Archaeologies of the future
Tracing the lineage of contemporary discourses on the climate-migration nexus

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Abstract

This chapter traces the historical lineage of today's concerns over climate migration, a topic of increasing salience in international (climate) policy arenas. The starting point is the idea that the widespread emphasis on the novelty of climate migration obfuscates the 'old' ideological roots on which contemporary discourses build. By producing a lineage of contemporary debates, the chapter highlights their ideal continuity with 'ancient' debates on populations and resources in classical political economy, as well as to spectre of the unruly and swelling population in the 'global south' that haunted Northern environmental discourses since the late 1960s. The historical vista offered by the chapter also contributes to clearly detect the emergence of new articulations of the link migration-environment-development, with aspects of radical discontinuity from the past. In light of these specific continuities and ruptures, the debates on climate migration fall under a somehow dark light – they appear not only as the response to the new set of challenges posed by climate change, but as a (re)emergence of the fear for/fixation with populations in the global South (seen as a dangerous threat to socio-economic and/or ecological stability), rearticulated via neoliberal discourses that aim at ruling through the production of resilient subjects.

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Moving climates – growing concerns

The question of how climate change will influence human migration has become a source of great concern, in academia, policy and advocacy domains. Both in the natural and social sciences, there is almost unanimous consensus on the importance of addressing the climate change-mobility nexus (IPCC, 2014, Baldwin and Gemenne, 2013). Even migration scholars and advocacy organizations, once alienated by the environmental determinism of the early debates on environmentally induced displacement (cfr. Castles, 2002, Black, 2001), are now engaging with the nexus. The 'success' of climate-related migration (hereafter, CM) could be witnessed at the latest Conference of Parties (COP) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), held in Paris in 2015. As we will see, numerous initiatives at the summit targeted CM, which also figured in the formal outcomes of COP 21.

The presence of the future, the absence of the past

On the way to its current 'popularity', CM has been understood through a variety of competing framings (for a recent overview, Ransan-Cooper et al., 2015), with agitated debates inside and outside the palaces of international climate diplomacy. Taken together, the shock waves originated by the recent 'refugees crisis' in Europe and the increasing likelihood of extremely severe climate impacts (IPCC, 2013) confirm the pressing character of the phenomena CM points to. However, this chapter deliberately 'zooms out' of immediate questions on whether and how we should (or should not) understand and act upon CM. instead, it interrogates the historical lineage of contemporary discourses. While the links between environmental change and human mobility have been researched within migration studies (cfr. Piguet, 2012), demography (cfr. Hunter, 2005, de Sherbinin et al., 2007), anthropology (Orlove, 2005) and environmental history (Worster, 2004), very seldom has there been a serious engagement with the question of where contemporary discourses on CM come from. This oblivion on the 'history' of CM arguably depends on the aura of novelty surrounding the issue. The link between mobility and climate change is discussed as something new and alter (ontologically, epistemologically and politically) to what we have seen before – as symptomatized by the incessant calls for new research, new analytical tools, new policy designs[1]. For sure, the fact that human impacts have moved the whole planetary

[1] As acutely noted by Baldwin and colleagues, most interventions discuss the nexus in the 'future-conditional' tense (Baldwin et al., 2014). Climate refugees or migrants are discussed as figures of the future, outcomes of what will have happened (or not) after climate change and possibly 'our' responses to it have kicked in. To be sure, present and past do not disappear from these narrations of CM, but assume a peculiar role. As the plan of actuality (in the discourse) shifts into the future, current and past phenomena become anecdotal evidence of what will (finally?) happen *then*. This can be seen in the problematic way the recent Syrian tragedy has been mobilized as an anticipation of how a warmer world could look like: the

climate (and 'Earth System') into a new state configures climate change as an unprecedented phenomenon. Unparalleled is also the combination of intensity, spread and pace of the expected changes. But of course, the fact that climate change and its impacts are in several ways unprecedented does not mean that the ways in which we make sense of and act upon them are detached from past and present politics. It goes without saying that the repression of these questions has political imports and effects. This chapter is motivated by the conviction that it impossible to grasp the future implications of contemporary discourses without a substantial engagement with their past.

