Beyond Climate Victims and Climate Saviours: Shifting the Debate on Migration-As-Adaptation Narratives

– A critical discourse analysis of gendered dimensions of the migration-climate change nexus

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Abstract

The nexus between migration and climate change is a topic that has received growing attention in both policymaking and mainstream media. While it has long been acknowledged that gender shapes the migratory process and the impacts of climate change are gendered, most discussions concerning migration and climate change have failed to incorporate a gender perspective into their analysis. At the same time, the international community, through the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and other initiatives, has committed itself to eradicating gender inequality. This has resulted in more institutions incorporating gender into their analyses of migration and climate change. While these commitments to developing a more nuanced understanding of migration in the context of climate change have been welcomed, it has been questioned how these institutions incorporate gender in their analyses and how this in turn impacts climate change adaptation efforts and migration policy. The aim of this study is to investigate how the relationship between gender, migration, and climate change is articulated in discourses at the level of international institutions, analyzing these discourses through a decolonial perspective. Using critical discourse analysis, the empirical material analyzed includes reports from international institutions that discuss migration and climate change. The findings suggest that the selected institutions tend to treat gender as a variable and focus on measurable, material impacts. While there is a possible discursive shift towards a more intersectional understanding of gender and social inequality, women are often perceived as an inherently vulnerable group. This feeds into a wider ‘feminization of vulnerability’ discourse that is present in climate change studies. An additional finding is migration is optimistically framed as a means of empowerment for women. This empowering discourse tends to promote individual agency over structural changes when it comes to climate change, aligning itself with neoliberal discourses and potentially obscuring larger questions pertaining to climate and mobility justice.

Keywords: Climate migration; climate refugees; climate change adaptation; resilience; gender mainstreaming; migration management; decoloniality; sustainable development
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<th>Full Form</th>
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<tr>
<td>ADB</td>
<td>Asian Development Bank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDA</td>
<td>Critical Discourse Analysis</td>
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<tr>
<td>COP</td>
<td>Conference of Parties (of the UNFCCC)</td>
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<tr>
<td>GCM</td>
<td>Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration</td>
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<tr>
<td>GCR</td>
<td>Global Compact on Refugees</td>
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<tr>
<td>GRT</td>
<td>Global Remittances Trend</td>
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<tr>
<td>ILO</td>
<td>International Labour Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>IOM</td>
<td>International Organization for Migration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MENA</td>
<td>Middle East and North Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ODI</td>
<td>Overseas Development Institute</td>
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<tr>
<td>PBSO</td>
<td>United Nations’ Peacebuilding Support Office</td>
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<tr>
<td>SDG</td>
<td>Sustainable Development Goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SFDRR</td>
<td>Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction</td>
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<td>SIDS</td>
<td>Small Island Developing States</td>
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<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNDPPA</td>
<td>United Nations Development of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNEP</td>
<td>United Nations Environment Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNFCCC</td>
<td>United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WB</td>
<td>World Bank Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WIM</td>
<td>Warsaw International Mechanism</td>
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</table>
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Chapter 1: Introduction

A small family walking together with armfuls of belongings across the cracked terrain of a former body of water that has now been struck by drought. A never-ending line of people, moving through water up to their knees, forced from their homes due to environmental disaster. These are the images invoked by the term ‘climate migration,’ a topic that has been the subject of growing consideration in the fields of migration, development, and climate studies, as well as the public conscience.

At the current moment we are faced with how to navigate the realities of a world affected by climate change. The conversation is no longer about whether climate change is happening or how we can mitigate it, but rather how can we manage this oncoming global catastrophe. Climate-induced migration is often presented as ‘the human face’ to the perils of climate change. Projections forecast that by the year 2050 there will be 200 million climate migrants, with some sensational reports claiming up to 1 billion will be displaced in the same time frame (Myers, 2002; Henley, 2020). Climate-induced migration is not presented as a far-off reality, but it is something happening now. As declared by the New York Times (Lustgarten, 2020) in their exposé on current climate migrants around the world: ‘The Great Climate Migration Has Begun.’ The common story that is told in mainstream narratives is one of apocalyptic proportions: hundreds of millions of ‘climate migrants,’ displaced by various ecological disasters, will lead to global instability, further complicated by limited natural resources.

Much research has been focused on interrogating the links between climate change and migration, posing the question of to what extent will climate change affect human mobility patterns. Critical research has called into question the validity of these astronomical numerical projections like the ones stated above, as well as made explicit the power relations embedded in migration management in the context of climate change.

However, research that specifically analyzes the interplay between gender, migration, and climate change, while receiving increased attention in the past decade, has been limited. This is indicative of climate change studies in general, as climate change has often been presented as a gender-neutral phenomenon (MacGregor, 2010). It is now commonly accepted that the impacts of climate change are gendered, with different groups being more vulnerable than others. Similarly, just as climate change impacts were often discussed as being gender-
neutral, early discussions on migration and climate change also lacked a gender perspective, despite gender being recognized as an organizing principle in migration (Gioli & Milan, 2018).

According to the international community, including institutions such as the United Nations, the era of gender blindness in the domains of development, climate change, and migration is no more. In recent policies and resolutions, there has been an affirmation on the importance of a gender in these discussions. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development commits itself to eliminating gender discrimination in all its forms. Following this, the 2018 Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regularly Migration also mainstreams a gender perspective throughout its resolutions. While these commitments to developing a more nuanced understanding of social problems have been welcomed, it has also been questioned how these institutions incorporate gender in their analyses and how this in turn impacts climate change adaptation efforts and migration policy.

1.1 Aim of Study and Research Questions

The aim of this study is to investigate how the relationship between gender, migration, and climate change is articulated in discourses at the level of international institutions. As gender receives increased attention in discourses on migration and climate change, it is important to analyze how gender is assumed, as these discourses will shape what and who is targeted in climate change adaptation efforts (Lama et. al, 2020, p.2). This includes examining how notions of vulnerability and empowerment are mobilized in discourses on gender, climate change, and migration, as well as how these discourses are tied to other discourses on migration and climate change. I seek to do this by doing a critical discourse analysis of official reports. Additionally, I plan on analyzing these discourses through a decolonial perspective, an approach that has seldom been taken in critical research on migration and climate change. To meet these objectives, my research questions are:

- How is the relationship between gender, migration, and climate change defined and articulated in policies and discourse?
- How do pre-existing discourses on vulnerability and empowerment figure in discourses on gender, migration, and climate change?
1.2 Thesis Outline

This thesis will be structured in the following way. First, in Chapter 2 I will provide some needed background to understand the context of the research topic. Chapter 3 will review some of the already existing literature about migration and climate change. In Chapter 4, I will detail my theoretical perspective, focusing on the decolonial perspective and the coloniality of gender. I will then move onto methodology in Chapter 5, explaining my chosen methods and how I gathered my empirical material, including a discussion of any possible limitations and ethical considerations, as well as my positioning. In Chapter 6 I will give my critical analysis of the empirical material. In Chapter 7 I will engage in a broader, more theoretical discussion of the gendered subject positions produced through discourses on migration and climate change and how they connect to coloniality, as well as suggestions for possible future research. Finally, in Chapter 8 I will finish the thesis with some brief concluding words.
Chapter 2: Background

In this section, I aim to give an overview of climate refugees and climate migration discourses, as well as connect them to the wider social and political context, using perspectives from migration studies, human geography, sociology, and political science. I will first present a brief genealogy of the varying discourses on climate migration. I will then describe the migration-as-adaptation thesis, one of the prevailing discourses on climate change and migration in contemporary times. Rather than being successive and evolving over time, different discourses are often working alongside one another and appearing and reappearing at different moments, with certain institutions having a propensity to favour certain discourses. I will then outline climate migration in global governance, which is fragmented across several institutions and agreements, and summarize the main initiatives dealing with the issue of migration and climate change.

2.1 ‘Climate Migration’ and a Problem of Definition

Rather paradoxically, I will open my study on gender, migration, and climate change by briefly outlining the problematic of defining ‘climate migration.’ The IOM (2019c, p.31) defines climate migration as ‘the movement of a person or groups of persons who, predominantly for reasons of sudden or progressive change in the environment due to climate change, are obliged to leave their habitual place of residence, or choose to do so, either temporarily or permanently, within a State or across an international border.’ Despite this definition, it has been difficult to categorize which instances of mobility fall under the umbrella of ‘climate migration’ and which ones do not.\(^1\) In migration studies, it is well accepted that migration is a multi-causal phenomenon. Consequently, it is almost impossible to isolate individuals or populations whose mobility is solely due to environmental factors (Foresight, 2011; Castles, 2002). According to Baldwin and Bettini (2017), labeling certain instances of migration as ‘climate migration’ is a form of environmental determinism, and can erase or underestimate other factors that played a role. Because of this, I will try to avoid the term ‘climate migration’, and instead opt for migration and climate change, recognising that it is difficult to establish a direct causal link between climate and migration and numerous factors impact why someone does (or does not) migrate.

\(^1\) In addition, it is difficult to delineate the differences between migration and displacement in the context of climate change, especially when considering slow-onset effects of climate change.
2.2 To Save or Secure Climate Refugees?

As explained by Piguet (2013, p.149), the connection between environment and migration in research has been characterized by ‘a strange disappearance and sudden reappearance.’ Some of the earliest researchers on migration acknowledged the impact of climate and environmental change on migratory decisions (Ravenstein, 1884). However, as the field of migration research expanded and the complex dynamics of migration became more evident, the role of the environment faded into the background around the mid-twentieth century. When researchers discussed the impact of the environment in migratory decisions, they often used simplistic explanations (see Santos & Mourato, 2021).

Environmental migration suddenly reappeared on the scene in the 1980s, coinciding with a growing awareness of global environmental change and a rising number of refugees being displaced around the world (El-Hinnawi, 1985; Baldwin et. al, 2014). Publications written around this time referenced a new phenomenon called ‘environmental refugees’ who oscillated between being framed as passive victims or as security threats (Ransan-Cooper et al., 2015).²

Some of the first publications on environmental refugees painted the picture of shockingly high numbers of environmental refugees looming on the horizon, their homes and livelihoods destroyed by a collapse of socio-ecological systems (Myers, 1993). This argument was mostly led by scientists and environmental activists who wanted political leaders to take the issue of environmental degradation more seriously (Baldwin et. al, 2014). NGOs used the image of the climate refugee to construct a ‘human face’ to environmental degradation that was characterized by helplessness and passivity and in need of salvation. In many of these early publications, the Global North is given the role of the saviour, who will give protection to these helpless ‘Others’ (Ransan-Cooper et al., 2015, p.109). This discourse was further reproduced by scientists who wanted to emphasize the gravity of environmental destruction. Projections made by biologist Norman Myers (2002) stated that by 2050 there could be almost 200 million environmental refugees.

Using the alarmist language and figures that arose in connection with the ‘climate refugees as victims’ discourse, environmental migrants have also been presented as security

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² There is a slight disagreement in the literature about which discourse appeared first, with some saying the securitizing discourse appeared first. I am using the ‘climate refugees as victims’ as a starting point because it is accepted that the earliest report on the climate refugees phenomenon is by El-Hinnawi (1985), which uses this discourse. Regardless of which came first, it is noted by Boas and Rothe (2016) that these discourses are not successive, but rather work alongside each other and sometimes together.
threats. Following arguments that environmental degradation and climate change will create global instability, policy makers, think tanks, and a few academics from the fields of international relations and political science sought to prove a relationship between environmental change, conflict, and migration (Geddes, 2015; Boas & Rothe, 2016). Such claims often used dramatic, apocalyptic language, asserting that waves of environmental refugees will exacerbate conflicts and destabilize global order. These discourses fueled a security-driven approach towards climate-induced migration that focused on the protection of state sovereignty (Bettini, 2014). Geopolitically, this alleged connection between climate migration and global security affirmed a North-South axis of security wherein the rational North is positioned as needing to protect itself from an unruly South (Ransan-Cooper et al., 2015).

These two discourses, along with the claims and projections made by activists and scientists from the 1980s to early millennia, were not met without critique. Many migration researchers rejected the simplistic ‘environmental reductionism’ explanation of environmental change triggering migration, arguing that migration is a complex and multi-causal social process (Castles, 2002). Because migration is dependent on a number of factors, it is nearly impossible to single out an individual or group whose mobility is determined solely by environmental changes. The quantitative projections made on the number of possible environmental refugees were criticized for having a lack of empirical support and shaky methodologies (Gemenne, 2011). Critics also argued that alarmist discourses buoy dystopian narratives that justify increased securitization against migration. Such narratives have been criticized for pathologizing migration, and it has been argued the implications of such discourse could lead to restrictive attitudes towards migrants and increased militarization of migration (Bettini, 2014).

These critiques gave rise to a ‘minimalist’ perspective which promoted a more nuanced view on migration and climate change, influenced by perspectives from migration studies and human geography. While climate change is a serious problem and climate-related displacement is likely to occur, it is unknown the scale of which such migrations will occur as migration is multi-causal and contextual. This perspective also considers an array of responses to ecological change, including displacement, but also relocation, voluntary migration, and

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3 Similarly, environmental factors can play a large, but hidden, role in displacement events that appear at the surface to be largely caused by other factors. Castles (2002) offers a good overview of the complexities of climate-induced displacement.
immobility (Felli, 2013; Baldwin et al., 2014). Moreover, migration is not a security threat or a problem to be solved, but a normal social process.

