⁹ A discussion of this criterion can be found in chapter 6.

society of mutual benefits, it fails in its very reason of existence. If this very rationale of society is contradicted, someone becomes a refugee (Shacknove 1985, 277–81).

With this description in mind, Shacknove (1985) aims at showing that any limitation of refugeehood based on the origin of the threat is invalid. According to Shacknove (1985), a distinction between “political” events and events where “the source of vulnerability is beyond social control” is fundamentally misleading (Shacknove 1985, 279). The extent of someone’s vulnerability is always mediated by societal infrastructure. State intervention may not hinder the rise of sea levels or the gradual desertification of agricultural land, but it can navigate the link between the events and its effect on individuals or communities. The constitution of a society has the capacity to either limit or exceed a damage.

Let us apply this logic to the origins of a threat. As such, severe poverty is not only an effect of resource scarcity but at least navigated by three more societal conditions. Shacknove (1985, 280) has identified these as a) the relevant technology for processing resources, b) the required infrastructure for facilitating commerce, and c) an effective method of distribution. All of these societal conditions are furthermore essentially subject to human provision. Concludingly, not the source of vulnerability is normatively relevant in deciding who is entitled to refugee status but the fact that someone is vulnerable in such a way that an event results in a relevantly severe threat.

This normative claim resonates with the current empirical frameworks of climate migration (see Appendix C). Climate migration is not monocausal but a response to a set of intersecting, social, environmental and even psychological factors. It is furthermore an individual’s or community’s vulnerability that substantially defines her response to any climatic event. Based on Shacknove’s (1985) arguments, one can conclude that one’s vulnerability in combination with the absence of a protecting state may make one a refugee.

This allows Shacknove’s (1985) definition to be the most inclusive one. In contrast to a Convention definition (UN Refugee Agency 1951/1967), there must not be any additional characteristics that decidedly involve human action, such as discriminatory practices when it comes to aid supply. Moreover, regarding the vulnerability framework, one would not have to prove that she not “only” suffers from severe poverty.

Another component of the previously-defined vulnerability perspective is that it refrains from a conceptual tie with migration. Regarding the phenomenon of climate migration, this would allow for cases of internal displacement to fit a refugee description.

5.4 Interim conclusion

Some core insights from this chapter are that regardless of which approach one applies, those who face full loss of territory due to climate change-related reasons are climate refugees. These are cases where the link between climate change and migration is directly constituted, one can only be helped by the means of migration, and there is no prospect of a future return.

Second, Miller's (2016) and Lister's (2014) proposal most substantially differ in the specification of duration criterion. To Lister (2014), the threat suffered by climate refugees must be long term. This relevantly excludes many scenarios resting on fast-onset events but sheds an interesting perspective on slow-onset climatic events. Someone suffering from the adverse effects of climate change on her agriculturally-based income cannot expect any bettering, and the effects must be expected to be long term. Climate change is no longer likely to go away. Nevertheless, Lister (2014) excludes most of these cases due to other criteria.

Third, Shacknove's (1985) proposal has been specifically discussed regarding its relation to vulnerability. Thus, reframed, a refugee is some whose vulnerability has led to her having to migrate. An individual's vulnerability as such is already a sign if her protective bond with a state is intact. A high vulnerability indicates a lack of this protective bond. A relevant definition identifies a substantially larger set of climate migrants to be refugees ranging from internal to external and from indirect and direct form of migration (Appendix C).

The fourth point concerns a practical consideration. Since the Convention definition was designed to deal with persecution, even a wide reading including small modifications of the definition will always dwell on this proximity. Accordingly, it is both theoretically as well as practically easier for someone to prove their case when it shares similarities with persecution. For climate migrants, these commonalities are often very limited, especially for those who suffer from gradual environmental deprivation.

To sum up, one must acknowledge that there *are* climate refugees. However, only broader definitions as proposed by Shacknove (1985) allow for a substantially large set of climate migrants to be climate refugees, whereas other definitions are rather limited. Empirically driven arguments may claim that one should accept a broader definition to adequately grasp some core empirical elements, such as vulnerability. Nevertheless, we have already touched on some core normative arguments that may prompt us to wonder whether one normative proposal is superior to the other. One such argument is further discussed in the next chapter.

6. Limits to refugeehood

It has been asked whether there are climate refugees in terms of there being a subgroup of refugees whose displacement factor is related to climate change but who are still picked out by the definition. In short, the answer to this question is: *yes*, climate refugees exist in the meaning of fulfilling the normative criteria of different definitions, and thus there *are* climate refugees. However, the scope and scale of their existence then is dependent on the definition that one accepts to be normatively correct.

The follow up question – subject to this section – is whether they do so in an adequate manner. Framed differently, one may ask whether the chosen normative criteria are the correct ones to map what it means to be a *climate* refugee. This concern is referred to as the “limits to refugeehood,” which prompt us to question the appropriateness of refugeehood as an ethical concept by the means of which we want to assess climate migration. In what follows, three possible objections are discussed and assessed.

6.1 Refugeehood and mobility

Philosophers who write about ‘climate refugees’ often do so by referring to broader definitions of refugeehood. Buxton (2019) explicitly refers to Shacknove’s (1985) definition of a refugee, Bell (2004) cites the inclusive legal frameworks as represented by the African Union Convention (1969), and Holtug (2022) and Wilcox (2021) emphasise that they refer to a human needs-based interpretation of what it means to be a refugee.

Accordingly, one might wonder whether refugeehood is an appropriate concept for assessing climate migration, albeit only if one accepts a broader definition. However, why should one consider broader definitions to be morally superior in the first place? Two lines of such arguments are presented, the first of which contributes to the scrutiny of the selection criteria apparent in different definitions. The second argument evaluates the consequences of a narrower definition in light of justice consideration.

First, the claim that narrower definitions – such as those aligned with the Convention definition (1951/1967) – uphold essentially mistaken criteria is described. In this vein, we can rearrange Shacknove’s (1985) positions: since the Convention definition is no appropriate conception of the underlying principles of refugeehood, it results in “treating alike cases differently” and is thus morally mistaken.³⁰ According to Shacknove (1985), all refugees are essentially characterised by a missing bond with a protective state. If a definition excludes legitimate

³⁰ A short description of the origins of this ethical principle can be found in Heinrichs (2007, 102–3).

claimants who share this criteria, it treats morally alike cases differently and infringes a principle of equal treatment (Draper 2022; Heinrichs 2007).

Miller (2016) and others who deploy a human rights perspective³¹ refute the persecution criterion rejected by narrower definitions. However, they adhere to a migration requirement: refugeehood is a response to a severe threat that can only be escaped by international migration. Migration must be the only available option. Such a claim is based on an underlying sufficiency argument: It is sufficient to offer one whose human rights are under threat an adequate set of options, although it is not necessary that they can freely choose their preferred means to aid.³² Consequently, not everyone whose human rights are relevantly under threat can decide to *become* a refugee if they can reasonably expect to receive more effective protection. This then is again a claim concerning the very function of refugeehood: Is it a tool to differentiate between migrants or should it be a protection mechanism at the disposal for those deprived of some basic human need?

Second, with reference to Oberman (2020) this argument can be further developed by considering the outcome of a sufficiency criterion. As a matter of fact, a migration criterion excludes people based on their mobility. A person's mobility is in turn to a substantial degree defined by her financial endowment and often complicated by other characteristics of her social positionality (Spijkerboer 2018). This is – for example true – when it comes to gender differences: by bearing the larger proportion of childcare, women tend to be less mobile. Oberman (2020) concludes that such a selection criterion is accordingly perpetuating discrimination, as those who are already specifically vulnerable are hindered from claiming refuge. Thus, narrower definitions discriminate by implicitly excluding socially salient groups from ever having access to refugeehood.³³ The above-stated reasoning is accordingly reversed: narrower definitions are mistaken in “treating different cases alike” and thus overlook the resulting perpetuation of discrimination (Heinrichs 2007).

6.1.1 Assessment

This debate has raised concerns that are very relevant to the empirical observation of climate migration. I want to especially elaborate on a differentiation between migration and mobility: climate change is having diverse effects on humans, with climate migration being just one

³¹ Consider for example Carens (2013) or Gibney (2004).

³² This observation reflects the discussion in Cassee (2016, 221–27) if freedom of movement is sufficiently fulfilled by an adequate set of options.