In the following, we will zoom out and explore the historical lineage of contemporary discourses on CM. When looking at their *longue durée*, the problematization of *population* in the 'global South' as a source of danger emerges as a thread linking future-oriented concerns over climate displaced to longstanding debates on economy, development, the environment. Focusing on population, this chapter will propose a heuristic periodization of the debate on CM into three phases – a prehistory, a history, and a contemporary period. Drawing on Harvey's work on the role of population in classic political economy (Harvey, 1974), we will locate the deep roots of CM in the fear of population informing Malthus and his proto-definition of 'eco-scarcity'. The next stop of our journey through time will be in the 1960s, when Northern environmental discourses erupted onto the scene, and out of which concerns over so called 'environmental refugees' emerged. In this phase, we will encounter Malthus' reincarnation in the fears for 'population bombs' and the swelling, unruly population in the 'global South' that ran through modern environmentalism. Moving towards the contemporary phases of the debate, we will still encounter the problematization of population as a source of danger, but this time articulated in new biopolitical discourses on climate change, development and resilience.

In the following, we will explore the three phases and trace signs of continuity and ruptures, concluding with some reflections on the political import of current debates on CM.

CM's prehistory, or the ecology of class hatred

When does our 'story' begin? The answer to this question cannot be innocent. In the literature, it is customary to point to the end of the 1970s (e.g. Foresight, 2011, Gemenne, 2011, White, 2011, Laczko and Aghazarm, 2009, Morrissey, 2012), when the UN Environmental Program (El-Hinnawi, 1985) and the World Watch Institute (Jacobsen, 1988)

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projection of the Syrian crisis into the future magically erases the political ecology of the conflict, displaced by a regression into environmental deterministic reading of the events (more on this below).

published two reports that launched the concept of 'environmental refugees'. Although that was a crucial phase, if we zoom out and situate CM in relation to 'old' discussions on environment, population and mobility, a number of important political questions – which are kept out of sight in the contemporary future-oriented debates – come to the fore.

An obvious preliminary remark, which helps to de-naturalize CM and to see through its novelty aura, is that the links between ecological conditions and migration have been discussed in numerous contexts, disciplines, times (although not in relation to global warming). For instance, geographers, demographers, (environmental) historians and anthropologists for a long time have worked on the interaction between ecological conditions and mobility (on this, see Hunter, 2005, Morrissey, 2009, Adamo and Izazola, 2010, de Sherbinin et al., 2007, Marino, 2012). Ample discussions targeted both sides of the relation, i.e. both the impacts of migrants on ecosystems in the areas from and to which they move, and the ways in which ecological changes stimulate or inhibit movements. The wandering of Viking villagers under the push of advancing ices in northern Greenland is an archaic example dating back to 1000-1400 A.D. (for a brief summary, see Orlove, 2005). The uprooting of peasants from the USA plains by a mixed ecological and economic crisis during the so called Dust Bowl in the 1930s is a more recent case (for a critical introduction, see Worster, 2004). Even the pioneers of migration studies – as early as in the 19th century – ranked environmental conditions among the principal factors of population movements (cfr. Piguet, 2012).

Thus – obviously – it is not the first time the links between environmental change and human mobility are discussed. But the next and more important step is to interrogate the roots of contemporary concerns over CM. While it takes some effort to retune one's ears to discourses that sound archaic in comparisons to the current affairs of climate policy, the parallels with old debates on population and environment are staggering.

It could be argued that the not-so-friendly 'dialogue' on population between Karl Marx (1983, Notebook VI) and Thomas Malthus (1996) already contained the seeds for the problematization of population in contemporary discourses on CM. There is a striking assonance between the discussions on resource availability/scarcity and population that animated classic political economy, and the current concerns on climate change, displacement and conflict. In a nutshell, Malthus argued that, while populations grow geometrically, resources to feed them grow arithmetically, at a much slower pace. Thereby, in the graphs Malthusians love to draw, the lines representing population and food availability (or natural resources, or environmental quality, you choose) diverge. Such

arguments build on three Malthusian assumptions – all controversial. First, the divergence of the two lines is assumed to be *natural;* second, this gap is said to *inevitably* cause the emergence of an (uprooted) *surplus population;* third, the dispossessed (because of their moral and material misery) are the cause of social unrest, turmoil and conflict. Thereby the scum (pardon, surplus population) becomes dangerous – in turn creating an imperative for 'society' to control it and restrain its reproduction. It is hard not to see the parallel with today's narratives that identify present and future 'victims' of climate change as the cause of armed conflict, where climate-induced stress assumes the same function of limited land productivity in Malthus' reasoning. According to neo-Malthusian perspectives on CM, climate change, by jeopardizing the resource base of vulnerable areas, will unavoidably create a sorts of surplus population, displaced by global warming – the waves of climate refugees to be feared because of their destabilizing effects (for critique, see Bettini, 2013, Hartmann, 1998, White, 2011). An illustrative example is the outrageous labelling of Syrian displaced as 'climate refugees', a rhetoric very popular in the run-up to the Paris COP. A few research papers provided evidence linking the drought that hit the Fertile Crescent 2007-2010 to anthropogenic climate change, and suggested that the latter may have contributed to the events in Syria (Kelley et al., 2015, Cook et al., 2016). This shaky causal link (for a more articulated account, see e.g. Fröhlich, 2016) was waved by many, including Prince Charles (SkyNews, 2015), as the anticipation of how a warmer planet would look like – with ecological stress said to directly cause armed conflict and originating 'hordes of climate refugees' menacing international security and stability. And all the politics is gone.