While the ‘minimalist’ perspective is now commonplace in global governance and policymaking related to climate-induced migration, alarmist and victimizing discourses have not disappeared. Media representations of climate-induced migration almost always employ alarmist narratives, and quantitative projections of hundreds of millions of climate refugees still show up in policy, media reports, and academic articles (Ransan-Cooper et al., 2015; Santos & Mourato, 2021). As explained by Boas and Rothe (2016), new discourses on climate-induced migration did not completely replace older narratives but were rather incorporated into already existing practices of climate security.

2.3 Resiliency and Migration-as-Adaptation

In the past decade, climate migration discourse has shifted to a resilience discourse that sees the climate migrant as an agent of adaptation (Foresight, 2011; Methmann & Oels, 2015). This change in discourse also signaled a change in the language. From the 1980s to the early 2000s terms such as ‘environmental refugees’ or ‘climate refugees,’ which dominated the discourse, became replaced with broader terms such as ‘climate-induced migration’ or ‘environmental migration.’ Migration as a means of adaptation to climate change is rooted in discourses of resilience that have been gaining popularity in international governance since the 2000s, as well as criticisms of previous discourses that pathologized climate migration or painted climate migrants as victims (Boas & Rothe, 2016).

Resilience refers to the ability of systems, communities, or individuals to recover from disturbances and ‘bounce back’ to a state of equilibrium (Methmann & Oels, 2015; Boas & Rothe, 2016). Discourses of resilience are a product of the human security paradigm, which emphasizes a people-centred approach to security (UN General Assembly, 2012). Resilience aims to minimize risk at all costs and deal with insecurity, leading to a ‘culture of preparedness’ (Methmann & Oels, 2015, p. 54). As communities vulnerable to climate change are being warned to create strategies to adapt to climate change, migration is now conceptualized as a way for communities to build resilience.

The migration-as-adaptation thesis argues that controlled migration can help communities build resilience in the face of climate change. One of the first publications championing migration-as-adaptation was the Foresight Report, produced by the UK government. As outlined in the Foresight Report (2011):
There is much evidence that migration is a key tool to build resilience, either through enhancing livelihoods or as a type of insurance strategy, and putting people in better positions to withstand environmental change. Indeed, migration can be seen as a transformational adaptation strategy, as opposed to a more static approach of trying to improve ‘coping’ in current locations to current climate conditions (p. 174-75).

Proponents of the migration-as-adaptation thesis argue that migrants from areas vulnerable to climate change can diversify their incomes by seeking out new livelihoods in other areas. They can then send remittances to their families, contributing to the resiliency of the local community. In this sense, the migration-as-adaptation narrative also fits in with the migration-development nexus. Under this discourse, circular and temporary migration are emphasized as being especially useful for such communities affected by climate change (Foresight, 2011; Felli & Castree, 2012). The biggest departure of the migration-as-adaptation thesis from previous discourses on climate migration is that migration is viewed as a solution instead of a problem to be solved. Migration-as-adaptation is also argued to be a more empowering approach for those living in climate-vulnerable areas. Under this discourse, climate migrants are not seen as passive victims of climate change, but rather as responsible subjects who exercise agency over the futures of both themselves and their community.

2.4 Climate Migration and International Governance

Many debates around the rights of those affected by climate change note that in the case of people forced to migrate due to environmental disasters and climate change, there is a ‘human rights protection gap’ (European Commission, 2014). People who are displaced due to climate and environmental disasters are not protected under the 1951 Refugee Convention. While the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) states environmental degradation and climate change can interact with drivers of refugee movements, this does not translate into any tangible rights for people displaced under these conditions. A recent ruling by the UN Human Rights Committee in 2020 declared that countries cannot deport people back to countries where their lives may be threatened by climate change, as it violates the principle of non-refoulement (Su, 2020).4

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4 The judgement from the Commission relates to the case of Ioane Teitiota, a man from Kiribati who sought protection from New Zealand, arguing that him and his family’s life was at risk due to sea level rise (Su, 2020).
While not legally binding, this ruling has opened the possibility of developing a more concrete human rights framework for those affected by climate change.

Global governance of climate migration is largely fragmented across several hard and soft-law agreements, policies, agendas, and action plans adopted by the international community (Kählin & Weerasinghe, 2017; Biermann & Boas, 2018). Many initiatives suffer from a lack of conceptual clarity of what instances of mobility exactly fall under the umbrella of ‘climate migration,’ as well as a failure to distinguish between voluntary mobility, displacement due to gradual environmental changes, displacement due to sudden natural disasters, and immobility. Because of this, no instrument fully encapsulates the complex elements of climate-induced migration and the varying causes of leaving or staying (Wilkinson et al., 2016). Further, most initiatives discuss climate change and migration as a gender-neutral phenomenon. A notable exception is the Global Compact for Migration, which affirms its commitment to gender mainstreaming. Table 1 on the next page has a brief overview of policies and initiatives in international governance focused on migration and climate change.

While many of the initiatives focused on climate-induced migration refer to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, none of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) explicitly mention climate-induced migration. While SDG13 is devoted to climate action, it fails to mention migration or displacement or how to include these phenomena in climate policies. SDGs 8, 10, and 17 address the need for facilitated, planned, and well-managed migration policies— however, this is not connected with climate change. As a result, ‘the ways in which migration may be altered by climate change and the challenges this poses for policy and planning are not directly addressed in the SDGs’ (Wilkinson et al., 2016, p.7).
### Table 1. Overview of global governance initiatives relating to climate migration.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initiative</th>
<th>Relevance</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1992 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) &amp; its Conference of the Parties (COP) Decisions</td>
<td>While the UNFCCC did not outright address climate-induced migration at its conception, COP decisions have increasingly done so. This includes the 2010 Cancun Adaptation Framework which recognized migration as an adaptation strategy and called on Parties to increase understanding, coordination, and cooperation in regard to climate-induced migration and displacement. Similarly, in 2013 the COP 19 created the Warsaw International Mechanism (WIM), meant to address the loss and damage associated with climate change impacts. The WIM recognized mobility and displacement as loss and damage caused by climate change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015 Paris Agreement</td>
<td>In its preamble, the Paris Agreement explicitly references migrants in the context of climate change. Under the text on Loss and Damage, there is a request to establish a ‘task force’ to address displacement related to climate change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 (SFDRR)</td>
<td>The SFDRR focuses on displacement caused by natural disasters and focuses less on people moving due to/in anticipation of gradual changes in climate. The SFDRR recognizes that both displaced persons and migrants need to be protected in the context of managing the risk of disasters and calls on States to adopt policies addressing disaster-related mobility to increase resilience capacities of both displaced people and host communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Nansen Initiative Agenda for the Protection of Cross-Border Displaced Persons in the Context of Disasters and Climate Change (2015), followed by the Platform on Disaster Displacement (2016)</td>
<td>The Nansen Initiative was a three-year project that aimed to assist States and other stakeholders in improving preparedness and responses to address cross-border displacement. Established in 2016, the Platform on Disaster Displacement focuses on the protection needs of those displaced across borders due to disasters and climate change. It seeks to address gaps in knowledge and data, as well as promote policy coherence and mainstreaming of human mobility challenges.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration (2018) (GCM)</td>
<td>Climate-induced migration figures heavily in the GCM. The Compact calls on States to eliminate the adverse drivers and structural factors that compel one to leave their country of origin and identifies climate change mitigation and adaptation as one possible strategy. It states that adaptation in the country of origin is a priority and identifies the need for adaptation and resilience strategies. It also affirms that the human rights of migrants and displaced persons are to be upheld.</td>
</tr>
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Chapter 3: Literature Review

In the previous section I presented a genealogy of migration and climate change discourses, as well as a brief discussion on the current policies and frameworks in place at the international level. I will now briefly outline pre-existing research on gender, migration, and climate change, as well as research concerning migration-as-adaptation and resilience. Research on migration and climate change that includes an analysis of gender is a growing field, with most research focusing on gendered differences in vulnerabilities in the context of migration and climate change. Findings suggest that vulnerability is highly contextual and depending on a variety of factors. Previous research surrounding migration and climate change also paints a complex picture, showing that different communities view migration as an adaptation strategy differently.

3.1 Gender, Migration, and Climate Change

Gender is recognized as a core force shaping migration and migrants’ lives, with research focusing on both how gender impacts migration and how migration impacts gender (Pessar & Mahler, 2003; Hanson, 2010). At the same time, it is widely recognized in discussions on climate change that the effects of climate change and adaptation efforts will have gendered effects. This has led to arguments that gender equality is essential for sustainable development and adaptation to climate change (Arora-Jonsson, 2011). Despite these understandings, early debates and policies on migration and climate change were overwhelmingly gender neutral (MacGregor, 2010).

The relationship between gender, migration, and climate change has received increased attention in the past ten years, both in policy and in research. Early research into the topic was limited due to a lack of data. One of the earliest frameworks for analyzing gender, migration, and climate change can be traced back to Chindarkar (2012), who proposes a ‘gender-sensitive vulnerability assessment framework,’ which takes into account vulnerability components such as exposure to climate risk, sensitivity, and adaptive capacity. Chindarkar (Ibid.) acknowledges that while in some contexts migration could be empowering for women, in other instances it can exacerbate inequalities.

Other research illustrates how the outcomes of migration are largely dependent on local contexts. Djoudi and Brockhaus’ (2011) study of gendered climate change adaptation in Northern Mali showed that while men used migration as an adaptation strategy, women
perceived this strategy as a source of vulnerability as they had to take on traditionally male labour tasks. The researchers concluded that while women’s vulnerability was increasing in the short term, in the long term this shift in roles could have positive impacts. According to Gioli et. al (2014), in the West Karakoram region of Pakistan men are more likely to use circular migration as an adaptation strategy while women stay behind; while male out-migration has not led to any differences in women’s decision-making power, they suggest this could change over generations as girls have increased access to education.

Research on gender, migration, and climate change has been overwhelmingly focused on the vulnerabilities and experiences faced by women. Some research suggests that men can also face specific vulnerabilities in the context of environmental disasters and climate change (Demetriades & Epslen, 2008). While there is very little research on the experiences of LGBTQ+ people in migration and climate change, research on the experiences of LGBTQ+ people in the context of environmental disasters suggests that they may face specific vulnerabilities due to their social location, as well as the heteronormative tendencies of policies related to disaster relief (Dominey-Howes et. al, 2014; Mustafa et. al, 2015).

### 3.2 Counternarratives of Resilience and Adaptation

Mainstream migration and climate change discourses are often produced by actors in the Global North about those vulnerable to climate change who are overwhelmingly located in the Global South. In the past ten years there has been burgeoning research on how these discourses reflect, or do not reflect, the realities of those living in areas deemed as vulnerable to climate change. Such research has indicated that policies need a more nuanced view on climate change adaptation that includes local perspectives and acknowledges the dynamic contexts of different communities.

The assumption that migration as a means of adaptation to climate change is something desired by populations likely to be affected by climate change has been interrogated. Increasing research done in Small Island Developing States (SIDS) has shown how islanders have complex relationships with climate change. Many island nations have developed their own adaptation strategies and have asserted their agency when it comes to climate change (Beyerl et al., 2018). Some leaders have also rejected the ‘climate refugee’ label and have instead called for solutions that will empower local communities to adapt to climate change (Farbotko & Lazrus, 2012). Research done on local perspectives of climate migration in Pacific Island states has shown residents have diverse opinions on the role of migration in climate adaptation. For
example, research on ni-Vanuatu perspectives reflect a preference for in-situ adaptation measures and a reluctance to resettle unless as a last resort (Perumal, 2018). Fieldwork done in Kiribati has shown that many residents have built defenses such as seawalls to adapt to climate change, and high numbers of residents reported that they are planning to migrate in the future for a variety of reasons, including changes in climate (Allgood & McNamara, 2016). Previous research has also found that people living in areas affected by climate change do not necessarily migrate to areas that are less likely to be affected by environmental change. For example, research carried out in the MENA region suggests that people adapting to changes in climate are more likely to migrate to urban centres which face environmental problems of their own (Wodon et. al, 2014). Similarly, Allgood & McNamara (2016) found that some residents in Kiribati who are planning to migrate in the future envision moving to different islands. What many perspectives have in common is a concern for upholding political, cultural, and territorial rights. Thus, including self-determination and justice in climate migration policy is important for nuance and balance (Walshe & Stancioff, 2018).