³³ Discrimination is an intensely debated subject. The definition used here is that an act is discriminatory if it “treats people worse than others because of their membership of a socially salient group” (Oberman 2020, 696).

response. A focus on climate migration along with alarmist prediction on the numbers of expected climate refugees may obscure the *immobilities* that climate change creates (Baldwin, Fröhlich, and Rothe 2019; Black et al. 2013). Consequently, scholars argue for a shift in the debate towards the effects of climate change on mobilities in general, including both migration and “trapped populations” (Black and Collyer 2014).³⁴ The according ethical question then is why those leaving due to climate change should be more deserving than those severely suffering from its adverse consequences at their homes, which are those who are in fact often the most vulnerable.

If one is convinced by the above arguments, it can be proceeded by refuting narrower in favour of broader definitions. Broader definitions do not select upon mobility. Accordingly, they are better equipped to cover the heterogeneity of the phenomenon. This can be understood as a reconciliation of empirical claims pointing at issues of adequate representation and ethical concerns questioning the validity of narrower definitions. However, further arguments have been made that prompt us to question whether refugeehood is an appropriate ethical framework. These arguments argue that there is something specific to climate migrants based on what they leave behind.

6.2 Refugeehood and collective remedies

Refugeehood is an individualistic solution: it is a reaction to a specific relation or the lack of such between an individual and her state. Furthermore, refugees can expect nothing but individualistic remedies in such that they provide protection only for them as individuals. It is the individual who is the bearer of moral rights qua being a human being.

However, scholars have been arguing that climate migration requires what Lister (2014, 626) has termed “corporate approaches.” Such claims aim at demonstrating that in some cases only collective remedies – in contrast to individualistic remedies – can meet the resulting moral duties towards climate migrants. One may be reminded of the discourse on border controls approached earlier: again, it is asked how individual and collective interests should be balanced. Only this time it is not the potential host states that may be holders of collective entitlement, but rather one should consider the collective claims held by those displaced by the consequences of climate change.

It is especially the paradigmatic cases of full territory submergence for which scholars have been developing claims that require considering a collective as the relevant recipient of

³⁴ On the mechanisms behind climate change and migration, consider the discussion in the Appendix C.

remedies (Nine 2010; Kolers 2012; Buxton 2019). Nine (2010) develops one such approach in which she aims at showing how the full territory loss to which climate migrants are subject – in the case of sinking island states – results in the duty to provide them with new territory. Her argument rests on the value of collective self-determination: a right to collective self-determination is both a normative and practical requirement to any established state. Every already legitimately established state can be expected to hold a right to self-determination. This applies to those small-island states like Tuvalu that are threatened by full territory submergence. Since self-determination is practically linked to some control over a geographical realm, losing their territory implies that they are hindered to exercise their collective right to self-determination. “Ecological refugee states” are accordingly collectives that bear a right to self-determination. The lack of being able to exercise this right can only be remedied by providing a collective solution, as individual protection in the form of refugeehood would not be sufficient.

6.2.1 From “value individualism” to “value collectivism”?

In view of this argument, one may wonder why only collective remedies should be considered as appropriate measures. Interestingly, essential parts of the arguments remain in alignment with refugeehood when it comes to balancing the value of collective and individual interests: both approaches acknowledge and emphasise the ontological existence and importance of collectives, specifically that of the state. However, one should be aware that the value of the collective as such remains to rest on individual interests. Shacknove’s (1985) proposal reminds us that ultimately the value of states can only be found in its protective function towards individuals. This function is the minimal social bond every individual should enjoy. If this bond is relevantly infringed, one becomes a refugee. I argue that a form of “*value individualism*” is deployed (Hartney 1991), which means that the collective ultimately derives its value and legitimacy from its contribution to the lives of individual human beings (Hartney 1991, 297). This condition remains very present in Nine’s (2010) argument. Even though she shifts the argument towards collective interests, the collective’s importance continues to rest to a substantial degree on the value that it brings to its individual members. As such, she indicates that collective are holding territorial rights by virtue of allowing them to govern justice concerns relevant for its members (Nine 2010, 362).

However, Nine (2010) concludes by emphasising the importance of collective remedies. I argue that another differentiation allows identifying the claimed specialities of the case discussed here. Miller (2002, 178) considers there to be a difference between a concept being a mere

“category” and it referring to a “group”. A category of persons means that it assigns a particular description like having blonde hair to this set of people. By contrast, a group is understood to “mean a set of people who by virtue of their shared characteristic refer to themselves as forming a distinct group” (p.178) Thus, someone belongs to a group by a conscious and deliberative process of identification. Importantly, the line between this distinction is both fluid and modifiable: a category of people may become a group by developing a shared identity. Vis-à-vis this, a shared identity may fade, and a group would become a category merely bound by some shared characteristics.

Whereas the “environmental refugee state” in the case of Nine’s (2010) assessment is a group, refugees are arguably better described as a category or can at least not be fully ascribed group status. This point is portrayed by Nine’s (2010) understanding of self-determination as being in relation with some kind of unique internal identity of a community: Each self-determined group has a unique identity, which is a prerequisite of self-determination in the first place but is in turn also strengthened by its execution. Accordingly, the islanders who are threatened by complete loss of their territory are also threatened by the complete loss of their self-determining powers, which is a part of what makes them a group in the first place. Moreover, their unique group identity is fundamentally at stake. Mere migration into another country may provide protection but does not allow upholding a collective’s well established right to collective self-determination, including its unique identity. The loss is irreducible to what can be given to individuals.

This irreducibility indicates a shift towards *value collectivism* where the “collective entity is said to have value independently of its contribution to the well-being of individual human being” (Hartney 1991, 297).³⁵ By identifying and stressing the internal, unique value of the collective’s identity – essentially constituted by their self-determining powers – a form of value collectivism is endorsed. This presents strong grounds for considering both collective and individual interest when assessing displacement. In cases, one may require a collective perspective: what is lost may be irreducible to assessing individual costs of displacement. Accordingly, in this vein one would state that by virtue of the unique identity of the collective, the loss cannot be fully remedied by individual protection.

This point is even more plausible by stressing the value of cultural heritage including but not limited to a collective’s identity (Thompson 2000). Cultural heritage is collective in its very

constitution, unique by virtue of its origins and – considered as a good – can only be held collectively. Above this, cultural heritage may be considered as determining “cultural potential,” which points at its importance for future developments of collectives (UNESCO 2022). Accordingly, Buxton (2019) identifies the loss of a community’s political identity and other cultural goods contained by a collective’s cultural heritage to present a solid and demanding starting point for what is owed to climate migrants: What is owed may rest on what did they had to leave behind.³⁶

6.2.2 Assessment

We may now consider these arguments with respect to this project’s overall research interest: Should we abandon refugeehood when ethically assessing climate migration due to its individualistic nature? The argument presented here refrains from rejecting refugeehood on the aforementioned grounds.

The collective nature of remedies is not specific to climate migration. We can imagine cases where a group experiences a loss of self-determination and/or cultural heritage that is not tied to climate change, just as there exist cases of climate migration that are not subject to such kind of deprivation and remain individualistic. Since climate migration is such a heterogenic phenomenon, a claim that would rest on homogenisation cannot be an argument for rejecting the concept of refugeehood altogether. However, it is especially the paradigmatic cases of sinking small-island states that are subjects of the previously-discussed collective approaches. Accordingly, one might question the realm of reasonably applying refugeehood as an ethical framework in the case of climate migration.

There might be cases of climate migration that require different solutions than asylum or any other form of remedy within the logic of the *principle of non-refoulment*. Forms of climate migration appear in such a variety that it is not surprising that they result in different moral duties. However, this discussion allows deriving several further insights.

First and foremost, this discussion allows for a shift in perspective when considering the morality of migration. What legitimates border controls in the first place – namely the value of collective interests – may in fact imply demanding claims indebted to those displaced. National self-determination is arguably the most accepted norm on behalf of collectives and has received excessive attention in relation to border controls (Jones 2000). Especially in public discourse,

³⁶ Other scholars emphasising this point include (Fruh 2021; Shalit 2011).

the implications of this norm are primarily discussed in terms of state sovereignty. Philosophers may contribute to impartiality by emphasising other inferences.

Another important and related insight has been gained by considering the value of cultural heritage and collective identity. Again, a comparison between the different agents involved in migration processes is enlightening: The unique value of a distinct culture has been playing a central role in arguments legitimising the importance of border controls. As such, border controls are considered a core function to preserve a distinct culture (Miller 2016, 57–75; Wellman 2020). However, taking the unique value of a distinct culture into account may also influence how one ethically assesses and empirically conceptualises migration. First, the value of what one needs to leave behind may hold relevance for assessing what is owed to them as we have seen in this chapter. Second, in terms of understanding the very nature of migration decisions, one should be aware of non-pecuniary migration costs (Djajic 2014; Grimes and Wesselbaum 2019).