To Malthus' take, Marx opposed a relational view on scarcity (what we would now call 'ecological stress'), understood not as a product of an external *nature*, but as linked to specific modes of economic and social (re)production. In Marx' account, a 'surplus population' is functional to the reproduction of a class society, rather than a fact of nature. In the Grundrisse, Marx offers an observation that, in its simplicity, is *classic* and illuminating: while Malthusians measure and model overpopulation as the reason for the collapse of past civilizations (and here J. Diamond's work comes to mind), "we never hear that there were surplus slaves in the antiquity"(Marx, 1983).

What these old, dusty political economic disputes unveil is that.. class matters – regardless of how globalized and evanescent class composition may appear today. This emerges as clearest in the climate-migration-security/conflict link. Such link is not only analytically dubious

(IPCC, 2014, Buhaug et al., 2014). If we spell it out, it also enshrines a Malthusian class fear for the poor (or climate vulnerable). In the economy of the discourses that blame the poor for igniting climate-related conflicts and for future insecurity, there is a missing logical and causal link. Such discourses do not explain how a quarrel over a loaf of bread escalates into an armed conflict between states. It is a class fear (if not hatred) that makes up for that missing link and sustains the vulnerability-conflict causal inference. And this becomes embarrassingly clear against the backdrop of the old Malthus-Marx rivalry.

To be sure (and luckily!), a number of traditions (in academia and in political movements, both within and outside the Marxian field) have articulated the nexus between environment, population and development along progressive lines. Just to name a few, this has been the case for the tradition of political ecology (Blaikie, 1985, Peet and Watts, 2004), environmental justice movements and various forms of 'environmentalisms of the poor' (Martinez-Alier, 2002, Bond, 2012), theories of unequal exchange (Hornborg, 2011), radical critiques to mainstream (sustainable) development (Escobar, 1995, Shiva, 1988). What we are stressing here is the fact that many of the narratives through which CM is narrated today (sometimes, even by progressive forces) embed elements stemming from old conservative, neo-colonial takes on population in the global south. What we see is the continuity of narratives built (more or less ostensibly) on the fear of population (of certain classes) – which will emerge clearly even when moving into the green pastures of modern environmentalism, from which contemporary discourses on CM originated.

History – Population and Northern Environmentalism

In most studies, the story of CM begins with two reports, by the UN Environment Program (El-Hinnawi, 1985) and by the WorldWatch Institute (Jacobsen, 1988). These were key texts, although not only for the reasons most of literature focuses on. For sure, by re-launching the term 'environmental refugee' coined by environmentalist champion Lester Brown a few years earlier (1976), the two reports brought into the limelight the issue of environmentally induced displacement. But more importantly, the two landmark texts started 'spinning' an intelligible and evocative narrative on the nexus between ecological conditions and mobility (what we will call environmental migration, EM), firmly situating it in the landscape of the modern Northern environmental discourses. A closer look at the two texts (in terms of framing, authorship, contents and tones) reveals the imprint of the discourses arising in the