The work of Anushiya Shrestha and others serves as an important critique of narratives surrounding community resilience and its power in enabling communities to adapt to environmental changes. The assumption behind resiliency is that communities, which tend to be homogenized and conceived as a bounded geographical unit, can actively participate in collective action and mobilize resources to adapt. Resilience discourses, however, frequently overlook the agency, conflict, inequality, and power dynamics that shape adaptation efforts (Shrestha, 2019). Shrestha (Ibid.) identifies three assumptions related to community resilience:

- First is the belief that a “community” is a unit of collective action with shared common interests, social values, and norms, in which adversity equally impacts all community members; second is the assumption that all members of a community are willing to and capable of undertaking collective action to overcome adversities; last is a faith that through collective action a community is capable of achieving a desired positive outcome for the community as a whole (p.498).

Based on ethnographic field work done in a peri-urban context in the Kathmandu Valley of Nepal, Shrestha found that structural inequalities and conflicting interests, along with wider socio-economic and political changes, made the task of building community resilience incredibly challenging. This illustrates how the above assumptions of community resilience fail to encapsulate the real-life complexities of socio-environmental change in this specific
context. Similarly, Nightingale (2017) also argues that adaptation initiatives often fail to address the root causes of vulnerability and do not account for specific relations of power in communities. Thus, presuming that the ‘community’ can surmount socio-environmental changes often oversimplifies the intricate, multi-actor, multi-level, multi-dimensional characteristics of such issues.
Chapter 4: Theoretical Framework and Analytical Approach

In this project I aim to analyze discourses on gender, migration, and climate change through a decolonial perspective, an approach that has seldom been used in critical studies on migration and climate change discourses. Critical research concerning migration and climate change has made explicit the power relations embedded in global migration management. A decolonial perspective can add to these conceptualizations by offering an explanation for how global power today has originated and how it is distributed along colonial lines. First, I will outline what is meant by modernity/coloniality/decoloniality. Next, I will discuss the work of María Lugones and the coloniality of gender, which is a valuable critique of the coloniality of power and serves as the foundation for decolonial feminisms. Then I will engage with some criticisms of the decolonial perspective, posing the question of how can coloniality be used to understand problems such as climate change. I will finish with a discussion of the Anthropocene through a decolonial perspective, as well as how the climate migrant becomes racialized as an Other in climate change discourses.

4.1 Modernity/Coloniality/Decoloniality

To discuss coloniality and the decolonial perspective, we must first define what is meant by modernity/coloniality/decoloniality; the ‘/’ being necessary as the three concepts are interrelated (Mignolo, 2018, p.109). It should be made clear from the beginning that coloniality is not interchangeable with colonialism. Colonialism is understood as ‘a political and economic relation in which the sovereignty of a nation or a people rests on the power of another nation, which makes such a nation an empire’ (Maldonado-Torres, 2010, p.97). While coloniality was borne out of colonial encounters that began in the fifteenth century, it has outlasted colonialism and is a much larger global system of power. As Nelson Maldonado-Torres (Ibid., p.97) succinctly puts it, ‘coloniality survives colonialism.’

The concept of coloniality cannot be explained without reference to the work of Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano and his concept the coloniality of power. Coloniality serves as a critique to a Eurocentric Marxist perspective that neatly locates the development of capitalist modernity within the Industrial Revolution of the late eighteenth century (Pagán, 2020). According to Quijano (2010), the modern system of today traces its roots back to the colonisation of the Americas in the fifteenth century. The conquest of the Americas created a colonial structure of power that relied on classifications of peoples and species that produced
a hierarchical system based on colonial difference. Indispensable to this was the creation of race that served as the dividing line between colonizers and colonized and facilitated the racialized division of labour in colonial projects (Ibid.). Mignolo elaborates on the coloniality of power and outlines the colonial matrix of power, established by actors who saw themselves as fully human in comparison to colonized peoples and constructed colonial differences. Racism and sexism are important pillars in the colonial matrix of power, as well as the separation of humans from nature:

This Man/Human who created and managed the CMP, posited himself as master of the universe and succeeded in setting himself apart from other men/humans (racism), from women/humans (sexism), from nature (humanism), from non-Europe (Eurocentrism), and from ‘past’ and ‘traditional’ civilizations (modernity) (Mignolo, 2018, p.163).

In other words, the social categorizations that today seem commonplace and ‘natural’ in Western society, such as gender, race, ethnicity, and humanism, are not naturally occurring but were constructed over time as a result of colonial dominance.

The coloniality of being and coloniality of knowledge are essential components of the coloniality of power. Out of the colonial encounters of the fifteenth century, the cultural complex of European modernity/rationality was being constituted (Quijano, 2010). As argued by many decolonial thinkers, it is not merely a coincidence that modernity/rationality was constructed around the time of colonial domination, but rather the emergence of the rational human at this temporal moment is a key articulation of the colonial difference. As non-European societies were denied humanity and seen as inferior, their cultures, knowledge systems, and ways of being were also cast as being inferior, irrational, and backwards in time.

Knowledge produced under the Western Christian epistemology was taken by Europeans to be the only valid form of knowledge, and thus universal. This is called by decolonial thinkers the coloniality of knowledge. This was also related to the colonization of space and time (Mignolo 2018).

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5 Building on this argument, Maldonado-Torres (2010) illustrates how this racialized capitalist system arising out of colonialism can be traced back to the Valladolid debate in the fifteenth century, in which Europeans questioned whether Indigenous groups in the Americas had souls. This violent question led to ‘a multitude of hierarchized identities hinged along racial classifications that directly reflected differing degrees of humanity’ (Pagán, 2020, p.9).

6 This can be seen in the work of Enrique Dussel. According to Dussel (2000), ego conquiro (‘I conquer’) laid the foundation on which Descartes’ ego cogito (‘I think’) could be built, and the conquest of the Americas was the beginning of the European modern ego. Maldonado-Torres (2010) builds on this and lays out the logics of the coloniality of being, arguing that the Cartesian cogito, ergo sum allows the European ego to establish itself as a subject in relation to a colonized object.
First, through this knowledge paradigm Europe became positioned spatially as the centre of knowledge production and political, economic, and social relations, with other societies being located on the periphery. In addition to this, humanity was conceived as progressing along a linear trajectory of time, with Europe being the most modern, and other societies positioned as being further back in time and needing to be brought forward by Europe to the modern temporal frame.

Coloniality/decoloniality offers a different conceptualization of modernity by placing it in a much wider and more accurate historical context. Modernity is a set of ‘diverse yet coherent narratives and discourses’ that are a part of the Western Christian version of humanity (Mignolo, 2018b, p.139). Coloniality, then, is the darker side of these narratives that are hidden in celebrations of modernity. As previously mentioned, coloniality has outlasted colonialism. While many former empires have dissolved and colonies have gained their independence, world power today is still distributed along colonial lines (Quijano, 2010).

For decolonial thinkers, the solution to overcoming coloniality is to liberate the production of knowledge, as well as understand and affirm subjectivities and ways of being that have been devalued and denied by narratives of modernity (Quijano 2010; Mignolo 2018b). Mignolo (2010) uses the concept of delinking to illustrate this point. For Mignolo, part of delinking is to denaturalize conceptual fields, made hegemonic through coloniality, that attempt to totalize reality and promote universal paradigms. It is then imperative to build structures of knowledge that emerge from the marginalization and suppression of the colonial matrix of power. Instead of trying to fashion a universal paradigm of knowledge and existence, decolonial thinkers call for pluriversality, or ‘a world in which many worlds can co-exist’ (Ibid., p.346). These knowledges and ways of existence will then be alternatives to modernity and neo-liberal civilization, built on co-existence rather than subjugation. As noted by Walsh (2018, p.17), decoloniality is not a static condition or a state of enlightenment. Rather, it is a

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7 To go back to Dussel (2000), there are two perceptions of modernity. The first is the hegemonic, Eurocentric perspective of modernity that views it as an emancipation of human thinking that allowed for progress that is centred around events such as the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and the French Revolution. In this conception, ‘modern’ Europe placed itself in the centre of history and others at the periphery. Dussel argues that a second view on modernity takes a more global perspective, considering how European modernity is built on subjugation and violence that began during the colonisation of the Americas.

8 This relates to re-existence, understood by Aldofo Albal as ‘the mechanisms that human groups implement as a strategy of questioning and making visible the practices of racialization, exclusion, and marginalization, procuring the redefining and re-signifying of life in conditions of dignity and self determination, while at the same time confronting the bio-politic that controls, dominates, and commodifies subjects and nature’ (2008, p.85-86 in Walsh, 2018, p. 18).
continuing process to displace Western epistemology as the only possible framework and make visible other ways of existence.

4.2 Coloniality of Gender

While Quijano and others did mention the role of patriarchy and violence against women in theorizing the coloniality of power and coloniality of being, they were criticized by decolonial feminists as they were ‘not sufficiently engaged with queer women of colour feminisms that have theorized for decades the intersections of race and gender’ (Pagán, 2020, p.14). The coloniality of gender, built on the work of María Lugones and others, is an essential aspect of understanding coloniality, as it is an important critique of the coloniality of power and illustrates how the coloniality of gender is enmeshed with the coloniality of being.

In articulating the coloniality of gender, Lugones jointly explores the work done by queer women of colour feminists, particularly the concept of intersectionality, and the coloniality of power. In her critique, Lugones (2010a) argues that Quijano’s understanding of gender is too narrow and he accepts a colonial understanding of what gender is about. This misrepresentation of how gender was imposed on colonized peoples is a misstep in theorizing the coloniality of power, as, ‘understanding these features of the organization of gender in the modern/colonial gender system—the biological dimorphism, the patriarchal and heterosexual organizations of relations—is crucial to an understanding of the differential gender arrangements along “racial lines”’ (Ibid., p.371).

Lugones maintains that race, biological dimorphism, and heterosexism are essential to the colonial difference. Key to Lugones’ argument is the acknowledgement of alternative understandings of gender that existed in societies around the world that were then devalued and denied in the wake of European colonization. In The Invention of Women, Oyéronké Oyewùmí (1997) argues that gender was not an organizing category for the Yoruba prior to colonisation. Further, the imposition of a Western, binary conception of gender on the Yoruba was fundamental for colonisation and was tightly entwined with the inferiorization of African people. Drawing on the works of Oyewùmí and others, Lugones illuminates how biological dimorphism and heterosexism was essential for European colonial domination. Just as race was created to serve colonial capitalism, so was gender: ‘Race is no more mythical and fictional than gender, both powerful fictions’ (Lugones, 2010a, p.384). This understanding gives us ‘the full reach of the colonial/modern gender system into the construction of collective authority,
all aspects of the relation between capital and labor, and the construction of knowledge.’ (Ibid, p.388).

4.3 A Coloniality for our Times?

What I have outlined so far is an overview of some of the main concepts and arguments of the decolonial perspective and how modernity/coloniality/decoloniality are understood. In this next section I will discuss how can modernity/coloniality/decoloniality be used in understanding the current crises of today, particularly the climate crisis. As argued by Fry and Tlostanova (forthcoming, p.xi), the world is experiencing a number of catastrophes relating to climate, geopolitics, economics, international security and technological change; while these crises seem separate, they are actually interrelated and fuse into one another. The current Covid-19 crisis is a current example, as the pandemic has made clear the instability of the current global system. Fry and Tlostanova (Ibid, p.xii) relate these disasters to ‘the afterlife of the consequences of modernity.’ Similarly, Walsh (2018, p.24) calls these ‘fissures’ in the dominant order ‘decolonial cracks.’

First, I want to engage with some criticisms of coloniality that I think are important when discussing the current global crises of today. Coloniality has made many contributions to conceptualizing how global power is distributed along racial capitalist lines, and how the production of knowledge and subjectivities have played an essential role in creating and maintaining this power structure. At the same time, when coloniality was first being developed as a concept, it did not consider global catastrophes such as climate change. As argued by Tlostanova (2021, p.18), ‘today coloniality means essentially the same yet it needs to be thought over in a more direct and thorough relation to the on-going crises.’

Tlostanova (2021) critiques coloniality on two fronts. First, coloniality/decoloniality is often focused on the past and how it affects the present. This fixation on the past can potentially prevent decoloniality from imagining the future. This is similar to critiques made by Baldwin (2017) of postcolonial theory, who posits that postcolonial theory, primarily concerned with excavating the past, needs to be augmented so it can also be useful when discussing the future yet-to-come. Second, coloniality, as it was originally conceptualized, tends to group humanity into a North/South, colonized/colonizer binary. As explained by Tlostanova (2021, p.18), ‘this critique is often balancing at the edge of stand-pointism (limited to the position of exteriority or colonial difference) which divides the humanity in a potentially essentialist way and defutures the human species closing any possibilities for communal refuturing action.’
It can be questioned if this division between North/South, embodied in the colonial difference, continues to reflect reality in light of these emerging crises. In her book *Expulsions* (2014), Sassen outlines how the past two decades have seen an increasing number of people, enterprises, and places expelled from the core social and economic orders. While Sassen demonstrates how those in dire poverty fit under this notion of expulsion, she also includes populations in the Global North in her analysis, such as an increasing number of the middle class. In this time of growing complexity, social and economic relations become increasingly blurred: ‘But today the oppressed have mostly been expelled and survive at a great distance from their oppressors. Further, the “oppressor” is increasingly a complex system that combines persons, networks, and machines with no obvious centre’ (Ibid, p.10). To what extent is coloniality too neat of an explanation for discussing global power relations and inequality?