This is supplemented by acknowledging the multifactored nature of migration decisions. Current discourses and public narratives tend to emphasise the role of economic incentives, specifically that of wage differentials between host and source countries. However, migration decisions are much more complex and guided by a variety of reasons.³⁷ Migrants are not only expecting benefits but are subject to potentially high costs. Considering these empirical complexities, one may question the usefulness of a concept termed ‘economic migrants’ to refer to all non-refugees. This differentiation is – for example – used by Miller (2016), while Oberman (2016b) provides a normative counter-argument to this distinction. However, even if one accepts the fundamental normative differences between these two categories of migrants, the usage of ‘economic’ may be misleading and indicates an empirical simplification. Furthermore, considering the populist utilisation of specific terms, academics should evaluate whether and to what degree they may contribute to such discourses.

The discussion on the costs of displacement is complemented by Shalit (2011, 311; 325), who stresses that in severe cases one may even be subject to a “loss of sense of a place” essential to one’s self-identity. Shalit (2011) furthermore claims that this loss is incommensurable: There can never be a replacement due to the place’s uniqueness. This also implies that it is impossible to assign an appropriate economic value to the loss nor is there a substitute to it.

³⁷ Consider also Appendix C on modelling climate migration.

The concerns raised in this section have been strongly addressing issues of migration in general, albeit that may be specifically relevant to cases of climate migration. However, a final argument is considered that allows grasping a specificity that all cases of climate migration share. Reflecting upon differences between Nine's (2010) and Buxton's (2019) approach allows making the final group of arguments tangible. Both consider self-determination and a loss of cultural heritage to be the fundament of their collective solutions. Nine (2010) bases her argument on the overarching right of a group to self-determination, which results in the provision of new territory to protect this underlying principle. However, it is only regarding a reparative justice framework that Buxton (2019) determines collective solutions in the form of providing new territory to be the required measure. Nine's (2010) "Ecological refugee states" *lack* their right to self-determination, whereas Buxton's (2019) "climate refugees" are harmed by a *loss* of self-determination and cultural heritage. Buxton (2019) furthermore claims that the harm is caused by anthropogenic climate change. Accordingly, searching for a relevant agent who is responsible for climate change – a core agenda to the ethics of climate change – allows assigning responsibilities for protecting those displaced. In the next section, such arguments are traced back to their origins.

6.3 Refugeehood and climate change

Next to Buxton (2019), many scholars assessing what is owed to climate migrants do so by reference to climate change and the specific ethical implications that are said to be entailed (Draper 2018; Draper and McKinnon 2018; Fruh 2021; Kolers 2012; Shalit 2011; Bell 2004; Nawrotzki 2014; Hoffman et al. 2022; Wündisch 2022; Dietrich and Wündisch 2015; Buxton 2019). This section aims at first understanding how climate change normatively relates to migration when identified as contributing to the respective displacement. Subsequently, it is assessed whether refugeehood is an adequate concept to grasp this relationship.

6.3.1 Why is climate change relevant?

According to Souter (2014), refugeehood is in one of its most fundamental moral functions a response to humanitarian claims: refugees lack protection against serious harm, which all humans should enjoy. In principle, all states have equal obligation to carry out the derived duties where the *principle of non-refoulment* functions – at least practically – as a distribution criterion.

When it comes to climate migration, philosophers have been deriving differing conclusions based on the role that climate change plays in the migration process: what is owed to climate migrants is not only a matter of general humanitarian claims that require states to protect those

in need and that all have equal obligations to, but rather it is one of the responsibilities that have been arising in the light of climate change.

Scholars arguing in this vein point at the ethical challenges entailed by climate change: anthropogenic climate change has been jointly and unintentionally caused by humanity and the source of it is deeply embedded in the very “infrastructure of current human civilisation” (Gardiner 2006, 401). Accordingly, climate change can be described as result of negative externalities associated with economic development – foremost of greenhouse gas emissions – where the costs are not borne by those benefitting from the intended economic activity (Stern 2014, Chapter 2). In fact, greenhouse gases are part of most economic activity up to today and have been imposing – and continue to do so – massive costs (and some benefits) on current populations and future generations. Thus, the effects of climate change are global, surpass generations and appear so distributed that already vulnerable communities tend to suffer the most, primarily due to their financial constraints limiting their resilience (Shue 2014). Scholars concerned with climate justice have specifically pointed at the correlation between the costs and benefits of climate change, where highly industrialised states have been historically contributing and benefitting the most by emitting the largest share of greenhouse gases, while tending to be both less vulnerable to climate change and wealthier in general (Meyer and Roser 2010).

Drawing on the described origin, constitution and dispersion of costs, benefits and risks, climate change entails challenging and demanding ethical problems. Due to the severe consequences that are already faced, and which will become even more serious (and unpredictable) in the future, climate action must be increased effectively. The concrete form of climate action – what is its content, by whom it should be carried out and who should bear the cost – may be called the “climate action question” (Caney 2020). To better understand the relation of climate migration and climate action, I want to differentiate between two heavily used concepts: *mitigation* refers to action aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions, whereas *adaptation* pertains to measures undertaken in response to “actual or expected climate stimuli, their effects or impacts” (Kallhoff 2021, 141).

6.3.2 What is climate migration?

Considering this differentiation climate migration is a form of adaptation associated with severe, both pecuniary and non-pecuniary costs. If imposed solely on the individual, these costs may even limit a person’s access to the adaptation strategy considering the effect of liquidity constraints on migration decisions (see Appendix C). Furthermore, climate migration can be a

form of both reactionary and anticipatory adaptation (Jamieson 2014). It may appear as a reaction when caused by fast-onset events such as hurricanes or as an anticipatory strategy when prospective climate migrants expect there to be no bettering of their situation due to slow-onset events such as the increasing desertification of agricultural land.

However, the cost of adaptation imposed on climate migrants is a loss subject to climate change. Conceptualising costs as a loss indicates that it has been intact in the past but was lost due to a specific event. Regarding climate migration this past (and ongoing) event is climate change: without climate change, those displaced by its adverse effects would not have to experience this loss. Climate migrants are *victims* of climate change in the sense that they already suffer from its consequences.

However, one might wonder if this initial distribution of the costs of adaptation is just: Who should burden the costs of displacement when induced by climate change? This is the relevant question for cases of planned relocation. However, at the time when a person is migrating, she already bears all of the costs. The relevant question is accordingly not who should bear the costs but who should remedy the climate migrants for bearing the costs?³⁸ A related but distinct question concerns the nature of this remedy: What is owed to climate migrants? This issue has been partly encountered in the previous section and depends on how one evaluates the nature of the loss, which may be different among climate migrants. However, a proposal is assessed that allows identifying a unifying moral basis relevant to all climate migrants: I show that ethically assessing climate migration requires us to deploy a diachronic perspective (Souter 2014). This argument is portrayed by contrasting refugeehood with another category of migrants. Accordingly, it is asked whether climate migrants are “particularity claimants” (Miller 2016, 77).³⁹

6.3.3 Are climate migrants particularity claimants?

A humanitarian framework as it is prevalent to the ethical solutions provided by the concept of refugeehood is a priori assigning equal duties to all states for protecting refugees. It is then only the *principle of non-refoulment* that entails special obligation (Jeske 2021): by asking for protection, the claimant makes herself vulnerable to a particular state (Miller 2016, 84). This vulnerability towards a specific state creates a bond, which allows specifically demanding protection by admission from this state.

³⁸ These burdens shouldered by climate migrants can be described as “secondary burdens” resulting from past adaptation and mitigation (Kallhoff 2021, 209).

³⁹ This idea is borrowed from Draper (2018).

Particularity claimants are distinct from refugees in the sense that they essentially invoke special duties towards particular states. These special obligations are a result of a past event: particularity claimants are “people who assert that one particular state owes them admission by virtue of what has happened in the past” (Miller 2016, 77). Furthermore, particularity claimants can be either refugees or economic migrants since they rather add another normative dimension than contributing to a threefold differentiation. One example of particularity claimants are Afghan citizens who have been working as translators for US forces in the course of their foreign operation, as these are “claims of desert” (Miller 2016b, 113). Another scenario that can grant people particular claims is when foreign forces have been involved in a conflict that significantly contributed to an individual’s displacement, which results in “claims to reparation” (Miller 2016b, 113). As such, the particular state is involved in the source of displacement and the creation of the related harm.