1970 on global environmental challenges such as biodiversity and desertification. We can start by noting that EM was brought into the spotlight by key figures of environmental policy and advocacy of the time, such as the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP, which commissioned El-Hinnawi's (1985) report), the Worldwatch Institute and its founder Lester Brown, and the vocal environmental scientist Normal Myers. It is revealing also that the first alarm bells over ecological displacement came from the 'desertification community', which was concerned that land degradation would lead to large scale uprooting of ecologically vulnerable populations, especially in sub-Saharan Africa (on this link, see Black, 2001, Leighton, 2006, Leighton, 2011, Myers and Kent, 1995, El-Hinnawi, 1985). From the environmental discourses of the time, the debates on EM inherited the quasi-messianic tone urging to rescue the planet from the imminent catastrophe (and here it hard not to think about the present alarmism on climate refugees), the imagined 'hero' (global environmental champions), as well as the belief that international institutions and legislation would 'solve the problem' (on these aspects, see Bettini and Andersson, 2014). The emerging narratives on EM were also contained the contradictions that carved environmental discourses; indeed, the critiques to the concept of environmental refugees (for some early examples, see Findley, 1994, Suhrke, 1994, Kibreab, 1997) built on arguments similar to those put forward by early political ecology (Blaikie and Brookfield, 1987, Thompson and Warburton, 1985, Forsyth, 1996, Leach and Mearns, 1996) – including dominance of Northern science, the technocratic character, and a tendency to identify the poor, rather than the unequal resource distribution or economic growth, as cause of environmental change (Adger et al., 2001). In sum, the nexus was understood in line with the epistemology and concerns of mainstream environment organizations and green advocacy – constructed as a 'problem to be solved' within their remit. This inscription strongly marked the nexus ecological conditions-migration as an 'environmental' one, something that probably explains the earlier reluctance to embrace the topic among development and migration specialists more than the often cited disciplinary boundaries between natural and social sciences (cfr. Morrissey, 2012).

It is not a secret that environmental discourses of the late 1969s and 1970s – of which the UN Conference on the Human Environment (Stockholm, 1972) and the Bruntlandt Report (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987) were key landmarks – problematized and pathologized *population* in the global South. The very title of one of the most influential, seminal books of the environmentalism of the time – Erlich's *Population Bomb* – speaks for itself. The fixation over the danger represented by a swelling population in the 'non-developed' world was (and arguably still is) one of the key ingredients of the discourses on

environmental and climate change (Chaturvedi and Doyle, 2015, Duffield, 2001). Instructive, and showing a clear continuity with the 'prehistory' discussed above, is the analysis Harvey (1974, p. 270) proposes of another foundational work for 'green thought' and concerns over global environmental change, i.e. 'The Limits to Growth' (Meadows et al., 1972). The report, with its 'systems approach' and computer modelling of populations, applied a technically more refined but in principle analogous methods to Malthus'. While already contested by perspectives such as political ecology and by non-Northern articulations of environmentalism (Martinez-Alier, 2002, Martinez-Alier, 1995), a similar Malthusian logic informed the debates on the impacts of environmental and climatic changes on mobility and on CM, as the work of Norman Myers (Myers, 1993, Myers and Kent, 1995) most evidently shows (cfr. Jakobeit and Methmann, 2012, Hartmann, 1998).

The ascension of Climate Change

The proto-debates on environmental displacement discussed above took a decisive turn in the 1990s. At that point, climate change's ascension towards the highest spheres of international (environmental) politics entailed a semantic shift from the concerns over environmentally induced displacement, to narratives focussed specifically on global warming. A key step in this direction was IPCC's first assessment report in 1990. A passage from Working Group II's "Summary of findings" was to have a great impact: "[t]he gravest effects of climate change may be those on human migration as millions are displaced by shoreline erosion, coastal flooding and severe drought" (IPCC, 1992: 103). That was a strong investiture, and its alarmed tones anticipated those echoing in the two following decades. Indeed, from that moment, a polarized debate started – opposing an 'alarmist'(Gemenne, 2011) or 'maximalist' approach (Morrissey, 2009) to a 'minimalist' (Morrissey, 2009) or 'skeptical'(Gemenne, 2011) school. The former, with strong roots in environmental sciences, championed the view that climate change will cause large-scale displacement of vulnerable populations – warning for the security implications of mounting waves of environmental or climate refugees (e.g. Myers, 1997, Myers, 2005). The latter, more closely related to social sciences, highlighted the analytical fallacies and potential normative risks of concepts such as climate and environmental refugees (e.g. Black, 2001, Castles, 2002).

This opposition lasted long, but did not hinder the debate from gaining growing attention. In the mid-2000s, a series of influential academic interventions stressed the pressing character of the issue of climate refugees (Biermann and Boas, 2008, Bronen, 2009, Docherty and

Giannini, 2009, Byravan and Rajan, 2006, McLeman and Smit, 2006). A number of influential actors (e.g. WBGU, 2008, Stern, 2007, Council of the European Union, 2008) also framed CM as an emerging security issue, which also secured many headlines to the figure of 'climate refugees'. Nina Hall offers a thorough account of the growing engagement in CM debates by international organizations such as the UN Higher Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and the UN Environmental Programme (Hall, 2016). Various NGOs organized opinion campaigns and published reports on the need to protect climate refugees (Christian Aid, 2007, Environmental Justice Foundation, 2009), and various platforms were launched to spread the word on the issue. For instance, the Climate Change, Environment and Migration Alliance (CCEMA) was initiated in 2008, as a multi-stakeholder partnership involving a cartel of influential organizations.[2] A few large-scale research initiatives were launched, such as the EU-funded EACH-FOR project, run between 2007 and 2009, with the substantial contribution of the UN University (Jäger et al., 2009).