At the same time, I am not arguing that we are now in a post-racial wasteland where we are all equally oppressed under the dominant order. Global power is still overwhelmingly creating the Others of modernity who are essentially sacrificed in the name of progress and sit outside of the promises made by neoliberal globalization. Chakrabarty (2012) uses the work of Homi Bhabha to illustrate the point that the new subaltern classes of global capitalist order include the stateless, migrant workers, refugees, and minorities. While neoliberal globalization promotes the seductive cosmopolitan dream of a world without borders, they become an embodiment of the contradictions within this (Ibid.). Similarly, Fry and Tlostanova (forthcoming, p.43) illustrate how more and more groups are becoming cast as imagined enemies, reflecting ‘the deep internal contradictions and unresolved dilemmas of modernity/coloniality in the conditions of declining global capitalism.’

These ‘expulsions,’ that are increasingly transcending the colonizer/colonized binary, can be seen as consequences of the paradoxes created by modernity and neoliberalism, particularly the impossibility of infinite growth. In the constant pursuit of progress, more and more groups are being regarding as expendable (Fry & Tlostanova, forthcoming). In this way, coloniality becomes useful as we can see these expulsions as consequences of the impossibilities promised by modernity.9

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9 Tlostanova (2021, p.16) also argues that the notion of unsettlement can be seen as a pluriversal human condition, which can potentially create a new ‘transversal relational solidarity’ and create opportunities for refuturing.
4.4 The Anthropocene and its Colonial Roots

The ‘Anthropocene’ is a term frequently used in both scientific and mainstream discourses to define ‘a unit of geological time in which humanity, *anthropos*, is said to be leaving its own stratigraphic signature on Earth’s geology’ (Baldwin & Erickson, 2020, p.3). For scientists, it’s not a question of if the Anthropocene is occurring, but at what point it should be distinguished from the Holocene period. This distinction is important for public discourse, as it makes the Anthropocene a unit of geological time and part of human history (Ibid.).

There has been an expanding critique of the Anthropocene concept in critical race and decolonial studies. While the Anthropocene has been reified in the scientific community as *human* history, it ‘is not attributable to all of humanity but only to a small subset of humans clustered mainly in the West’ (Ibid, p.4). Mignolo (2018e, p.117) echoes this, stating that the Anthropocene is a ‘scientific narrative fiction’ that presents a false, unilinear, universal history of humankind. The danger of the universal narrative of the Anthropocene is it will ultimately repeat a ‘liberal forgetting’ of modernity as a colonial/racial project that was founded on the premise of Western progress (Lowe, 2015 in Baldwin & Erickson, 2020).

Critiques of the Anthropocene as a concept argue that the Anthropocene, and the resulting climate crisis, cannot be severed from coloniality, racism, capitalism, and imperialism, but rather they are constitutive. The colonial matrix of power has been fuelled by extraction, possession, and dispossession (Mignolo 2018d, p.159). Fundamental to the colonial matrix of power was the ontological separation of Man from nature. By ontologically separating Man from nature, Western civilization was able to view nature as an object that can be plundered and exploited in the name of progress. However, this logic of extraction was not just limited to nature but was also projected onto colonized peoples in the racialized capitalist system that resulted from the colonial encounter. Pagán (2020, p.12) argues that the bodies of colonial difference are placed in ‘extractive zones,’ demarcated by race, indigeneity, and gender, that normalizes violence against lands and peoples in the name of racialized capitalist profit. In a similar vein, Yusoff (2019, p.32) connects the emergence of the Anthropocene to

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10 As argued by Philippe Descola (2013), the two severed concepts of *nature and culture* do not make sense beyond Western civilization, and other cosmologies and ways of knowing view *nature and culture* as being interlinked and inherently inseparable.

11 Similarly, Nixon (2011) uses the concept of slow violence to describe how the consequences of environmental exploitation exacerbate the vulnerability of poor populations located in the Global South.
colonial racial violence and how this history of violence, enslavement, and suffering inscribes ‘colonialism (and race) into global environmental change.’\textsuperscript{12}

4.5 The Racialization of the Climate Migrant

Throughout debates and discourses on climate migration, the climate migrant has been produced and reproduced as an Other that needs to be managed by the Global North. This has contributed to the climate migrant being racialized in such discourses, and discourses on controlling and containing climate migrants become linked to White supremacy and coloniality. The work of Andrew Baldwin has been particularly illuminating on how the climate migrant has become racialized and how climate migration management is about racial hierarchy.

Baldwin’s earlier analysis of climate change migration discourses found that there is no universal form of racial power that can be traced through climate change discourses. Rather, racial power is expressed through a variety of tropes which ‘intersect and articulate differently through specific empirical sites’ (Baldwin, 2013 p. 1486). The three most notable tropes identified by Baldwin include naturalisation, the loss of political status, and ambiguity. These tropes were identified both in policies and in popular media. Under these discourses, climate migrants are constructed as an Other with the capacity to undo Western civilization (Baldwin, 2012; Baldwin, 2013). Other research has shown that climate security discourses use racial logics based on racialized assumptions about ‘Muslim’ and ‘African’ populations that are then mobilized when discussing climate security (Telford, 2018).

As noted by Baldwin (2012), climate change discourses use the future-conditional tense, and threats are always articulated as a yet-to-come. In this sense, the climate migrant is presented as a looming figure on the horizon, symbolising an emergent potential. Baldwin (2013) argues that when positioned this way, the climate migrant represents a set of ‘White’ anxieties regarding a loss of control and disorder. In later work, Baldwin (2016) connected these anxieties to the unraveling of European humanism in the face of climate change. The desire to manage climate migration is really a desire to preserve the hegemony of a social order that the monstrous climate migrant threatens to destroy. Therefore, climate migration management is about colonizing the future and the yet-to-come Other (Ibid.).

\textsuperscript{12} For example, Yusoff (2019) outlines the ‘slave-sugar-coal nexus,’ in which sugar from plantations fuelled the labouring classes of industrial Europe.
The migration-as-adaptation narrative has also been critiqued for its racial underpinnings. While the migration-as-adaptation thesis is often seen as a positive development in discourse as it avoids victimizing or securitizing narratives, it fosters a novel form of racial differentiation that ‘racializes bodies on the basis of their adaptive/maladaptive or resilient/non-resilient capacities’ (Baldwin, 2017b, p. 5, author’s emphasis). In developing this line of thinking, Baldwin argues that adaptive migration is linked to capital and insurability; an insurable body is a resilient body that can avoid or manage risk. If there are insurable bodies, then it follows there are also uninsurable bodies who are incapable of adapting or embodying resiliency. Uninsurable bodies, then, spark a new form of racial difference ‘akin to the biopolitical racism that Michel Foucault identified through his analysis of the figure of abnormality’ (Ibid., p.5). Continuing to use Foucault’s theory of biopower, Baldwin argues that migration-as-adaptation can be thought of as a life-giving technology that promotes human survival by making human life resilient. Maladaptive and uninsurable bodies, on the other hand, are framed as bodies that are a threat to planetary well-being. This leads to a new form of racism that is topological rather than dialectical; it is a form of differentiation based ‘not on what a person is, but what that person might become should a specific set of conditions materialize’ (Ibid., p.22).
Chapter 5: Methodology

In the previous section I explained my theoretical framework that will guide my analysis for this study. In the following chapter I will outline my methodology plan that will determine how I will conduct my study. To answer my research questions, I will be doing a discourse analysis based on the epistemological and ontological principles of critical discourse analysis. I will also overview how I collected my empirical material, as well as limitations and my positionality.

5.1 What is Discourse? Revisiting Foucault

The field of discourse analysis encompasses multiple approaches on how to analyze discourse and what is the nature of discourse. Approaches to discourse analysis are all rooted in social constructivism, which is based on the principle that language actively shapes and constructs our social reality (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002).

The work of Michel Foucault and his discourse theory has been instrumental to the field of discourse analysis. For Foucault, discourse is something that transcends a mere collection of sentences (Albertine et al., 2016, p. 363). Foucault (1972, p.117) identifies discourse as a bounded set of statements ‘for which a group of conditions for existence can be defined.’ Further, discourses belong to a particular historical moment and are temporally fixed. In Foucault’s conception of discourse, knowledge and truth are both discursive constructions and ‘different regimes of knowledge determine what is true and false’ (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p.13). Therefore, although language presents us with an infinite number of possible utterances and enunciations, some will never be accepted as valid and the rules of a particular discourse limit what is acceptable to say. This then connects with Foucault’s theory of power/knowledge, in which power is conceptualized as being productive, constructing discourse, knowledge, bodies and subjectivities (Ibid., p. 13). In short, ‘power is responsible both for creating our social world and for the particular ways in which the world is formed and can be talked about, ruling out alternative ways of being and talking’ (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 14).

Many contemporary analytical approaches align themselves with Foucault’s definition of discourse and his idea that truth is something that is discursively constructed (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). However, there is disagreement with Foucault’s penchant to identify only one regime of truth in each historical period; rather, other approaches present a more variegated landscape in which multiple discourses operate alongside one another or come into conflict in
a struggle for dominance (Ibid.). I am in agreement with this critique of Foucault. Further, I argue that Foucault has a tendency to underestimate agency and resistance towards regimes of truth.

5.2 Critical Discourse Analysis

My study will be grounded in the ontological and epistemological foundations of critical discourse analysis (CDA). Critical discourse analysis is primarily concerned with how language and discourses are used to establish and cement unequal power relations in society (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002; Mogashoa, 2014). Because of this, CDA is not a politically neutral research method.

According to Norman Fairclough (2010, p.3), critical discourse analysis has three properties: it is relational, it is dialectical, and it is transdisciplinary. It is relational in the sense that it is focused on social relations instead of entities or individuals. Discourse is both constitutive and constituted. By this, Fairclough (Ibid.) means that discourse is in a dialectical relationship with other social dimensions; while discourse constitutes the social world, it is also constituted by other social practices. This differs from other discourse analysis theorists, as Fairclough argues that there are aspects of the social world that are apart from discourse. Critical discourse analysis is transdisciplinary in that researchers not only employ theories of discourse, but they also incorporate other relevant theories into their analysis (Fairclough, 2010; Reisigl & Wodak, 2008). For critical discourse analysts, linguistic analysis is not enough, and critiques must be connected to the wider social and political context (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002).

The objective of critical discourse analysis is to excavate the ideological assumptions that are concealed in written text or oral speech, which are known as ideological effects (Reisigl & Wodak, 2008; Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). For critical discourse analysis, ideology is understood as ‘ways of representing aspects of the world, which may be operationalised in ways of acting and interacting and in “ways of being” or identities, that contribute to establishing or sustaining unequal relations of power’ (Fairclough, 2010, p.8). According to Reisigl & Wodak (2008, p.88), “power” relates to an asymmetric relationship among social actors who assume different social positions or belong to different social groups. Power, then, is legitimized through discourses. However, there is often not one totalizing discourse, but different ideological narratives struggling for dominance and hegemony (Reisigl & Wodak, 2008; Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002).
In order to analyze a text and connect it to the wider social context, Fairclough (1992, p.72) has developed a three-dimensional conception of discourse that looks at text through micro, meso, and macro levels. The dimensions of this framework require the researcher to examine: 1) the text, with a focus on the linguistic aspects, including but not limited to word choice, syntax, metaphors, and text structure; 2) discursive practices, including how the text is produced, distributed, and consumed; 3) discourse as social practice, looking at the discourse in relation to ideology and power (Ibid.). In addition, Fairclough is also interested in how discourses change over time, and how discourse connects to social change. As noted by Jørgensen & Phillips (2002, p.69), ‘discourse analysis is not sufficient in itself for analysis of the wider social practice, since the latter encompasses both discursive and non-discursive elements.’ The focus of critical discourse analysis is how discursive practices figure in the maintenance of social order and social change. In other words, what is the ‘common sense’ embedded in discourses and how do they legitimize inequalities or injustices? What can be said and what cannot?

Critical discourse analysts employ a number of methodological tools to conduct a rich analysis of the text and the wider social context. One such tool is intertextuality, which refers to how texts draw on pre-existing texts (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). Intertextuality makes explicit the historicity of a text (Fairclough, 1992). Moreover, texts can become linked in an intertextual chain, wherein a series of texts contain elements from other texts (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p.74). Interdiscursivity is one form of intertextuality and occurs when communicative events draw on different discourses and articulate them together (Ibid.). While some texts may reproduce existing discourses, they can also contradict or challenge them, or articulate discourses in new, creative ways (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002; Fairclough, 1992). For Fairclough, new articulations can contribute to change, whereas conventional mixing of discourses point to an upholding of the dominant social order. Further, communicative events can then become sites of ‘struggle and conflict,’ as different discourses compete for hegemony (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 74).