For the current purpose, only the second case hold relevance. Along with Draper (2018), it is considered if specific states are relevantly involved in the source of displacement when it comes to climate migration. According to Souter’s (2014) understanding of reparation cited by Miller (2016, 114), this requires determining the relevant responsibilities. He specifies further that only if a state is *outcome* responsible for the harm involved in leading to the displacement can one recite reparations (Souter 2014, 330). This in turn rests on a threefold distinction between different forms of responsibility coined by Miller (2007): causal responsibility explains “why something happened,” while outcome responsibility allows to hold an agent accountable (87-90). This means that an agent can be reasonably expected to identify “a foreseeable connection between [her] action and the result” (88).

Let us now relate these reflections to the current case. The assessment of responsibilities for climate change is a complex endeavour and has been circulating around three principles (Caney 2020). The polluter pays principle (PPP) draws on the causal reasoning that states should bear the burdens in proportion to what they have been contributing. This is often considered to reflect a model of historic responsibility where agents are held accountable in ratio to their historic emissions.⁴⁰ Another principle that substantially departs from the causal reasoning apparent in the PPP but adheres to a backward-looking perspective is that of the beneficiary pays principle (BPP). It states that any state should – as a matter of fairness – support “practices that manage the negative effects of activities from which they benefit.” However, “the countries benefiting

⁴⁰ This position can be represented by Peter Singer’s (2002, 41) demand: “you broke it, you fix it” (Singer 2002 in Kallhoff 2021, 129).

the most from greenhouse emitting activities in the past bear the greatest responsibility of climate justice.” (Page 2008, 562). The ability to pay principle (APP) does not make any claim about the agent’s role in the process of creating current challenges since it is “explicitly forward looking” (Kallhoff 2021, 215). Agents should shoulder burdens in proportion to their ability.

Initially, none of these principles allows assigning outcome responsibility to climate change. However, Draper (2018) shows that climate migrants do not suffer from climate change itself. As we have seen above, they suffer from burdening the costs of adaptation that are imposed on them. This individualised form of adaptation would not have been necessary in the first place if the initial mitigation duties had been carried out in time. For this conclusion, one can make use of all principles. Even in consideration of an excusable ignorance argument, one must acknowledge that it has been quite some time since humanity was made aware of the dangers of climate change.⁴¹ If states had taken their mitigation duties serious, the harm faced by climate migrants could have been prevented. It is thus a “failure to have discharged pre-existing mitigation obligation” that results in a relationship between states and climate migrants (Draper 2018, 68). Whether the relevant states are the high-emitting states (PPP) or the wealthiest (APP, BPP) depends on the principle that one prefers. However, the different sets of responsible states can be expected to overlap to a substantial degree.

6.3.4 Assessment

Let us now consider this argument in the light of the overall research agenda of this project. The question that I aim to answer is how these normative claims identified above relate to the concept of refugeehood.

In essence, this section developed the claim that climate change as relating to the source of climate migration is ethically relevant. Regardless what principle of distributing the responsibilities of climate change that one prefers, climate migrants are particularity claimants and thus in a special relationship with particular states. Moreover, this normative position can only be grasped by applying a “diachronic approach” (Souter 2014, 327–28): this allows applying a backward-looking perspective and consider how the processes that caused the harm can be ethically relevant. This in turn presents a limitation to all normative proposals of refugeehood that have been encountered. Refugeehood as a normative framework is a “synchronic approach” in the sense that it only considers “*current* needs and rights” (Souter 2014, 327). However, assessing ethical questions related to climate migration requires

⁴¹ See a discussion of the excusable ignorance argument in Gosseries (2004, 39–41).

refraining from only considering “contemporaneous claims” based on “contemporaneous needs” (Fruh 2021, 104). One needs to recognise the ethical importance of the source of displacement and consider its implications.

Against this theoretical background, I argue that the normative proposals of refugeehood that we have encountered obscure the normative status of climate migration. What unifies all heterogenic forms of climate migration is not what is owed to them but how one initially must assess what is owed to them considering the nature of displacement. This has been shown by indicating that climate migrants are particularity claimants. Thus, it can be said that the cause of displacement influences the type of migration. Some climate migrants may share normative characteristics with refugees, but they are always victims of unfulfilled mitigation duties.⁴²

6.4 The normative limits to refugeehood

In this section, three possible normative limits to refugeehood have been identified and evaluated. In the course of this endeavour, deeper insights into both the normative nature and the descriptive appearance of climate migration have been gained.

In section 6.1, the conceptual tie between refugeehood and migration inherent to most definitions has been scrutinised regarding its normative validity. When refuting this conceptual tie, one can still invoke broader definitions of refugeehood coined by Shacknove (1985) that initially omit this criterion. The normative considerations can be reconciled with empirical observations on climate migration. Scholars have been emphasising that migration is only one response to the effect of climate change. In fact, in the light of financial constraints, individuals might rather suffer from their *immobility*. The relevant ethical question is who should deserve protection by invoking refugeehood: those who are most vulnerable or those who can only be helped by the means of migration?

However one stands on these issues, in section 6.2 a further possible limitation to all proposals of refugeehood is discussed. This section concerns the nature of the remedies assigned and observes whether climate migration requires one to consider collective solutions. Even if this might be relevant to some cases of climate migration, collective solutions are no unifying characteristic. Nevertheless, the discussion has shed light on some valuable insights and allows proclaiming a shift in perspective towards a balanced evaluation of interest.

In section 6.3, an overarching limit to refugeehood is finally detected. Refugeehood lacks a diachronic perspective that allows considering the ethical relevancy of the origins of

displacement (Souter 2014, 327–28). However, what makes climate migrants a distinct category is their relationship to particular states. This relationship rests on the states' contribution to the harm from which climate migrants suffer. Next to this section's contribution to the overall research agenda of assessing the adequacy of referring to refugeehood when it comes to climate migration, insights have been gained concerning the relation of climate migration and climate justice.

6.4.1 Research question

With this discussion in mind, we can finally approach the research question of this project and ask: *Should one refer to those displaced by climate change as climate refugees?*

To recap, the procedure of this thesis has been to first consider what it means to be a climate refugee. However, the term is used ambiguously, as portrayed in chapter 2. Accordingly, it has been asked what it means to be a refugee in the first place (chapters 3 and 4). This question can be answered by consulting philosophers who have been aiming to identify the relevant normative criteria that distinguish refugees from other potential migrants. With the relevant normative criteria in mind, one can continue by considering the overlap of refugeehood and climate migration (chapter 5). This reflects the question of whether there is a set of people who we can reasonably refer to as climate refugees. However, it is only throughout chapter 6 that one becomes equipped to evaluate the adequacy of refugeehood for the purpose of ethically assessing climate migration.

Backed on the insights from section 6.3, we can conclude that one should refrain from referring to climate refugees in this very specific context due to the aforementioned limitations. However, this result requires contextualisation. Hence, the following chapter aims at discussing the limitations, implications, and future perspectives of this conclusion.

7. Discussion

7.1 Context and scope

From chapter 2, one gained the insight that the discourse on climate migration has picked up speed around a specific terminology, namely that of the 'environmental refugee' coined by Hinnawi (1985). Regarding the prevalent utilisation of 'climate refugees,' this spirit remains in force. Remember, even if the term's popularity in academia may have passed its peak (Millock 2015), it is nevertheless very unlikely that it will go away (White 2019). Despite the term's significance, it lacks an unambiguous definition. Moreover, one may even wonder whether

proponents and opponents of using the term refer to the same concept when talking about climate refugees: Do they mean the same thing?

This perspective is informed by considering a possible linguistic diagnosis (Belleri 2020): the parties of a controversy do not necessarily “talk past each” by referring to different concepts while using the same terminology, but rather partake in “metalinguistic negotiations ” (Plunkett and Sundell 2021, 144–45). Put simply, this represents a disagreement about how one should use language in a specific context. A relevant disagreement may evolve from choices about which concepts one should use or what the used words should mean, and hence to which concept it should relate. Regarding the dispute between “minimalist” and “maximalist” approaches in the academic discourse on climate migration, this enables meaningful insights consistent with Morrissey’s (2012) evaluation of the debate.