The contemporary phase – CM goes mainstream

Such important endorsements have led to CM's *mainstreaming*: while the polarization between sceptics and alarmist has been largely overcome, the tones have softened, and CM has firmly established itself as an important policy issue in the climate arena and beyond.

For instance, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) devoted to CM a large section of chapter 12 of the latest report by Working Group II (IPCC, 2014). In the context of the UNFCCC, the Cancun Adaptation Framework (signed in December 2010) urged member countries to implement "[m]easures to enhance understanding, coordination and cooperation with regard to climate change induced displacement, migration and planned relocation"(UNFCCC, 2010). This commitment was explicitly restated under the discussions on "Loss and damage" at COP18, in Doha, in 2012. COP 21 in Paris hosted an unprecedented number of initiatives on various forms of CM, organized by a constellation of research and advocacy organizations. Both the IOM and UNHCR were very active, also being prominent members of the recently formed UN Advisory Group on Climate Change and Human Mobility. One of the outcomes of the Paris COP 21 was the decision to, in line with the call to address climate migration made in Cancun, to "establish [..] a task force to develop

[2] See the homepage ccema-portal.org

recommendations for integrated approaches to avert, minimize and address displacement related to the adverse impacts of climate change" (UNFCCC, 2016, par. 47).

What happened at COP 21 in Paris was the culmination of a period in which CM entered the agendas of an increasing number of mainstream organizations in the arenas of climate change and international development. For instance, while the World Bank has targeted the issue on various occasions and discussed it in its yearly flagship report in 2010 (World Bank, 2010), the Asian Development Bank (ADB) went much further, promoting two high-profile initiatives. Namely, it funded "a regional project designed to generate policy options for addressing climate-induced migration in Asia and the Pacific", resulting in a series of case studies and a lengthy final policy report (ADB, 2012). Furthermore, in collaboration with IOM, the ADB promoted the Asia-Pacific Migration and Environment Network (APMEN),[3] an online platform for sharing information and research results, as well as for 'spreading the word' on CM.

Another high-profile State-led project is the Nansen Initiative, which was launched by the Norwegian and the Swiss governments and inspired by UNHCR (Hall, 2016, ch. 3). As a follow-up to the Nansen Conference on Climate Change and Displacement organized in 2011 by the Norwegian Government, the initiative fostered a state-owned consultative process (which lasted 3 years) that created a vast consensus among countries on the need to formulate an agenda for tackling environmental-induced cross border displacement.

While it would be erroneous to understand the contemporary phase as a complete rupture with the past – for instance, the problematic figure of 'climate refugees' has still got currency – it presents substantial elements of novelty. As detailed more extensively elsewhere, the mainstreaming of CM was made possible by the affirmation of a different discursive register (Bettini, 2014), characterised by a different understanding and articulation of the links between migration, climate adaptation and development. A watershed, crucial for the emersion of the contemporary discourses on CM and for the affirmation of sounder understandings of migration, was the influential initiative on 'Migration and Global Environmental Change' that the UK Government commissioned to the Foresight Programme (2011). That was a monumental project, involving more than 300 international experts and stakeholders, and producing about 70 background papers[4]. Its synthesis report, known as the Foresight Report, had a huge impact on academic and policy debates, and had large echo in

[3] See the homepage available at http://www.apmen.iom.int/en/

[4] See www.bis.gov.uk/foresight/our-work/projects/published-projects/global-migration

the media[5]. Crucially, migration scholars such as Professor Richard Black – previously one of the fiercest critics of the maximalist position, had a key role in shaping the sounder and more accurate understanding of CM that informed the report. Indeed, today most interventions on CM are informed by quite refined understanding of how ecological factors influence migration: the maximalist's determinism and simplistic model of migration have become marginal, supplanted by a conceptualization of CM as an array of mobility responses to climate change. While displacement is still a matter of concern (see the Nansen Initiative, a number of initiatives by UNHCR, and the wording of the Paris Agreement itself), the ways in which climate vulnerability might result in a *reduced* mobility are also considered (Black et al., 2013), as well as the ways in which planned relocation might be an option (UNHCR, 2014, de Sherbinin et al., 2011, for some cautionary remarks, see Schade et al., 2015).