I chose critical discourse analysis as it calls into question power relations and inequalities that are often naturalized in discourses. If we accept the argument made by Baldwin and Bettini (2017, p.2) that the relation between climate change and human migration is a relation of power, then an excavation of how power operates in discussions on climate change and migration is much needed. Interdiscursivity and intertextuality will also be particularly useful in uncovering how different discourses interact and struggle for dominance. As demonstrated in previous sections, debates on climate change and migration mobilize a number
of varying discourses. Therefore, I will be able to delineate how dominant voices understand the relationship between gender, migration, and climate change.

5.3 Data Collection and Empirical Material

While there is ample material on (1) migration and climate change, (2) migration and gender, and (3) climate change and gender, relatively little has been said about the intersection of gender, migration, and climate change. However, more recent publications are including an analysis of gender in the context of migration and climate change. Main actors in discussions and initiatives on gender, migration, and climate change include the International Organization for Migration (IOM), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UN Women, the World Bank, and the Asian Development Bank (ADB), and the World Bank.

I will be focusing on key documents, which I define as official reports, made by these key actors from 2011 to early 2021. I chose this period as 2011 serves as a rough benchmark for when the migration-as-adaptation thesis became mainstreamed into climate change and migration discourses, as evidenced by the publication of the 2011 Foresight Report. This timeframe will also allow me to see if and how discourses on climate change and migration changed after the creation of both the 2015 Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda. I will discuss the context within which my material is embedded in Section 6.1.

Material for analysis was collected online from the above institutions’ official websites, utilizing the website’s search function and publication archives. To find material that was relevant to my research questions, I used keywords related to discourses identified in previous research, including ‘climate migration’, ‘environmental migration’, ‘gendered migration’, ‘women and migration’, ‘climate change adaptation’, ‘environmental adaptation’, ‘resilience’, ‘climate resilience’, ‘sustainable development’, ‘gender and climate change’, ‘gender and sustainable development’, and ‘migration and development.’ Initially I used an advanced search function to find publications in my time frame and chose publications which contained several of my keywords. After this, I used a more general search to catch any relevant documents that may have somehow slipped through the cracks of my advanced search.

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13 At the beginning stages of this study, I also wanted to analyze policy documents. However, there is incredibly little in policy concerning gender, migration, and climate change. Therefore I decided to look at reports from these institutions. While I make reference to the 2018 Global Compact on Migration, I did not analyze it as empirical material but rather as ‘analytical guidance’ to compare with the empirical material.
Through this method of searching for material, I saved 85 documents which included policies, policy briefs, reports, and position papers. While some were relatively brief and several pages in length, around half of the publications were over 100 pages. To avoid having an excess of data, I then quickly examined the documents to get a sense of their structure, focusing on the sections and headlines, as well as reading executive summaries and introductions and conclusions. I also identified which sections of the text were most relevant to my analysis. I did this by utilizing the search toolbar to search for keywords such as ‘migration’, ‘gender’, ‘women’, ‘men’, ‘climate change’, ‘climate migration’, ‘adaptation’, ‘resiliency’, ‘empowerment’, and ‘vulnerability’. I then made the decision to exclude some documents on the basis that they were redundant, or they were not relevant to my analysis after all.\footnote{For example, sometimes I downloaded a full report, and then also downloaded a smaller summary of the same report.} In total, I analyzed 23 documents. While I recognize I could have potentially excluded important elements through this method, it has allowed me to obtain a manageable amount of data while not compromising my methodological framework.

5.4 Limitations and Ethical Considerations

Due to my empirical material being public documents that are easily accessible online, there has not been a need to obtain any form of consent for collecting and sharing the material in my study.

My main ethical concern is regarding the danger of reifying ‘climate migration.’ The relationship between climate change and migration, as it has been discussed in previous sections, is a fickle one. While many reports both in governance and the media talk about ‘climate refugees’, ‘climate migrants’, and ‘climate migration’, these terms have eluded concrete definition. Continuing calls for research and policy on ‘climate migration’ creating a ‘self-perpetuating circle’ that reifies migration in the context of climate change as a problem to be solved (Nash, 2018; Boas et al., 2019). The ‘climate migrant’ has also served as a figure that is mobilized in narratives around securing European humanism and neoliberal world order in the face of planetary destruction (Baldwin, 2016; Bettini, 2019).

Therefore, in my study it is imperative that I do not take a relationship between climate change and migration for granted and do not contribute to the reification of ‘climate migration.’ I do not deny that changes in the environment will influence people’s decisions to migrate, and do not intend to downplay the importance of climate change. However, I am also aware of how
accepting ‘climate migration’ as a solid concept can be problematic. I am looking at discourses on migration and climate change, hoping to unearth the relations of power that are constructed within them. In doing so, I will always approach the climate change-migration nexus through a critical lens, calling into question what is often assumed or taken for a fact.

Early in this study, I considered the possible inclusion of discourses from NGOs and grassroots organizations, looking into how they negotiate and contest the discourses coming from international institutions. While I believe this is an important topic to consider, I had to be mindful of both the time frame of my study and the length. Therefore, I have decided that my empirical material will be limited to reports coming from international institutions, as previously outlined. I recognize that in doing this, my study will be focused on those deemed ‘experts’ discussing migration and climate change and will not include the perspectives of those with lived experiences of migration and climate change.

5.5 Reflexivity and Positionality

In the case of researching issues around gender, migration, and climate change using a decolonial perspective, I recognize my position as a White, middle class researcher from the overly developed, affluent world typically referred to as the Global North and how this can influence my work. I grew up in a settler colonial state wherein I benefitted from ongoing colonisation. Resultingly, my life experience has inescapably been shaped by coloniality. I recognize that because of this, I may take colonial epistemologies and ontologies for granted, and perhaps may end up with a study using the decolonial perspective that is not so decolonial after all. Because of this, I am not claiming to decolonize anything through my work. Rather, I want to explore how modernity/coloniality/decoloniality can contribute to critical discussions on migration and climate change. I also recognize that through my chosen topic, I am contributing to a body of research that talks about people who are affected by climate change without incorporating their lived experiences and perspectives. I acknowledge that this is unfortunately outside of the scope of my project, and I affirm that lived experiences are much needed additions to discussions on migration and climate change.
Chapter 6: Analysis

To go back to the research questions, the aim of this thesis is to find out how the relationship between gender, migration, and climate change is articulated in policies and discourses at the level of international institutions. This includes looking at how pre-existing discourses on vulnerability and empowerment are mobilized in these conceptualizations. First, I will briefly give context to the empirical material, looking at how the material emerged and its reception. Next, I will look at how gender and gendered differences are understood in the relationship between gender, migration, and climate change. I will then outline how there is a discursive tendency in the documents to reproduce women as a vulnerable group in the context of migration and climate change, contributing to what is labeled by Djoudi et al. (2016) as ‘the feminization of vulnerability.’ Finally, I will look at how discourses surrounding the notion of empowerment are mobilized, as migration as an adaptation strategy to climate change is presented as an opportunity for women to achieve gender equality by challenging gender roles and putting themselves on the labour market. Throughout this analysis I will take a critical stance on the discourses that have unfolded. In the following chapter, I will engage in a broader, theoretical discussion of the data.

6.1 Contextualizing the Data

The data selected for this study consisted of 23 reports made by key actors in international governance (including the IOM, UNDP, UNEP, UN Women, the World Bank, and the Asian Development Bank) from the years 2011 to early 2021. None of the documents focused exclusively on gender, migration, and climate change. In some reports, there was an entire chapter devoted to a gendered analysis of migration and climate change. In other reports, this analysis was limited to one page or less.

All the reports were created with the intention of informing policy makers and other stakeholders, and virtually all conclude with specific policy recommendations. Some are created with the direct purpose of filling a knowledge gap that has been expressed at the international level (UNEP/UN Women/UNDP/UNDPPA/PBSO, 2020, p.7). Some reports also target other actors, such as one report written specifically for the private sector (UNDP, 2021). Six reports were created in partnership with other actors who have an interest in the
topic, including the European Union, the European Commission, the Ankara Initiative, Canada-UNDP, and the Norwegian Embassy to Bangladesh.

Interestingly, the contents of many of the reports analyzed are not picked up by media outlets. When they are, discussions on gender, migration, and climate change are sidelined for the more ‘tried and true’ apocalyptic narratives that focus on numerical projections of climate migrants.\textsuperscript{15} Summaries of reports are posted on knowledge sharing platforms dedicated to development, migration, and climate issues, such as ReliefWeb and PreventionWeb. Some reports were also shared by think tanks, but the discussion was more summative rather than a critical engagement (for example, Fatorić, 2015). The reports also made their way through international governance institutions. For instance, the UNFCCC Task Force on Displacement included recently produced documents by the IOM, including ones analyzed in this study, in its yearly update on IOM activities. Finally, newer reports build on and reference older publications, creating intertextual linkages between the documents. For example, the Asian Development Bank’s 2012 analysis of migration and climate change is often referred to in later works by other institutions.

\section*{6.2 Articulations of Gender}

As has been expressed by numerous organizations, gender is an important dimension in migration and climate change that has been neglected for far too long. However, it is important to understand how institutions include gender in their analyses and what they mean by gender, as, ‘how gender is assumed in migration and climate change policy goes on to shape conceptualization of inequalities and consequently what and who is targeted/participates in the interventions’ (Lama et al., 2020, p.2). To do this, I will look at who is included in articulations on gender, migration, and climate change, as well as what is emphasized in these discourses.

A common theme across all the publications is that an analysis of gender often becomes synonymous with women, accentuating women’s vulnerabilities and women’s experiences in migration and climate change. Of the twenty-three reports analyzed, only seven briefly mentioned vulnerabilities faced by men in the context of migration and climate change, with the majority centering on women’s experiences. This overwhelming focus on women when it comes to gendered analyses is symptomatic of climate change studies in general (MacGregor, 2010; Gioli & Milan, 2018). Inclusion of the ways in which men and boys can be vulnerable

\textsuperscript{15} For example, an article from \textit{Time Magazine} on a 2018 report by the World Bank focused on their numeric projections of those who will be internally displaced due to climate change.
in the context of migration and climate change is growing. The IOM (2014) is one of the few institutions to explicitly include this:

While in most cases addressing vulnerabilities based on gender involves promoting women’s equality, it is important to adequately also consider men’s vulnerabilities and integrate the gender dimension in disaster risk assessment, reduction and management (p.105).

This exclusive focus on women tends to reify women as an inherently vulnerable group, a thread I will pick up again in the next section.

All the publications view gender as a men/women binary. As a result, a gender analysis in the publications is often conceptualized as a ‘men versus women’ dichotomy, highlighting the differences between men and women. The Asian Development Bank and the World Bank offer some examples:

Women respond to disasters by mobilizing social networks, whereas men more frequently adopt strategies that take them away from their families or communities (ADB, 2012, p.49).

Men are more likely than women to use migration as an adaptation strategy...In some cases, however, women are more likely to migrate (WB, 2021, p.45).

This men/women’s binary means that the realities faced by individuals who have a gender identity outside of this binary, including people who are transgender, non-binary, or intersex, are marginalized. While most documents acknowledge that gender shapes every stage of the migratory experience, virtually none of the documents acknowledge the experiences of those who are outside of the men/women binary. The IOM (2015) stands as the lone exception:

The roles, expectations, relationships and power dynamics associated with being a man or woman, boy or girl, and whether one identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and/or intersex (LGBTI), can significantly affect all aspects of the migration process, and also be affected in new ways by migration (p.30).

However, a more robust gender analysis that goes beyond the men/women binary is not incorporated into any IOM reports on gender, migration, and climate change after 2015.

In the publications, discussions of gender, migration, and climate change are focused on articulating differences in vulnerabilities to climate change between men and women.
Vulnerability, according to the discourse, is expressed in terms of measurable, material indicators. These include levels of poverty, workloads, education, and access to resources. For example, the Asian Development Bank (2012) links poverty levels to climate change vulnerability:

The stronger relationship between women and poverty and between women and vulnerability to environmental impacts, and the fact that women in many countries of Asia and the Pacific (particularly in the developing countries) are less powerful than men, means that environmental impacts are strongly gender specific (p.49).

A similar sentiment is expressed by the IOM (2017a):

In Kenya, women are particularly vulnerable because of their household responsibilities and their economic marginalization (p.28).

This understanding of gendered differences in vulnerability shows interdiscursivity to previous discourses in policymaking on the relationship between gender and climate change, in which vulnerability is understood as measurable, material impacts (Lama et al., 2020).

All the publications acknowledge that ‘climate change impacts and the use of migration as a coping strategy are far from gender neutral’ (ADB, 2012, p.49). However, the reasons explaining gendered differences in climate change adaptation vary from publication to publication. For some publications, gendered differences are explained in terms of gender roles or sociocultural norms. From the World Bank and the UNEP/UN Women/UNDP/UNDPPA/PBSO:

Gender norms for migration influence who is more likely to migrate when climate pressures intensify (WB, 2018a, p.36).

Gender roles, relations, norms and expectations significantly affect women’s and men’s decisions to migrate, and their experiences of migration in the context of climate change (UNEP/UN Women/UNDP/UNDPPA/PBSO 2020, p.20).