Resting on this context, the previously-drawn conclusions on refugeehood should be contextualised as follows. There might be a variety of reasons why one uses a specific word. Accordingly, the question of whether one should use a term in a specific context can be informed by very different agendas. Philosophers assessing the ethics of climate migration have been contributing to the discourse by referring to ‘climate refugees’ or ‘environmental refugees.’ However, backed by the history of the term and the normative and legal implications of refugeehood, one has reasons to be cautious: should philosophers refer to refugeehood when theorising about climate migration? This then defines the scope of my conclusion. Accordingly, the adequate interpretation of the argument is that philosophers should be aware that the normative endowment of refugeehood does not present an adequate ethical framework to assess climate migration. Climate migrants may share normative characteristic with refugees, although their moral position is essentially different.

7.2 Limitations

Given the limited scope of my conclusion, it must be emphasised that I do not want – nor am I equipped – to claim that we should abandon ‘climate refugee’ from our linguistic repertoire. Scholars have – for example – been arguing for adhering to its usage to re-politicise the subject of climate migration (Gemenne 2015). Nevertheless, such arguments can only be evaluated by using different criteria. By recourse to Plunkett and Sundell (2021), it is plausible to conclude that the ‘climate refugees’ prevalent to such kind of arguments do not refer to any discussed concept of refugeehood. Accordingly, their ‘climate refugee’ means something different than the ‘climate refugee’ outlined in chapter 4.

Another limitation that I want to address draws on the selection of writings in chapter 3. Despite the variety of arguments that are covered by the three proposals, other philosophers argue in rather different veins. As such, Bender (2021) claims that the essential normative basis of refugeehood is that they are subject to political oppression. Parekh (2014, 649) claims that Convention refugees are “only one subset of stateless people” bound by the nature of their deprivation. Her approach is furthermore inspired by Hannah Arendt’s (1979) writings from whom she derives the significance of “ontological deprivation” (Parekh 2014, 651); stateless people not only suffer from a lack of protection provided by their political community but from an even more fundamental loss effecting their very ontological constitution. This – for example – includes the irreversible transformation of one’s identity (651-652). The emphasis on the irreducible nature of the loss appears to be complementary with the considerations in section 6.3 and indicates potential for further examination. Despite potential compatibilities, the structure of my argument implies that the conclusion rests on the set of proposals of refugeehood one discusses in the first place. It is in chapter 3 that potential meanings of refugeehood are outlined. If one thinks that refugeehood means something different, she may very well arrive at a differing conclusion when it comes to its normative fit with climate migration. Nevertheless, I believe that most components are valid across a significantly broad range of definitions.

7.3 Implications and future directions

This thesis sheds light on various – both normative and empirical – components that are relevant to understand the nature of climate migration. Furthermore, these insights allow deriving some implications and blaze the trail for established investigations.

First, the normative insights gained in chapter 6 allow envisaging some core ethical issues relevant to climate migration. These insights have been acquired by assessing (6.1) the validity of a demarcation criterion based on mobility (6.2), the nature of the cost of migration and the required remedies, and (6.3) the nature of climate migration itself. Furthermore, an essential inference from discussing the nature of climate migration is that climate migrants are suffering from the adverse effects of climate change. Moreover, by categorising them as “particularity claimants,” it is shown that a particular set of states is indebted to them. Based on these conclusions, one is very well-equipped to 1) identify the the relevant states who hold these special obligations, and 2) assess the content of these obligations. One way to identify the relevant states is to rely on one of the prominent burden sharing principles (PPP, BPP, APP).

To furthermore define the content of the obligations (What is owed to climate migrants?), one can combine insights from 6.2 and 6.3.

An initial question concerning the content of obligations rests on the nature of the required remedy. It has been discussed whether the remedies should be collective. However, these claims cannot be supported for all cases of climate migration. The concrete content of what is owed differs among climate migrants. Nevertheless, it has been shown that climate migrants can be considered as holding “claims to reparation” (Miller 2016, 113). Thus, how can reparation be achieved?⁴³ Scholars have been arguing that the loss cannot be monetarily compensated in light of the nature of the loss (Buxton 2019; Fruh 2021; Shalit 2011). By virtue of such observations, demanding claims have been derived: Buxton (2019) argues for the provision of a new island, which must share significant similarities with the lost territory. However ethically appealing this proposal may come across, it demonstrates the gap between ideal theorising and what appears to be feasible. Accordingly, assessing the ethical challenges of climate migration may require further investigation into the relation of ideal proposals and feasible solution inherent to much discussion in the realm of climate justice. Wündisch (2022) specifically addresses this concern and aims at developing a non-ideal theory of climate migration. I have argued that to fill a “protection gap” (Türk and Dowd 2014), one must balance normative and an empirical questions. As such, one may ask “How should protection ideally look like?”, and “How can protection be effectively achieved?” Thus, research on climate migration requires a multidisciplinary approach, portrayed – for example – by the interplay of empirical and normative insights in chapter 6.

In relation to these observations, I want to consider another perspective on relating climate migration and refugeehood. Even though the limits of understanding climate migrants as refugees have been demonstrated, one may consider whether assigning the refugee status can function as a tool for a state to fulfil its obligations. This is inspired by Souter (2014, 326), who argues that one “moral function” of asylum is to respond to claims to reparation. Even if one considers these solutions to be morally insufficient in the case of climate migration,⁴⁴ the refugeehood protection scheme draws strengths from already being a proven tool at the disposal of states. Moreover, states enjoy significant freedom in interpreting and implementing the selection criteria of the Convention definition. Another proposal in this vein could be an argument for a general extension of the Convention definition to require states to fulfil their

⁴³ Both Buxton (2019) and Fruh (2021) specifically refer to a reparative framework.

⁴⁴ Consider for example Shalit (2011), who claims that there can never be a morally sufficient rectification qua the losses incommensurability.

reparative duties. However, the actual outcome of such a policy may be even less desirable considering states' present reluctance to fulfil their duties (Ferracioli 2014).

By considering further policy implications, a final point should be mentioned. The protection scheme provided by the refugee regime can be evaluated in the light of its capacity to bring justice for climate migrants. Nevertheless, dealing with climate migration should not focus on the protection scheme of refugeehood. This point has been stressed by scholars (McAdam 2011; Draper 2022; Ammer 2015) and is supported by the insights gained here. Moreover, the identified normative relevancy of climate change can be used as a guide to determine appropriate policy realms. This can – for example – indicate that the challenges of climate migration should be discussed within the sphere of the UNFCCC (2022).

8. Concluding remarks

The overarching agenda of this thesis has been to determine the normative constitution of climate migration. This endeavour has been carried out by assessing the normative adequacy of referring to *climate refugees*. Furthermore, there are two main reasons that legitimate and explain this strategy. First, the term 'climate refugee' holds a prevalent yet contested position in scholarly engagement with climate migration. Accordingly, this thesis draws inspiration upon a broader scientific discourse towards which it may in turn provide some further insights. Second, the concept of refugeehood holds significant interest to the philosophy of migration in general and has also found its way into philosophical assessments of climate migration specifically. By accompanying refugeehood from its initial sphere within the political philosophy of migration to its utilisation in a climate justice context, one gains fundamental insights into what it does and does not mean to be a refugee. Moreover, this approach allows gaining meaningful insights into both the political philosophy of migration and the ethics of climate change.

From chapter 3, one can gain an understanding of the frictional interplay between two fundamental norms – namely that of collective self-determination and individual freedom of movement – when it comes to the legitimacy of border controls. It becomes apparent that a political philosophy of migration is concerned with balancing the interests of individuals and collectives. The relevant individuals are (potential) migrants, whereas the collective interests discussed here are limited to states. The relevant identified agents remain central throughout the thesis. In addition to these insights, further methodological considerations have been

discussed based on which one could grasp the normative status of refugeehood within a political philosophy of migration.

The insights from chapter 4 allow one to consider different possible meanings of refugeehood. By discussing normative proposals concerned with the essence of refugeehood, it appears that they especially disagree on a mobility criterion. Accordingly, they dissent on whether refugeehood is conceptually tied to migration, reflecting a concern to which the discussion returned in chapter 6.

Chapter 5 considers whether there *are* climate refugees in the sense that they indeed *exist*. This addresses the question whether climate refugees are a relevant empirical phenomenon. Conclusions furthermore depend on what one takes to be the fundamental normative characteristics of refugees in the first place. Broader definitions refraining from a migration requirement would – for example – allow for a substantial overlap between a variety of different climate migration scenarios. In this chapter, one gains a partial response to the overall research question: *Should one refer to climate migrants as ‘climate refugees’?* In light of this chapter’s discussion, one could even consider this as a fundamentally trivial question: Why should one refrain from calling someone a *climate refugee* if they *are* a climate refugee? Nevertheless, by considering refugeehood as an ethical concept, its usage is not limited to merely identifying a relevant set of people that fall in this category but rather to shed light on further normative implications. The relevant question is accordingly not whether climate migrants can be refugees but whether we gain an appropriate normative representation of them by doing so. This concern is finally covered in chapter 6.