In particular, the idea that governed migration can represent a legitimate adaptation strategy has gained currency. Replicating the optimistic position in the decade-long debate on the so called migration-development nexus, labour migration is seen as source of remittances, which in turn are expected to play a key role in building up the resilience of vulnerable strata of the population (Barnett and Webber, 2010, Black et al., 2011, McLeman and Smit, 2006, Warner, 2012).

A number of studies highlight the perils associated to the 'new' idea of migration as adaptation, in particular the ways in which it risks being symptomatic of the neoliberalization of climate policy (see Bettini, 2014, Felli, 2013, Felli and Castree, 2012, Methmann and Oels, 2015). For sure, the new register entails a different articulation of population, development and security centred on resilience and adaptive governance. As we have seen, modern Northern environmentalism has been characterised by a long tradition of fears for populations in the global south, of which the idea of climate refugees can be seen as an example. It would be wrong to state that this (post)colonial component has evaporated, but the contemporary register offers a re-articulation of (and to an extent, a rupture in relation to) the ways in which population is signified in discourses on environmental change. In the contemporary register we can see signs of a biopoliticization of adaptation and development. The narratives on migration as adaptation, behind a palatable facade, appear as a mechanism for disciplining populations through the imposition of neoliberal subjectivities – the figure at the centre stage is a docile temporary labour migrant, mobilizing her skills and human capital to become

[5] for instance, see the 'One-year review' available at www.bis.gov.uk/assets/foresight/docs/migration/12-1265-migration-one-year-review.pdf

resilient (Bettini, 2014). Hardly a good prospect for progressive politics on cliomate and/or migration.

Back to the future

There is little doubt that the coming decade will entail decisive crossroads for the politics of both migration and climate change. Will the brunt of climate change fall on those in the peripheries of globalised capital, as the outcomes of international negotiations seem to indicate (Morgan, 2016, Ciplet et al., 2015, Bond, 2012)? Or will progressive movements manage to forge and force pathways of just climate action? If we look at mobility, the recent 'refugee crisis' around the Mediterranean – with the 'moral panic' it originated (Bauman, 2015) and the cracks it highlighted in the very edifice of the European Union – once again confirmed the divisive, political character of migration. Its function as symptom (in Lacanian terms) of globalized struggles around the production of space and distribution of resources (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2013). Coming closer to this chapter's focus, the racialization of migrants and refugees are also powerful reminders of how resilient postcolonial relations are, not least in the political field of climate change – with the resurfacing of the fear for some non-white being close to invading Europe.

Not in spite of, but because of the pressing character of these matters, this chapter zoomed out of 'current affairs' to offer a lineage of contemporary concerns over CM. A worrying continuity emerged, linking 'ancient' debates on populations and resources in classical political economy, the spectres of the unruly and swelling population in the 'global South' that haunted Northern environmental discourses since the late 1960s (and from which discourses on CM originated), and contemporary concerns over 'climate barbarians' igniting conflicts and knocking on 'our' doors. The fact that such discursive elements are reproduced also by actors concerned about climate justice (Bettini et al., forthcoming) is a source of particular concern. Older and newer conservative narratives on population and environment share "programmatic" implications (Robbins, 2012: 17-18) – as they all identify the root cause of the problem in the poor – too many, too dangerous. Also the emerging narratives on migration as adaptation appear less benign than they might seem at a first glance: they represent an element of discontinuity, but rather than a rupture from the earlier problematization of population in the global South, they are a biopoliticized articulation of the same Northern takes on link migration-environment-development.

These discourses share a depoliticizing potential, with the political kernel of climate justice and of migration foreclosed by the Malthusian invocation of environmental crisis or of the fantasy of labour migrants as docile, adaptive and resilient subject. Of course, the effect of these depoliticizing discourses is highly political – as they have to do with resource distribution (Robbins, 2012: 18), and often the 'right to live'. In light of these continuities and ruptures, current discourses on CM fall under a somehow dark light. They appear not only as the response to the new set of challenges posed by climate change, but as a (re)emergence of the fear for/fixation with populations in the global South (seen as a dangerous threat to socio-economic and/or ecological stability), even when rearticulated via neoliberal discourses that aim at ruling in the name of resilience, through the production of docile neoliberal subjects.

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