These reasonings draw on earlier discourses regarding gender and climate change. According to Arora-Jonsson (2011), discourses on gender and climate change typically explain gender disparities in terms of gender roles and do not incorporate a deep analysis of how power
relations shape vulnerabilities across populations. However, some publications take into account power relations that go beyond gender norms. As explained by the IOM (2014):

The relationship between gender, vulnerability and probability of migration is more difficult to explain since it is shaped by other social, cultural, economic, ecological and political factors (p.105).

This more nuanced understanding of vulnerability also aligns with an overall discursive shift in which vulnerability in discourses on gender, migration, and climate change is increasingly understood as being intersectional and contextual. I will further explore these arguments in the next section.

6.3 ‘The Feminization of Vulnerability’

There is an interesting tension going on in the publications when it comes to articulating gender, migration, and climate change. On one hand, a handful of documents assert the agency of women and warn against them being labeled simply as victims in climate change discourses. This is highlighted particularly in the Global Compact for Migration (2018, 14g):

It [The Global Compact] mainstreams a gender perspective and promotes gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, recognizing their independence, agency and leadership in order to move away from addressing migrant women primarily through a lens of victimhood.

At the same time, many of the publications analyzed repeatedly label women as a vulnerable group. As previously mentioned, debates on migration and climate change have often been discussed as being gender neutral, and when gender is brought into the analysis, it is often to emphasize the vulnerability of women in the context of migration and climate change (Gioli & Milan, 2018; Rothe, 2017). As argued by Djoudi et al. (2016), this has led to a ‘feminization of vulnerability’ in which women are continually discursively reproduced as a vulnerable group, despite research suggesting more complex conclusions.

There is a general acceptance amongst the documents that women are more vulnerable to both environmental disasters and slow-onset effects of climate change. Consequently, the assumed vulnerability of women becomes an ideological effect. The IOM (2019a) writes:
Women are particularly vulnerable to environmental change as they often are the most socio-economically marginalized, bear the brunt of domestic labour and face unequal access to land and decent employment (p.7).

Further, as noted by the Asian Development Bank (2012), in the context of natural disasters women are more prone to serious injury and death:

There is a disproportionate risk to women from natural disasters. More women than men die in severe storms in flooding because of a lack of mobility due to gender barriers, the fact that women are less likely to know how to swim than men, and other factors (p.49).

According to the IOM, the vulnerability of women in the context of climate change is proven based on ‘data and experiences’ (IOM, 2020, p.40).

These arguments show interdiscursivity with pre-existing discourses of women’s vulnerability in the face of climate change that are found in policies and research. Climate change discourses have argued that women are more affected by climate change due to their social status, being overrepresented among the poor, and their higher mortality rate during natural disasters (Macgregor, 2010; Arora-Jonsson, 2011). Similarly, women are often portrayed by institutions, NGOs, and the media as being ‘on the front lines’ of climate change due to their marginalized position and their domestic responsibilities (see UNEP, 2011).

When discussing migration and climate change, institutions typically envision a dynamic wherein men typically migrate, and women are ‘left behind’ to navigate the challenges of not having a male head of household. As outlined by the IOM and the UNDP:

Women left behind bear the responsibility for taking care of children and the elderly, managing household assets and responding to new challenges (IOM, 2020, p.259).

The increased incidence of male outmigration to urban areas for employment serves to intensify women’s workloads, both paid and unpaid (UNDP, 2016, p.10).

This state of being ‘left behind’ is linked to vulnerability, as it is assumed female-headed households are poorer, have less resources, and face social marginalization. The IOM (2017b) writes:
The outmigration of men could increase the vulnerability of women due to an increase in their workload...unsafe working conditions, exploitation and loss of respect (p.107).

The World Bank (2018a) echoes this sentiment, adding that high incidences of male migration can be a security concern:

Where only men migrate, women, children, people with disabilities, and the elderly left behind are at greater risk of food insecurity and personal safety (p.29).

Further, when women migrating is brought into the picture, it is emphasized how they are prone to exploitation and trafficking (ADB, 2012; WB, 2018a).

These arguments reflect a discursive trend in climate change discourses that has been coined by Djoudi et al. (2016) as ‘the feminization of vulnerability.’ It should be noted that this perspective does not intend to trivialize or downplay vulnerabilities faced by some women when it comes to climate change. Rather, it is to problematize the extent to which ‘women’ can be labeled as a vulnerable group. Djoudi et al. (Ibid.) conducted a meta-study of climate change studies literature that includes a gender analysis, focusing on how women’s vulnerability is determined. Studies on vulnerability tend to link female-headed households to climate change vulnerability, due to their social standing, lower education, lack of reliable income, and limited social networks. Similar linkages were made in research on the feminization of poverty, arguing that female-headed households were inherently more vulnerable to poverty, despite research casting doubt on this generalization (see Arora-Jonsson, 2011 for an overview). According to Djoudi et al. (2016, p.255), ‘the existing evidence on the comparative vulnerability of female and male headed households is not sufficient to draw strong conclusions that one is worse off or better than the other.’

Research focusing on gender, migration, and climate change has shown that in some contexts certain women are more vulnerable to the effects of climate change (Chindarkar, 2012). However, in these instances gender is also intersecting with a number of other identities and subject positions and ‘women’ as a monolithic needs to rightly be problematized, as vulnerability to climate change is also determined by race, ethnicity, class, age, sexuality (dis)ability, and so on. Additionally, studies concerning climate change frequently lack a gender perspective, so there are gaps in the data on how climate change effects are impacted by gender. Gioli and Milan (2018) point out that policies and documents often take a few studies on climate change and then apply them broadly, de-contextualizing the data. For
Djoudi et al. (2016), this ‘feminization of vulnerability’ discourse materializes when studies evidencing female-headed household vulnerability are then used to justify a generalized women’s vulnerability to the effects of climate change.

In the publications there is a possible discursive shift moving away from this ‘feminization of vulnerability’ towards a more intersectional understanding of vulnerability. To go back to Fairclough (1992), the existing discourse of assumed vulnerability is being challenged by a growing awareness on how vulnerability is contextual and dependent on a number of factors, potentially resulting in the creation of a new discourse. According to the IOM (2020):

> Conditions linked with socioeconomic and political processes, often determined long before a displacement is triggered, intersect with factors such as age, gender, ability, ethnicity and other individual or collective factors, to shape the differential vulnerability of different people and groups, within and across communities (p.39).

However, many current publications, including ones published in the past few years, are still quick to define women as being inherently vulnerable to negative outcomes of migration and climate change, as well as being ‘dependent’ on men. The World Bank (2018a) writes:

> Women’s dependence on remittances from men involves sensitive intrahousehold power relations. Women face increased vulnerability and workload as a result of the loss or inconsistency of the household male’s income, despite remittances, and female migrants can be victims of human trafficking (p.155).

While the ‘feminization of vulnerability’ still figures heavily in discourses on gender, migration, and climate change, it also appears that more nuanced, intersectional understandings of vulnerability are beginning to gain traction in mainstream discourse.

### 6.4 Migration as Empowerment

As previously discussed in Chapter 2, early debates on climate change and migration were clouded by both environmental determinism and a pathologization of migration. However, in the past decade, perspectives have shifted towards a more optimistic view. First, the relationship between migration and climate change is thought to be highly contextual; instead of simplistic ‘climate disasters will trigger migration’ analyses, migration was conceptualized
as being influenced by multiple factors intersecting in dynamic ways. Second, migration is not just seen as a problem, but as a possible adaptation strategy to climate change. The migration-as-adaptation thesis, now a dominant discourse in discussions on migration and climate change, rose out of this line of thinking.

As outlined in the previous section, women are often articulated as being particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change. When discussing migration and climate change, dominant discourses often assert that predominantly men migrate, leaving women behind to deal with the burdens caused by male out-migration. However, many of the publications also emphasized that migration can be empowering and bring opportunities for women. The underlying logic behind this gives two interconnected explanations: (1) as a consequence of migration, both women and men take on new roles and responsibilities that can challenge pre-existing gender systems, and (2) through migration, women gain skills and earn money that can be used to help households cope with environmental stressors. These arguments echo the optimistic reasonings of the migration-as-adaptation thesis, viewing migration as a possible solution to the problems presented by climate change rather than a failure to adapt.

6.4.1 Migration and Transforming Gender Roles

The first claim under this discourse made by many of the institutions is that through migration, women (and men) take on new roles and responsibilities which can empower women as well as challenge gender roles in their community of origin. In instances of male out-migration, women become responsible for running the household and taking on tasks traditionally done by men. According to the World Bank (2018a):

Where male household heads migrate for work, women may increasingly manage household finances. In agriculture, for example, male migration leaves many women as the de facto head of household, with more responsibility for overseeing and maintaining subsistence production for the family (p.35).

Whereas in the previously mentioned ‘feminization of vulnerability’ discourse this increased responsibility was linked to heightened burdens faced by women, under this discourse it is argued that being the de facto head of household can lead to more power for women. The IOM (2017b, p.107) asserts: ‘Male out-migration could also empower women to revamp traditional roles, increase their access to public decision-making forums, and seek new livelihood
opportunities.’ As echoed by the Asian Development Bank (2012, p.49), this gives women ‘greater autonomy, decision-making power, and independence.’

Further, it is argued, these new responsibilities for women can lead to a change in gender roles, as women move into positions both within the family and the community that are typically occupied by men, and vice versa. In the context of women’s migration, the gendered division of labour can change as men take on tasks typically done by women. As explained by the World Bank (2018a):

In their wives’ absence, husbands have taken on greater responsibilities for child care, housework, and agriculture. These changes in the division of labor have seen women gain influence in household purchasing and investment decisions, especially concerning remittances (p.35).

As noted by Rothe (2017), these arguments articulate migration as being a catalyst for transforming gender relations. This invokes Methmann and Oels’ (2015) concept of resilience as transformation, in which systems are able to transform into something new in the face of dramatic change. Further, this notion of transformation aligns with gender mainstreaming, a dominant strategy in international governance, defined as ‘the transformation of discriminatory social institutions such as laws, cultural norms, and practices that limit women’s access to rights and opportunities’ (UNFCCC, 2016, p.5 in Rothe, 2017, p.43).

The claims put forward by these organizations, that migration can lead to changes in gender roles and inherently improve the social positioning of women, are a lot more nuanced than some let on. Some organizations, particularly the IOM, slightly diverge from the optimistic picture painted by other actors. While agreeing that migration can have positive benefits and the ability to transform family and community relations, it is also stressed that migration can also lead to new challenges:

However, it is important to underline that migration can also exacerbate existing inequalities between women and men, expose them to new vulnerabilities, and intensify gendered experiences of poverty, discrimination and socioeconomic inequality (IOM, 2014, p.103).

The publications analyzed use a handful of academic studies as justification for the transformative qualities of migration, the majority done in South East Asia. As highlighted earlier, research on gender, migration, and climate change is relatively scant, and publications
are usually relying on a small number of studies that are highly contextual (Gioli & Milan, 2018). There is a danger of taking these studies and generalizing them for policy recommendations. According to researchers (Chindarkar, 2012; Djoudi et. al, 2016), there is some evidence that climate adaptation processes can lead to more freedom for women and a change in gender roles (for example, see Djoudi & Brockhaus, 2011 and Nielsen et al., 2012). At the same time, other research shows that gender hierarchies can be resilient in the face of disaster, conflict, and social change (Gioli et. al 2014; Fröhlich & Gioli, 2015). According to the IOM (2020, p.41), empowerment experienced by women ‘may also imply additional exposure to risks of violence where new gender roles and responsibilities are not accepted by the family or community.’ Additionally, while gender dynamics can change in the case of migration and climate change, these may only be temporary as there is a lack of long-term data (Fröhlich & Gioli, 2015). Positive changes in gender relations generated by migration will also be impacted by race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, nationality, age, religion, (dis)ability, and so on, and it is hard to talk about gender in isolation of these other categories.

6.4.2 Migration and Displacement as an Opportunity

The second claim under this empowering discourse posits that migration and displacement in the context of climate change can be viewed as an opportunity for women to find employment, gain skills, and earn money that can be used to help their families. This can lead to women having a more influential standing in their families, as well as additional resources to cope with external shocks. The UNDP/ODI (2017) writes:

Increasing participation in the migrant labour force can give women greater voice in family and community affairs, and economic resources for dealing with disasters (p.13).

A number of publications also linked empowerment to adopting new demeanours and skills that are assumed to assist them on the labour market. In this sense, empowerment becomes linked to embodying an ‘entrepreneurial’ ethos. According to the UNDP (2021):

Displacement can, however, break down cultural barriers, to the benefit of women, as under the different circumstances present at their destination, women may, for example, adopt new entrepreneurial behaviours (p.64).
In a similar vein, the Asian Development Bank (2012, p.49) asserts that increased decision-making power can turn women into ‘self-confident, independent female managers.’