In chapter 6, some especially valuable insights have been gained, which not only allow deriving a final conclusion but grasping the very nature of climate migration. In a first step, it has been considered whether the inadequacy of refugeehood rests on its reliance on a migration criterion. Accepting such an argument would imply a conceptual shift away from migration towards vulnerability. Such normative claims resonate with empirical approaches that have been emphasising the role of vulnerability in making sense of climate migration. However one stands on these concerns, further limitations have been taken into account. Moreover, it has been asked whether climate migration requires one to consider collective remedies. Although this claim must be refuted, the arguments considered here have shown that one should strive for a balanced and impartial assessment of interests for all involved parties. Many arguments in favour of states’ unilateral entitlements to control their borders emphasise its value in protecting collective interests. However, not only potential host states have collective interest worth

protecting: those subject to displacement may also hold claims qua them being an entitled collective entity. In this vein, Nine (2010) shows that collectives deprived of their territory – as it will be irrevocable the case for some small-island states – should receive new territory to be able to enjoy their collective right to self-determination. Another related insight is that migration is a costly endeavour. It entails a variety of pecuniary and non-pecuniary costs, some of which are in fact unique and thus deserving of special consideration. This applies – for example – to a collective’s identity. Accordingly, migration decisions are not solely constituted by economic considerations but come with further non-pecuniary costs such as leaving behind one’s sense of belonging.

It is then by discussing a third and final consideration that a limit to refugeehood has been detected. This final argument is concerned with the influence of climate change on the normative status of climate migrants. It has been shown that climate migrants are in fact adapting to the adverse effects of climate change. However, it may seem unfair that they must burden the high costs of adaptation considering that climate change has been jointly produced and that their contribution may be even vanishingly small. This indicates that climate migration is a subject to climate justice considerations. In a next step, it has been shown that this is influencing how we should categorise climate migration: Climate migrants are “particularity claimants,” which means that there is a bond between climate migrants and particular states, constituted by special obligations that are in turn derived from these states’ past failure to fulfil their mitigation duties. In a final step, these conclusions have been used to complete the research agenda: *Should one refer to those displaced by climate change as climate refugees?* Climate migrants can be refugees, although they are always particularity claimants. Accordingly, assessing the ethics of climate migration requires deploying a “diachronic approach” that allows considering the relevance of past events (Souter 2014, 327–28). This cannot be provided by the original design of refugeehood as an ethical concept by adhering to a synchronic perspective focused on contemporaneous needs.

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Appendix A: Abstract

Both climate change and migration pose fundamental ethical challenges to humanity. Climate change has been described as “a perfect moral storm” in that the complexity of ethical challenges it entails specifically complicate the performance of the required collective action (Gardiner 2006). Ethical concerns regarding migration have in turn especially gained momentum in 2015 when numbers of asylum seekers in the European Union were increasing. The harsh treatment of potential refugees by particular European states and the European border control has furthermore fuelled controversies concerned with both entitlements and obligations of states during such crises. The phenomenon of climate migration may therefore appear as an even so demanding hybrid of both these challenges. Although there is scholarly agreement on that climate change influences migration patterns, evaluations regarding the phenomenon’s severance are differing. The term climate refugee is, moreover, a prominent, though contested, figure constituting such controversies. Philosophers are, however, no exception to this trend and have been writing on climate refugees in the context of assessing the ethics of climate migration. This thesis is then a contribution to the understanding of climate migration by assessing its relationship with refugeehood. By drawing on the philosophy of migration and the ethics of climate change it can be shown that the concept of refugeehood should be used with caution. Considered as an ethical concept it does not provide an appropriate framework to grasp the normative status of climate migration.

Appendix B: Zusammenfassung

Sowohl Klimawandel als auch Migration stellen die Menschheit vor fundamentale ethische Herausforderungen. Ethische Fragen im Zusammenhang mit dem Klimawandel sind durch eine solche Komplexität geprägt, welche es erschwert, notwendige Maßnahmen zu identifizieren und auszuführen. Insbesondere seit 2015, als die Zahl der Asylwerber*innen in der Europäischen Union drastisch zunahm, sind auch ethische Fragen der Migration wieder vermehrt ins Zentrum öffentlicher Debatten gerückt. In diesem Zusammenhang wurden die Kontrollen an den europäischen Außengrenzen und die teils gewaltvolle Behandlung von Menschen auf der Flucht durch europäische Staaten kritisch diskutiert. Diese Debatten hatten demnach sowohl Rechte als auch Pflichten von Staaten zum Thema. In Anbetracht dieser Fülle an ethischen Herausforderungen, mag das Thema der Klimamigration ebenso anspruchsvoll erscheinen. Obwohl ein wissenschaftlicher Konsens darüber herrscht, dass Auswirkungen des Klimawandels auch Migrationsdynamiken beeinflussen, gehen Einschätzungen hinsichtlich des Schweregrads des Phänomens weit auseinander. In diesem Kontext ist insbesondere der Begriff des *Klimaflüchtlings* ein prominentes Streitobjekt. So wird dieser Terminus auch von Philosoph*innen verwendet um ethische Fragen der Klimamigration zu diskutieren. In dieser Arbeit wird diese Vorgehensweise wiederum kritisch hinterfragt, indem der Flüchtlingsstatus einer normativen Analyse unterzogen wird. Darauf aufbauend wird schließlich überprüft in welchem Verhältnis Flüchtlingsstatus und Klimamigration zueinanderstehen. Damit wird einerseits ein grundlegendes Verständnis hinsichtlich normativer Fragestellungen im Zusammenhang mit Klimamigration geschaffen und, andererseits gezeigt, dass man den Terminus in einem ethischen Kontext mit Bedacht verwenden sollte. Betrachtet als ein ethisches Konzept, bietet es nämlich keinen geeigneten Rahmen, um den normativen Status von Klimamigrant*innen zu bewerten.

Appendix C: Economic perspectives on a heterogenic phenomenon

Along with an increasing awareness of the pressing challenges entailed by anthropogenic climate change in general, the phenomenon of climate migration has recently gotten both academic and public attention. In fact, the International Organization for Migration has been dedicating a whole new division to solely address the migration, environment and climate nexus in 2015 (IOM, 2022b). However, scholars have been arguing that the popularity of this research topic does not only refer to the far-reaching extent of the phenomenon that demands further research and corresponding policy solutions. Beyond that, the part of the phenomenon's attraction may lie in it representing the “human face of climate change” which signals an urgency to counteract climate change (Gemenne, 2011). Accordingly, some scholars are specifically interested in questions of *how* and *why* one theorises, talks, and writes about climate migration. Such research is concerned with “narratives” (Santos & Mourato, 2022) or “discourses” on climate migration. One such prominent narrative is that of the *climate refugee* (see chapter 2).

Nevertheless, there is a broad set of scholarly work inquiring the nature and extent of climate migration in an empirical fashion (Kaczan & Orgill-Meyer, 2020). The discussion at hand is concerned with this kind of literature in order to better understand the link between climate change and migration. First, the heterogeneity of climate migration is portrayed. For that, some definitions and distinctions are provided to reflect on the *appearance* of climate migration, a phenomenon that can come in a lot of different shapes. The second section focuses on the way environmental factors may influence migration decisions. More precisely, the interaction between individual migration decisions and environmental factors is elaborated. Accordingly, this section reflects the concerns from chapter 6 of this thesis from a different angle, namely: What makes one a climate migrant in terms of their normative status? Now this question is approached from a different angle: What does it take for an individual to make the decision that leads him to becoming a climate migrant? And put another way: How is climate change influencing an individual's decision to migrate? In doing so, a special emphasis is put on the economic drivers of migration.