These arguments that migration and displacement can be an opportunity for women that can leave them empowered, confident, and independent presents a gendered dimension of the migration-as-adaptation discourse. As previously discussed, current discourses on climate change emphasize the need for communities and individuals to be resilient in the face of slow-onset changes and sudden disasters. In resilience thinking, the notion of empowerment is an essential element in creating resilient communities, as it entails providing vulnerable people with the ability to develop adaptive capacities (Chandler & Reid, 2016). This is a more strategic thinking of empowerment, as it is seen as a means of achieving the goal of resiliency. However, empowerment also has another discursive trajectory that refers to challenging power imbalances and ensuring marginalized people have resources needed to achieve equality (Agarwal, 2009). The empowerment discourse of gender, migration, and climate change then creatively mixes these two discourses together, linking this more humanistic notion of empowerment with empowerment as strategy. As summarized by Rothe (2017, p.44): ‘The empowerment of marginalized women and girls in many communities is seen as desirable not only from a gender equality perspective, but also from a strategic point of view.’ This becomes clear when women who are left behind due to male out-migration become centred in adaptation initiatives. The UNEP (2011) writes:

Women need to be at the heart of adaptation efforts because of the significant roles they play in agriculture, food security, household livelihoods and labour productivity. Within these critical roles, women have valuable knowledge, skills and agency in managing natural resources and are often at the front-line of adaptation to climate change in the context of high rates of men’s out-migration (p.53).

This illustrates how women’s empowerment becomes linked with strategies of climate change adaptation, viewing women as both agents of change and ‘untapped resources’ in adaptation (Wester & Lama 2019, p.68).
Chapter 7: Discussion

In the previous chapter I outlined how gender and gendered differences are understood in gender, migration, and climate change discourses, as well as how notions of vulnerability and empowerment are mobilized in these discourses. In this chapter, I will undertake a more theoretical discussion of the data and discourses. First, I will explain how understandings of gender in the discourses could possibly lead to climate change interventions that fail to address root causes of vulnerability. Additionally, these discourses could have racializing effects. I will also discuss the need for a more nuanced ‘insurgent vulnerability’ that could be based on the principles of decolonial feminisms. Next, I will examine how migration-as-adaptation discourses reflect the wider migration as development paradigm. Continuing to focus on the migration-as-adaptation thesis, I will then look at how these discourses align with neoliberal discourses and how these can be connected to coloniality. I will conclude the chapter with a call to bring justice into discussions of migration and climate change, as well as possible directions for future research.

7.1 Gendered Discourses and the Possibility of Maladaptation

In Sections 6.2 and 6.3, it was discussed that many of the publications analyzed understand gender in terms of a men/women binary, with a focus on the vulnerabilities faced by women. Gendered differences in migration and climate change were understood through comparing indicators between men and women such as higher levels of poverty, increased burdens of domestic work, less power in decision making, and so on. Further, a gendered analysis of migration and climate change tended to explain differences between women and men as a matter of gender roles. This corresponds to previous research of discourses on gender and climate change that argue in these discourses, gender is being treated as a variable and analyses focus on measurable, material impacts (MacGregor, 2010; Lama et al., 2020). Further, these articulations can possibly reproduce gender stereotypes rather than challenge the status quo (Wester & Lama, 2019; Rothe, 2017).

The conceptualization of gender that is employed in these analyses on gender, migration, and climate change has its roots in modernity/coloniality. From a decolonial feminist perspective, this fixation on a women/men dichotomy is in line with the dismissal and subjugation of other gender identities that occurs under coloniality. Sexual dimorphism is taken as the natural order in a society, ignoring the fact that around the world different cultures had
different gender identities that went beyond such a dichotomy. For those outside of this framework, their experiences are merely a footnote in the discourse, if they are included at all. This exclusion can ultimately become destructive, as the vulnerability of those in question is not addressed and they are more exposed to risk. Previous research has shown how individuals with gender identities outside of this Western binary have certain vulnerabilities in the face of environmental disaster, and policies that take a heteronormative stance can further exacerbate these (see Dominey-Howes et al., 2014 and Mustafa et al., 2015).

Another concern is such analyses rely on static ‘men versus women’ arguments, allowing linear and simplistic explanations to become the norm; additionally, relations of power that shape vulnerabilities across different social groups are not addressed (Arora-Jonsson, 2011; Lama et al., 2020). Further, these conceptualizations can lead to well-intentioned but misguided policies. According to Nightingale (2017), climate change adaptation efforts thus far have focused on addressing these measurable impacts but have failed to include relations of power and politics that shape vulnerability. This is echoed in Shrestha’s work (2019), showing that adaptation efforts tend to underestimate or ignore how local politics and power relations play out in projects meant to mitigate the effects of climate change. Adaptation initiatives, consequently, become a distraction from addressing the roots of vulnerability or may even compound vulnerability (Nightingale, 2017).  

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7.2 Adaptation ‘Under Western Eyes’

The discourses analyzed could potentially have racializing effects. As noted by MacGregor (2010), the main protagonist in discourses on gender and climate change are women in the Global South. This was also seen in the empirical material analyzed. This has the potential to portray these women as one-dimensional objects who only enter the discussion as climate victims or as climate saviours waiting to be empowered (MacGregor, 2010; Fröhlich & Gioli, 2015). Likewise, Alaimo (2009) points out how discourses on climate change present a troubling binary between scientific knowledge on climate change, a masculine discourse, and the vulnerability of impoverished women. Intersectional nuances that also play a role in vulnerability are not considered, same with women’s lived experiences and agency (Djoudi et al., 2016; Gioli & Milan, 2018).

16 Similarly, Ginty (2018) argues that adaptation initiatives in the Pacific following neoliberal logics are potentially leading to maladaptation, and even a new category of displacement resulting from this maladaptation.
In her essay ‘Under Western Eyes’, Mohanty (1984) argues that Western feminists discursively frame the ‘Third World Woman’ as a static, unchanging figure, marked as different from Western women through descriptors such as poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, sexually constrained, domestic, family-oriented, victimized, and so on. While some institutions note the problems with this representation, it continues to be discursively reproduced. Further, the discourses create a clear line between those who are tasked with solving the problems of climate change and the Others who are impacted: ‘It perpetuates the idea that environmental problems like climate change are for “them” and not for “us”’ (MacGregor, 2010, p.227). It is necessary here to revisit Baldwin’s point that the new racial logic of migration and climate change ‘racializes bodies on the basis of their adaptive/maladaptive or resilient/non-resilient capacities’ (Baldwin, 2017b, p.5). This group of women discussed in these discourses, marked as different by their maladaptive potential and their predisposition to vulnerability, are discursively produced as an Other that needs to be saved.

7.3 ‘Insurgent Vulnerability’ and Decolonial Feminisms

The empirical material shows possible evidence of a discursive shift away from a static understanding of vulnerability, including characterizing women as an inherently vulnerable group, to a more nuanced, intersectional understanding of vulnerability that considers multiple factors and local contexts. Critiques of the ‘feminization of vulnerability,’ a concept that is already present in discourses of gender and climate change, argue that the construction of women as a vulnerable group essentializes women in the discourse as a homogenous group, their vulnerability determined because of their lack of opportunities, resources, and freedom vis-à-vis men (Arora-Jonsson, 2011; Fröhlich & Gioli, 2015). It is argued that vulnerability should be perceived as more nuanced than these simplistic framings. Research that has been critical of these dominant discourses use an intersectional approach to vulnerability, stressing that vulnerability is highly contextual and class, gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, and other categories assume importance in different situations (Arora-Jonsson, 2011; Djoudi et. al, 2016). Similar to this, Alaimo (2009, p.33) envisions a type of vulnerability which she calls ‘insurgent vulnerability’ that does not reinforce gendered binaries, but instead ‘endorses biodiversity, cultural diversity, and sexual diversity, and recognizes that we all inhabit trans-corpeal interchanges, processes, and flows.’ This framing of vulnerability would necessitate a shift from viewing gender as an empirical category (men versus women) to understanding
gender as a discursive construction that is entwined with other relations of power that shape vulnerabilities and responses to climate change (Djoudi et al., 2016; Lama et al., 2020).

In a similar vein, Lugones (2010b) argues that while intersectionality has been a useful concept for analyzing how institutions fail to account for oppression towards women of colour, dominant social categories adhere to a categorical logic that renders them as homogeneous and separable. Therefore, categories such as ‘woman,’ ‘black,’ and ‘poor’ are constructed in ways that do not include people who belong to all these categories: ‘When one is trying to understand women at the intersection of race, class, and gender, non-white black, mestiza, indigenous, and Asian women are impossible beings.’ (Ibid., p.757). This criticism of intersectionality is important as it serves as a reminder to not reify gender as a given category of organization.

For Lugones (2010b), decolonial feminisms emerge from the zone of colonial difference and aims to delink from the coloniality of gender, meaning that ‘women’ is a category emerging out of modernity’s need to construct hierarchical orderings of both human and non-human beings. Pagán (2020, p.26) follows this thread and applies it to the climate crisis, arguing that a decolonial feminist integral ecology is needed in order to confront the severity of climate change we need to confront ‘the onto-anthropological subject through the lens of modernity/coloniality, not only through the lens of modernity, in order to properly understand and resist the nexus of the coloniality of being/coloniality of gender and the space of the colonial difference where genocide and ecocide intersect.’ This gives space to confront inequalities in a manner that does not privilege human beings over non-human species, and links with the ‘insurgent vulnerability’ described by Alaimo (2009).

7.4 Migration as Development: The Mantra Returns

As was seen in the empirical material, migration was optimistically framed as an opportunity for women and men to empower themselves by challenging gender roles, seeking employment, and gaining valuable skills. Such discourses reflect the wider migration as development paradigm and are a testament to how discourses around migration and climate change have become increasingly ‘developmentalized’ (Bettini & Gioli, 2016).

Dominant views on the relationship between migration and development have changed over time. De Haas (2012, p.11) describes attitudes in policy and research towards migration and development as swinging like a ‘pendulum’ between optimistic and pessimistic outlooks. From the 1990s onward, migration has been optimistically framed by neoliberal thinking as a tool for development that can empower families and communities. New research focused on
the role of diasporas in development and the multiplier effects of remittances (Bettini & Gioli, 2016). Numerous institutions began to enthusiastically embrace migration and its potential for development, and in 2006 ‘Migration and Development’ was integrated into the United Nations’ framework on the Global Governance of Migration (Delgado Wise, 2018).

The dominant discourse on the connection between migration and development posits that remittances sent by migrants to their families help facilitate development within communities of origin. Remittances are regarded as a ‘bottom up’ source of development finance. Because remittances are not as bound to political and financial controls as large-scale development programmes are, it is often argued that remittances flow directly to the people who really need aid (de Haas, 2010). Migration then transforms the poor into agents of development by giving them access to resources that can bring them out of poverty (Delgado Wise, 2018). Further, there is a complementary relationship between sending and receiving countries, as receiving countries (typically in the Global North) need immigration to ensure population growth and to fulfill needs in the labour market. Under this discourse, circular and temporary migration schemes are also seen by receiving countries as an attractive compromise and a sound migration policy (Geiger & Pécoud, 2013). In this sense, migration is portrayed as a ‘triple win’ in which migrants, host societies, and areas of origin benefit.

The nexus between migration and development has been problematized by scholars for failing to include critical aspects of this relationship. It is argued that those promoting migration as development fail to interrogate structural and hierarchical relations that also impact development (de Haas, 2012; Geiger & Pécoud, 2013). From a decolonial perspective, the concept of development itself is inherently colonial as it suggests that human progress can be placed on a timeline, implying that poor countries, many being former colonies, are further behind and should strive for ‘progress’ by emulating wealthier nations (Casas, 2013). Further, the mantra does little to discuss the workings of contemporary capitalism and the everyday lived experience of migrant workers and their families. Delgado Wise (2018, p.167) advocates for a Southern Perspective of migration and development that offers a more nuanced view than the mainstream discourse, also taking into account: ‘(i) an analysis of the multiple violations of human and labour rights suffered by the migrants themselves and their families; and (ii) the root causes of the complex relationships underlying migration and development under neoliberal globalisation.’ There is also a lack of empirical evidence of the purported assumption that remittances are a catalyst of development in countries of origin. ‘Success stories’ are often context-specific and not easy to replicate in other settings (Bettini & Gioli, 2016). While
migration can have positive benefits, it is certainly not a ‘one stop shop’ for meeting development goals and cannot surmount structural inequalities.

The discourses surrounding the migration-as-adaptation thesis echo the neoliberal optimism that migration can be a driver for development. Despite the migration-as-adaptation discourse arising out of the migration as development paradigm, there has been little cross-fertilization with previous research in development (Bettini & Gioli, 2016). There is a substantive body of work warning against so-called the ‘remittance euphoria’ that characterizes mainstream discourse on migration and development; however, these critiques are largely absent from discourses on migration-as-adaptation (Santos & Mourato, 2021). All the previously mentioned criticisms of migration and development could easily be applied to the migration-as-adaptation thesis. Namely, the root causes of inequality are under analyzed and the lived experience of migrants and their families, the Southern Perspective, are not considered.