Before diving deeper into these topics, two remarks must be made. First, the literature on climate migration lacks a “coherent theory of migration” (Koubi, Spilker, Schaffer, & Böhmelt, 2016, 137). Some of these differences can be traced back to disciplinary boundaries and different methodological approaches (Black, Adger, Arnell, Dercon, Geddes, & Thomas, 2011a; Black, Bennett, Thomas, & Beddington, 2011b). In the present discussion, I will focus

on economic perspectives on climate migration, especially in the second half. A second remark concerns the selection of topics. Economists have been addressing a variety of questions when it comes to climate migration, not even taking into account the contributions from other disciplines. Hence, this discussion only provides insights into a small share of the existing literature and the selection criteria are furthermore geared towards the agenda of this project. The first section should provide the reader with an idea of the heterogeneity of the phenomenon. By that, it makes an initial empirical understanding available that contemplates the normative discussion of the phenomenon. This is specifically useful for this project since a normative proposal of refugeehood may be more or less inclusive towards different forms of climate migration. The second section further contributes to an in-depth understanding of climate migration by shedding light on the actual decision-making structures of climate migrants.

The heterogeneity of climate migration

Climate migration is a subcategory of environmental-induced migration. In the latest *World Migration Report* (2022, 379) environmental migration has been defined as “the movement of persons or groups of persons who, predominantly for reasons of sudden or progressive changes in the environment that adversely affect their lives or living conditions, are forced to leave their places of habitual residence, or choose to do so, either temporarily or permanently, and who move within or outside their country of origin or habitual residence.” Climate migration then refers to those cases “where the change in the environment is due to climate change” (IOM 2022b, 379). Thus, environmental change is constituted by different environmental factors that eventually influence migration decisions. Though identifying those factors that are associated specifically with climate change may be hard at times, Black et al. (2011b, 7-8) state that global climate change manifests itself primarily in “changes in weather patterns at a place and an increase in sea level, due to the thermal expansion of sea water inputs from melting.”

Having said this, scholars have been identifying different types of climate change related events that in turn may trigger migration⁴⁵. A commonly used distinction is that between fast-onset and slow-onset events (UNFCCC, 2012).

Type of event: fast-onset and slow-onset

The category of fast-onset events constitutes single, rapidly appearing events which's occurrence may be a “matter of days or even hours” (UNFCCC 2012, 1). Kälin (2010, 85) describes these kinds of events, such as “floodings, windstorms [...] or mudslides caused by

⁴⁵See e.g. Black et al. (2011a); Kälin (2010).

heavy rainfalls”, to be associated with large-scale displacement whose duration may be limited and return is possible and initiated in many cases. In addition to the typically short-lived nature of displacement, event-driven movement tends to be internal with migrants staying within national borders (Black et al., 2011a, 7).

Slow-onset events associated with climate change are including sea level rise, increasing temperatures, ocean acidification, glacial retreat and related impacts, salinisation, land and forest degradation, loss of biodiversity and desertification (UNFCCC, 2012). The gradual and long-term deprivation associated with these events tends to indirectly influence migration patterns via other drivers of migration. Accordingly, migration may be perceived as an active adaptation mechanism. In fact, many of the here united scenarios are a conceptual fit with economic migration as in contrast to refugeehood where we understand the former as choosing to migrate “given the economic benefit of this decision” (Dustmann, Fasani, Frattini, Minale, & Schönberg, 2017, 528). This distinction will be furthermore discussed in the following section.

Another prominent scenario of climate migration associated with slow-onset events is the case of “small islands states” being threatened by full or partial territory loss due to rising sea levels (Kälin 2010, 85). In this paradigmatic example, the link between climate change and migration is perceived to be undeniably direct: Environmental change attributed to climate change is erasing land and with that its fundamental habitability (Black et al., 2011a). In general, slow-onset events cannot be expected to be short-lived and conditions may not change for better in the future.

In conclusion, the type of event tends to trigger a specific response and with that a form of migration by excluding some options and making others more reasonable. In the case of forced displacement, either temporarily or permanently, migration may be conceptualised as the only available option. Moreover, one can make sense of the literature on climate migration by structuring it along the type of events scholars are interested⁴⁶: Scholars have for example been analysing the relation between fast-onset events and international migration (Gröschl & Steinwachs, 2017; Naudé, 2009), between floodings and migration (Chen, Mueller, Jia, & Tseng, 2017) or provided case specific evidence on the non-occurrence of disaster-induced migration (Paul, 2005). With regard to slow-onset events, scholars have been analysing the link between climate variability and (international) migration (Cai, Feng, Oppenheimer, &

⁴⁶This is only a selection of relevant literature and no extensive discussion.

Pytlikova, 2016; Coniglio & Pesce, 2015; Dallmann & Millock, 2017; Thiede, Gray, & Mueller, 2016) or the specific link between increasing temperatures and migration (Cattaneo & Peri, 2016). They furthermore provided case study evidence on the impact of soil salinity on migration (Chen & Mueller, 2018) or evidence on the country-specific relation between climate variability and migration (Gray & Wise, 2016). Looking closer at this variety of perspectives and focal points, it is indicated that there is no causal link between climate change and migration or between a type of event and a specific form of migration. Instead, climate change related events seem to trigger asymmetric, context dependent responses.

Constitution of the link: direct and indirect

As discussed above, the events associated with climate change can be classified into two rough categories. Moreover, one can differentiate how these events may influence human mobility either directly via environmental drivers of migration or indirectly via other drivers of migration. Black et al. (2011a) identify those indirect drivers to be social, political, demographic or economic. Together they constitute the macro context of an individual's decision to migrate.

Type of Migration

Whereas the type of event correlates with the constitution of the link (direct vs. indirect), it as well contributes to the type of migration one may empirically observe. A conceptual explanation in terms of economic theorising is that the type of event influences the favourability and availability of specific options and by that the actual migration response (Cattaneo et al., 2019, 193).

As such, migration may be *forced* or *voluntary* with individuals or communities being forced when their only option is to migrate. Voluntary then refers to those cases where other options are available and migration is perceived as an adaptation response (Black et al., 2011b; McLeman & Hunter, 2010). Nevertheless, such a distinction has been criticised in the context of constituting a normative difference between such cases (see Chapter 6). It has already been mentioned in this short discussion that it furthermore relates to a conceptual difference between “refugees” and “economic migrants” (Dustmann et al., 2017, 528).

Furthermore, migration can either be *international* with individuals crossing borders or *internal* with them remaining within the country of initial residency. With regard to this distinction, scholars have been criticising maximalist projections of future mass migration from the Global South to the Global North and emphasised the need for further investigations on international

migration (Cattaneo et al., 2019). In fact, a substantially big share of climate migration currently is and is expected to remain internal or rather short-distanced. Rigaud et al. (2018) expect there to be 143 million internal climate migrants by 2050. In relation with the above differentiation, chapter 6 of this thesis is partially concerned with the normative contribution of such a distinction.

Moreover, climate migration can be either *temporary* or *permanent*. As discussed earlier, fast-onset events tend to correspond with temporary migration due to the short-lived nature of the disaster. Nevertheless, these events may as well have indirect long-term effects due to e.g. decreasing agricultural income based on related crop failures. Slow-onset environmental degradation may be, in an idealised fashion, considered to correspond with permanent migration since one cannot expect a change for the better in the future.

A final distinction when it comes to the type of migration can be drawn between *community displacement* and *individual migration*. An event can either require a whole community to leave their homes or trigger individual responses. Community displacement is prevalent in natural disaster induced scenarios and specifically relevant when it comes to planned relocation of whole communities. Planned relocation is an important policy response in cases of territory loss due to sea level rise or in scenarios where there is a high level of environmental dangers which leads to the designation high-risk zones (Kälin, 2010).

Uncovering the mechanism: insights from economic theory

It has been shown that climate migration is a heterogenic phenomenon. Its heterogeneity stems from the interplay of various factors on every level of the process. The following discussion aims at diving deeper into understanding this complexity through the lens of economic theory. Due to the subject matter, the interplay between economic drivers of migration and climate change can give especially valuable insights. Accordingly, the following discussion is concerned with the *indirect links* between climate change related events and migration and furthermore contributes to an understanding of the socio-economic, political, and individual context of the decision to migrate. It is namely the case that how an individual, a household or a community responds to an event is most likely shaped by factors such as national or individual wealth, gender or educational endowment (Black et al., 2011a).

Along with one of economic theory's most fundamental concerns⁴⁷, the following input sheds light on the behaviour of *individuals*⁴⁸ who suffer from the adverse effects of climate change. Guiding questions of this section are: 1) *Who* becomes a climate migrant? 2) *How* does climate change influence an individual's decision to migrate? And to be more specific, how does climate change influence economic drivers of migration? and 3) What *context* makes climate migration more likely? By the means of these questions, I hope to contribute to an adequate portrayal of climate migrants' reality. This should furthermore allow to break some myths when it comes to (climate) migration. These myths are not only found in public discourse but as well in academic argumentations. Nevertheless, this section is only a short contribution to my overall project and cannot deliver full coverage of the topic. Instead the aim is to point at some relevant aspects that amend the arguments of this thesis. Moreover, I am specifically concerned with a portrayal of theoretical insights on how one can reasonably model climate migration and not so with the empirical testing of these.

In what follows, it is considered how climate change may influence economic drivers of migration. This requires to first portray economic drivers of migration to subsequently evaluate the potential influence of climate change on these. Lilleør and van den Broeck (2011) moreover identify two economic channels– wage differentials and income variability – via which climate change may influence migration. However, the current focus lies on wage differentials.

Costs and benefits of migration

Economic factors have been identified to be core channels through which migration decisions are influenced. For individuals, migration can provide access to better economic opportunities and higher wages. Nevertheless, an individual's limited financial endowment may in fact be a fundamental obstacle to any such considerations. Migration is a costly venture constituted by a range of pecuniary and non-pecuniary costs (Grimes & Wesselbaum, 2019; Michaelides, 2011). The potentially high monetary cost of migration may thus initially hinder an individual's access to this option. This indicates the importance of liquidity constraints for understanding migration patterns (Djajić & Vinogradova, 2014).

Reconsidering these aspects with regard to the wage differentials between a source and a host country, we can intuitively identify a positive and a negative correlation with migration pressure.⁴⁹ At the one hand, high differences between the respective incomes are a strong

⁴⁷I am referring to theories of decision making here. Consider e.g. Simon (1959).

⁴⁸I am discussing migration decisions with a focus on individuals to complement the overall agenda of the project. Other commonly discussed entities within economics are households.

⁴⁹Migration pressure refers to the factors that drive individuals or groups to move from one location to another.

incentive, at the other hand, low wages in the source country may hinder an individual overcoming her liquidity constraints (Djajic et al., 2016). Thus, migration pressure is not only a linear function of wage differentials – the higher the difference, the higher the pressure – but requires one to consider the costs of migration and an individual’s capacity to burden them.

These findings are not only relevant with regard to making sense of global migration patterns and differences between countries or regions based on *real* wage differentials (Pritchett & Hani, 2020).⁵⁰ Rather than that, migration decisions may also be based on differentials in “*expected* wages” and accordingly *expected* welfare gains (Todaro, 1969 in Lilleør & van den Broeck, 2011, 71). Consequently, an individual’s decision to migrate rests on a combination of objectively given criteria and the subjective, deliberative assessment of these. Covering this aspect, Djajic et al. (2016) built a model claiming that the expected welfare gain from migration is affected by source country wage, migration cost, and the economic conditions abroad. A static framework lets us exclude those potential migrants lacking the initially required financial endowment to cover the migration costs. Furthermore, the set of individuals “*who would like to migrate*” is fundamentally determined by the difference between source and destination country earnings (Djajic et al., 2016: 48). However, Djajic et al. (2016) claim that such strict selection criteria are blurred once we consider a dynamic framework where an agent has the possibility to accumulate assets over time to overcome the initial costs. Accordingly, individuals are considered to be having the capacity to *plan* their emigration and thus to have power over its timing. This in turn implies that the expected wage differential becomes an endogenous variable that is subject to the agents’ decisions.

There would be much more to say about the economics of migration. However, this discussion continues by connecting this topic with climate change related factors of displacement. Before doing so, I want to again emphasise on one main insight: Migration comes with both benefits *and* costs. Accordingly, an economically driven migration decision is not only triggered by (expected) economic benefits, represented by wage differentials between two areas, but constituted by a complex interplay of different exogenous and endogenous factors. Thus, the relation of a countries level of development and its emigration rate is fundamentally non-linear. The exact shape of a so defined function is moreover subject to further investigation. Djajic et al. (2016) provide one such analysis in which they identify the relation between source-country wages and migration pressure to be indeed hump-shaped, with the exact moulding being defined

⁵⁰This fundamentally draws on insights from Development Economics that consider different countries' development levels. The relevant question here concerns the development level of a country: What is the relation of a countries level of development and its emigration rate?

by the level of migration costs. Moreover, individual characteristics such as a person's skill level tend to influence his or her sensitivity to migration pressure. The ratio of high to low-skilled emigrants itself then depends on the relative level of the source-country wage.

Climate change and income

Drawing on development economics, environmental disaster or changes in exogenous weather factors are grasped as shocks to households or individuals (Millock, 2015). In this context, economic theory can identify two channels via which climate change is affecting economic drivers of migration. Climate change may *directly* influence income by decreasing agricultural productivity. As such weather has been modelled as an input factor into the production function (Marchiori, Maystadt, & Schumacher, 2012). These changes may in turn initiate wage adjustments or other adaptation mechanisms in other markets (Millock, 2015). Thereby climate change is *indirectly* affecting economic drivers of migration. All in all, climate change has the potential to influence (especially source-country) wages that are fundamental economic drivers of migration decisions.

Although climate change related events are occurring on a global scale, the severity of its effects is context dependent. When it comes to climate migration, scholarly research has been focusing on areas of the Global South that are considered to be most vulnerable to the adverse impacts of climate change.⁵¹ One source of this increased vulnerability can be identified as resting on the proportion of the primary sector, specifically agriculture: Climate change is affecting income across the globe, however, the effects may be more severe in areas and for individuals which significantly depend on agricultural income. This “agricultural linkage” between climate change and income is also relevant for understanding migration patterns (Cai et al., 2016). Regarding this effect, Cai et al. (2016) find that a statistically significant relationship between temperature variations and international outmigration can only be found in agriculture-dependent countries. They furthermore explain these results by the just discussed adverse effect of climate change on agricultural productivity that entails an increased sensitivity to such impacts for agriculturally dependent countries in general and individuals or households specifically.⁵²

⁵¹Consider for example Baez, Caruso, Mueller, and Niu (2017a, 2017b); Chen et al. (2017); Chen and Mueller (2018); Dallmann and Millock (2017); Henry, Schoumaker, and Beauchemin (2004); Lilleør and van den Broeck (2011); Marchiori et al. (2012); Mastrotillo, Licker, Bohra-Mishra, Fagiolo, D. Estes, and Oppenheimer (2016).

⁵²

Climate migration

I will now conclude this discussion by reconsidering the initially stated guiding questions.

First, *who* becomes a climate migrant? Looking at the considerations above, it becomes clear that especially in cases of slow-onset events, migration can be understood as one adaptation strategy among other options. Migration is moreover a costly venture. However, these costs depend on a variety of factors, including the kind of migration and the aspired destination. Although dynamic models of migration allow to loosen the straitjacket of initial financial endowments prevalent in static models, migration is not the most prominent nor accessible adaptation strategy among the most vulnerable individuals. In fact, in cases where climate change is expected to successively decrease incomes, one's mobility may be further limited. Thus, scholars have been speaking of "trapped populations" which are in fact "forced to stay" (Black & Collyer, 2014, 293). There are many dimensions that make one more or less likely to become a climate migrant. Lilleør and van den Broeck (2011, 73) describe the typical migrant coming from less developed countries to be "a younger adult with relatively more resources in terms of financial, social and human capital". These characteristics might also be relevant for climate migrants. However, the main point to behold here is that climate migration is the consequence of a complex interplay of different factors, and one should be cautious not to fall for deterministic and simplistic explanations.

Nevertheless, one can achieve a better understanding of migration decisions by uncovering the underlying mechanisms and drivers of migration: *How* does climate change influence an individual's decision to migrate? Economic theory allows to shed light specifically on economic drivers of migration. As such it has been identified that climate change may impact incomes that in turn constitute a significant factor influencing migration decisions (for example via wage differentials). Another component that has not been discussed yet but should be shortly mentioned here, is the *expected* impact of climate change on future agricultural productivity. This refers to the role that knowledge about climate change or individual "environmental perceptions" may have on one's decision to migrate (Koubi et al., 2016).

To conclude this discussion, the final question should be approached: What *context* makes climate migration more likely? As has been discussed, scholars and policy makers should be aware of the agricultural link between climate change and the severity of its impacts: Agricultural dependent countries and individuals are prone to be more sensitive to climate change via its direct effects on agricultural productivity (Cai et al., 2016; Dallmann & Millock, 2017; Kubik & Maurel, 2016). These insights furthermore contribute to the literature on

vulnerabilities regarding climate change which emphasises that the severity of climate change's impacts are fundamentally navigated by a variety of intersecting factors that determine an individual's or communities' vulnerability.

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