Additionally, development narratives tend to neglect gender in their arguments: ‘Important (gendered) dimensions of migration and their embeddedness in the material conditions of labour and remittance economies remain still uncharted territory (Bettini & Gioli 2016, p.182). Kunz (2011, p.1) outlines a Global Remittances Trend (GRT) in which remittances become a ‘global object of knowledge’ and migration and development become both theoretically and practically entwined. Kunz argues that the GRT is gender-blind, and the realities faced by migrant women on the labour market, including gender pay gaps, overrepresentation in the informal economy, and precarious work are either ignored or underestimated. Gioli and Milan (2018) argue that just as the GRT is ignorant of the realities faced by migrant women, so are arguments surrounding migration-as-adaptation. While it becomes a gendered discourse in the sense that it argues that migration is optimistically presented as both an adaptation strategy and an opportunity for women to become empowered and overthrow traditional gender systems, it does not fully consider the lived experiences of migrant women.

7.5 Creating Docile Bodies

According to the institutions analyzed, putting oneself on the labour market and gaining employable skills is linked to empowerment and therefore vital for individual resiliency and climate change adaptation. Much of the literature on discourses surrounding migration-as-adaptation has demonstrated how climate migration management falls in line with neoliberal
discourses that promote individual agency over structural changes and uphold global neoliberal capitalist order. Migration-as-adaptation discourses champion individual efforts to mitigate the effects of climate change and promote labour migration, particularly temporary and circular migratory schemes, as a way individuals from areas vulnerable to environmental degradation can build resilience. Under this discourse, the subjectivity of the climate migrant has changed; instead of being seen as a passive victim or a security threat, the climate migrant becomes a flexible and mobile individual who takes charge of their future by putting themselves on the labour market (Felli, 2013; Bettini, 2014). To go back to the Asian Development Bank, one of the positives of migration as adaptation to climate change was that women can become ‘self-confident, independent female managers’ (ADB, 2012). Under this discourse, climate migrants become docile, entrepreneurial adaptive agents who are responsive and resilient to both environmental changes and neoliberal capitalist relations (Bettini, 2014; Methmann & Oels, 2015).

At its core, the migration-as-adaptation narrative aims to discipline labour mobility. Felli (2013) outlines how the migration-as-adaptation thesis functions as a means of primitive accumulation and upholds neoliberal capitalist relations. As argued by Taylor (2003), capital’s accumulation rests on the insecurity of labour on a global scale. Felli (2013) then argues that climate migration is a case of insecurity management and displacement. Primitive accumulation is the incorporation of populations into capitalist relations; rather than being a simple process of dispossession, it is an ongoing process within capitalism with the aim to constantly constitute and reconstitute the labourer. Ultimately, these processes keep the labourer a dispossessed individual (Ibid.). Temporary and circulatory migration schemes that are championed by migration-as-adaptation proponents create the framework for precarious work. Felli argues that this is not accidental, but rather fundamental to capitalism and its need for endless accumulation. Thus, migration-as-adaptation narratives turn the victims of environmental change into wage labourers, ‘dragging even more individuals into capitalist relations of production’ (Ibid., p. 352).

Others have echoed Felli’s argument but have also included how this disciplining of labour is demarcated along racial lines. As noted by many, the optimistic view of migration as an adaptation strategy is not a call for open borders or mobility justice. Rather, it envisions a very specific type of mobility that is highly regulated and based around labour migration, particular temporary labour migration schemes (Felli & Castree, 2012). However, circulatory migration schemes create conditions of precarity in which migrant labourers are constructed as an ‘Other’ apart from native populations, justifying limited rights and social safety nets.
(Gonzalez, 2020). Gutiérrez Rodríguez (2018) uses ‘the coloniality of migration’ as a framework to explore the connection between racial capitalism and the asylum-migration nexus, arguing that migration and asylum policies, both in the past and contemporary times ultimately contribute to a racialization of the workforce. Following Bhattacharyya’s (2018) analysis of racial capitalism, these racialized divisions of labour are not coincidental, but rather capitalism relegates those deemed expendable, marked by difference, to the most precarious forms of labour.

Circulatory schemes aside, discourses surrounding migration-as-adaptation do little to address the exploitation faced by migrant workers under global capitalism and advocate for workers’ rights. To go back to Delgado Wise (2018), discourses around migration-as-adaptation lack a Southern perspective that includes the root causes of migration and the lived experience of migrants. In a video entitled ‘Bangladesh: Supporting Climate Migrants through Education and Jobs,’ the World Bank (2018b) profiles Monoara, a 23-year-old woman from Bangladesh who moved from her village to Dhaka to work as a seamstress in the garment industry. Her story is promoted as an example of successful migration in the wake of climate change. In the video and successive write up, not once are the working and living conditions of workers in the Bangladeshi garment industry addressed. As reported by the ILO (2016), safety conditions have improved for garment workers after the 2013 Rana Plaza collapse, but there has been resistance in improving workers’ rights. The Covid-19 crisis has also made clear the lack of safety net for these workers. As numerous clothing companies began to cancel orders due to the pandemic, labourers in the garment industry went for months without work, often without unemployment insurance of any kind, or did not receive compensation for completed work (ILO, 2020).

This is where the migration-as-adaptation thesis becomes intertwined with coloniality. For Quijano (2010), the creation of racial differences was essential for the coloniality of power as it facilitated the racialized and gendered division of labour. The colonial capitalist project hinges on zones of extraction where both people and lands are considered expendable in the name of economic development (Bhattacharyya, 2018; Pagán, 2020). The climate migrant envisioned in discourses on migration and climate change is from these zones of extraction, overwhelmingly located in the Global South. To adapt to climate change, they are brought into the global capitalist system through circulatory migration schemes and precarious labour. While they are praised for embodying an entrepreneurial ethos, they are also at the mercy of global labour markets. Further, as argued by Bettini (2014), the migration-as-adaptation thesis is an attempt to make populations on the margins governable and docile to neoliberal order. As
argued by Mark Duffield (2007, in Bettini, 2014), human security has been a technology that has been instrumental in the subjection and disciplining of ‘unruly’ populations in the South in the aftermath of decolonization. Bettini (2014, p.187) uses this argument by Duffield and applies it to the case of migration and climate change, noting ‘the correlation between populations at climate risk and those yet-to-be-governable under the global neoliberal order is almost total.’ Because of their marginality and their state of precarity caused by environmental degradation, these vulnerable populations become potential threats to global order and must be governed, tying in with Baldwin’s (2016) concept of climate migration governance colonizing the future yet-to-come.

7.6 A Matter of Justice

A concerning trend in discourses on migration and climate change is the erasure of questions of justice and an emphasis on individual adaptation. Methmann and Oels (2015) highlight the political context for this shift:

> While those countries affected by climate change demand compensation for the loss and damage caused by climate change, industrialized nations are more than reluctant to grant sufficient sums of money to compensate for the enormous losses. In this context, climate-induced migration appears as a discourse that completely sidesteps these issues (p.62).

Under the banner of resilience, the implications of climate change are redefined as an opportunity for those affected by climate change to define their own future (Ibid.). As noted by Bettini et. al (2017, p.354), the inherent rights of those facing the perils of climate change, as well as the idea of responsibility, becomes ‘less relevant, if not irrelevant.’ Additionally, this focus from mitigation to adaptation leads to a depoliticization of climate change, as it is presented as being something beyond human control and addressing the root causes of climate change are silenced (Methmann & Oels, 2015). As elaborated by McNamara and Gibson (2009), dominant discourses on migration and climate change in the context of the Pacific Islands tend to silence demands from small Pacific Island states that industrialized countries must reduce greenhouse gases. Through the discourse increasingly emphasizing individual adaptation, structural inequalities are erased from the migration-climate nexus, which ‘can be seen as symptomatic of a shrinking of the conditions posing the question of climate justice’ (Bettini et. al 2017, p.348).
This is also bound with mobility justice, articulated by Sheller (2018, p.22) as ‘how we might theorize justice in relation to liberal and neoliberal power, global inequalities, and colonial histories and postcolonial presents of uneven mobilities.’ Discourses on migration and climate change seem to be in tension with the reality we witness today. On one hand, in discourses of migration and climate change, migration is praised as an adaptation strategy that can build both individual and community resilience. On the other hand, we are currently witnessing a period in which border regimes, particularly those in the Global North, are becoming increasingly restrictive and brutal, geared at keeping out the ‘Others,’ even if international law is violated in the process. It is troubling that while it is acknowledged that more people will be displaced, choose to migrate, or be rendered immobile due to climate change, contemporary migration governance is becoming increasingly punitive. There is a need for concepts of justice, including climate justice and mobility justice, to be brought into discussions on migration and climate change. This also involves moving beyond a Western notion of migration, as many Indigenous communities have long-standing traditions of environmental mobility (Whyte et. al, 2019).

7.7 Future Directions

Research on gender, migration, and climate change is a small, but growing, field. From the international community, there is a recognition that collecting gender-disaggregated data is a need for achieving sustainable development, and there have been calls for more data and gender statistics. According to Gioli and Milan (2018, p.143), qualitative migration research, typically used by feminist researchers, needs to be better integrated with quantitative research for a gender analyses that goes beyond an ‘add women and stir’ approach. To add to this, data that takes the household as the main unit of analysis can potentially not fully account for the wider power dynamics present in the community (Ibid.). Therefore, it is necessary for further research to take a gender relational approach that considers gender as one factor amongst many. Additionally, while much research focuses on vulnerabilities, there is a lack of research on the lived experience, leadership, and agency of those impacted by climate change.

As previously discussed, I was only able to focus on a limited number of documents for this study due to the time period and had to be very strict in my selection. These elite discourses also make their way into other institutions, including NGOs, national governments, local organizations, and other movements. An interesting point for future exploration could be how these discourses are interpreted, negotiated, and contested by other individuals and
organizations. This includes organizing and frameworks being created outside of these dominant institutions. There are growing movements that offer alternative framings of migration and climate change that focus on the self-determination of communities affected by climate change (see Gonzalez, 2020 for an overview). These frameworks can be valuable when it comes to developing a rights-based approach for those affected by climate change.

From a theoretical perspective, there is lots of potential for exploring the relationship between climate change and migration. The change in debates on migration and climate change, from the maximalist to the minimalist perspective, necessitated a shift from viewing migration as a problem to be solved to seeing it as one adaptation strategy out of many. This has the potential to view migration as something different than it is frequently conceptualized in Western discourses. Baldwin et. al (2019, p.290) use the term ‘anthropocene mobilities’ to emphasize that movement should be seen as a ‘founding condition rather than an exception to social life.’ Further, incorporating Indigenous perspectives on environmental change and mobility can complicate Western discourses on migration and climate change. These perspectives can help re-centre debates on migration and climate change to be focused on justice.
Chapter 8: Conclusion

The aim of this study was to investigate how the relationship between gender, migration, and climate change is articulated in discourses at the level of international institutions using a decolonial perspective. The empirical material showed that most institutions articulate gender as a male/female binary, with a focus on measurable, material indicators of vulnerability. The notion of vulnerability figures heavily in the discourses, and women are often discursively reproduced as a vulnerable group. This is in tension with empirical research which contends that determining vulnerability is complex and dependent on local contexts, as well as other intersecting factors. Another discourse found in the material optimistically framed migration as an opportunity for women to earn an income and gain employable skills. Emerging from this logic, migration was seen as empowering as it could also potentially allow women and men to challenge and shape gender roles and gendered relations of power. There is potential evidence for shifts in the discourse towards a more nuanced understanding of gender and vulnerability that is based on the concept of intersectionality. This aligns with wider goals in international governance to move away from victimizing discourses.

From a decolonial feminist perspective, this understanding of gender can be seen as upholding sexual dimorphism, which has its roots in the colonial encounter. Further, it is argued by critical scholars that conceptualizations of gender or other social inequalities that purely focus on the measurable impacts can fail to consider the root causes of vulnerability. This leads to policies and initiatives that, while they may have good intentions, end up treating the symptoms of vulnerability rather than eradicating it. New conceptualizations of vulnerability, rooted in decolonial feminisms, can potentially allow for an understanding of vulnerability that goes beyond binaries and addresses the structural factors that lead to vulnerability.

A decolonial reading of the migration-as-adaptation narrative brings to light how these optimistic framings of migration can potentially lead to maintaining a racialized migrant labour workforce, as well as how migration-as-adaptation aligns with neoliberal governance that favours individual efforts over structural change. The subjectivity of the climate migrant also changes, as they are now framed as an endlessly flexible, adaptive individual who exercises agency by putting themselves on the labour market. The intention here is not to argue for less migration or generate nostalgia for previous discourses that were hostile towards migration. Rather, the intention is to emphasize that discussions of migration as an adaptation strategy should be centred around migrants’ rights, workers’ rights, as well as accounting for the self-determination of communities affected by climate change.
The future when it comes to migration and climate change is uncertain. Apocalyptic scenarios that are envisioned in mainstream discourses will lead to migration governance that is based on fear and protecting national interests. While newer discourses appear to be more egalitarian, evidence shows they will likely uphold the status quo rather than bring structural change. However, approaches based around rights and responsibilities that confront hegemonic narratives could potentially bring justice into the discussion where it rightfully belongs.
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