

## Climate Migration in the Pluriverse

*Please do not circulate or cite without [my](#) permission. Thank you*

### Abstract

This paper builds on recent work in fields such as critical geography, migration studies, mobility studies, and the philosophy of movement, that critiques dominant paradigms of climate migration. My intervention is to turn to the decolonial concept of the pluriverse as an alternative to cosmopolitan theories of global justice that tend to be used to frame debates over climate migration and “refugees.” The pluriverse begins with a claim of epistemological and ontological plurality and is oriented by the ethical and political vision (adopted from the Zapatistas) of a world in which many worlds fit. My aim is to indicate how a reorientation to what Arturo Escobar calls a “pluriversal cosmopolitics” might open to alternative understandings of climate migration that better meet the pressing ethical, political, and ecological challenges of a warming world.

### Keywords:

climate justice, climate migration, climate refugees, cosmopolitanism, cosmopolitics, decolonial, environmental justice, extractivism, pluriverse

### Introduction

Despite critique and contestation, climate refugees and the “great climate migration,” frequently appear in media coverage, political debate, and policy (Hartmann 2010; Lustgarten 2020; Tower 2021; UK 2011; The World Bank 2018).<sup>1</sup> The pull of the figure of the climate refugee is in part due to the way that it marries two great crises. On the one hand, the refugee, thought by philosophers such as Arendt and Agamben, as “the limit-concept that at once brings a radical crisis to the principles of the Nation-State and clears the way for a renewal of categories that can no longer be delayed” (Agamben 2008, 95), and on the other, the crisis of the dualism of nature-culture in the form of global anthropogenic climate change, or what is sometimes referred to as the Anthropocene. Alone, each has been understood as ushering in a

---

<sup>1</sup> Debates have circled around the legal status and protections for climate refugees, and by extension, what the criteria are for refugee status, given the complexity of factors that contribute to environmental migration. Consequently, there is dissensus around the calculation of the numbers of current and future “climate refugees” and migrants. The media and political responses to flows of Black and brown people in the wake of Hurricanes Irma, Maria and Dorian, and most recently in response to Honduras in the wake of two devastating hurricanes in 2020, gives a sense of the four distinct (if often overlapping) paradigms of climate migration (Enking 2019; Kitroeff and Volpe 2021; Rivera 2018). These are (1) as migration-as-adaptation - as enterprising and resilient individuals adapting to climate change; (2) desirous of humanitarian refuge in the Global North – that is as refugees and victims requiring immediate action and a more robust updated International and national governance and policy architecture; (3) security threat - a swell of barbarians at the gate, or (4) a more universal plight of climate loss and displacement that is the fate of the species as a whole.

new species and planetary consciousness. It might therefore seem certain that as the bastard offspring of these two crises of Western modernity, the figure of the climate refugee evidences the urgency and necessity of a properly planetary, truly universal political philosophy and practice, or at the very least a rejigged cosmopolitanism capable of superseding the uncoordinated and sectarian responses to climate change and to “the refugee crisis.”

My claim is that there is another way. A way that in fact is an opening onto innumerable alternatives for conceiving of and responding to climate change and to migration. One name for this is the pluriverse, or pluriversality. We can begin to delve into the pluriverse by following Arturo Escobar’s trail in *Pluriversal Politics: The Real and the Possible*. As he notes: “Perhaps the best starting point for our purposes here is the saying that the contemporary conjuncture is best characterized by the fact that *we are facing modern problems for which there are no longer modern solutions*” (Escobar 2020, 69). Taking this as my premise, I show that pluriversality allows us to understand climate migration as a distinctly modern problem, that has its roots in the episteme and model of the world characteristic of capitalist modernity-coloniality.<sup>2</sup> However, rather than seeing the failure of “modern solutions” to such a problem as equivalent with species or planetary extinction, or as an occasion for despair and universal melancholia, pluriversality turns to the myriad alternative worlds that *already* exist as the seeds of solutions to the problems generated by the model of the world (or ontology) of modernity.

My proposal “does not claim to have arrived at a new land of general theories and Big Ideas – in fact, this is explicitly not one of its goals” (Escobar 2020, 67) - yet I argue that it offers a way to take up many of the demands and critiques that have been rightly levelled at dominant discourses of climate migration.<sup>3</sup> Starting with an introduction to the pluriverse, I contrast it

---

<sup>2</sup> Here I am using climate migration both to refer to the way it has been figured as a problem by Western modernity, and on the other hand, as well as a range of mobilities and displacement that are taking new forms in relation with climate change and ecological destruction. Climate migration in and of itself is neither new nor negative.

<sup>3</sup> These include the need to interrogate the racialization of migrants and to situate climate refugees in terms of the longer histories and dynamics of colonialism, imperialism, and racism; calls to depart from the tokenization and marginalization of the knowledges and voices of peoples disproportionately vulnerable to climate change

with the colonial concepts of the universe and the universal, and highlight what is distinctive about pluriversal cosmopolitics, in comparison with cosmopolitan, global, and planetary justice. In the latter half of the paper, I consider the relevance and import of pluriversality for established discourses of climate migration. I conclude with some brief reflections on what climate migration in the pluriverse means for the philosopher and for philosophy.

## **S1 What is Pluriversal Cosmopolitics?**

### 1.1 Welcome to the Pluriverse

Pluriversality is at once a metaphysical claim, an ethico-political practice, and a design tool for imagining and (re)creating a world in which many worlds fit. The concept of the pluriverse: “questions the concept of universality, one of the pillars of Western modernity. Modernity created the idea that we live in a world that has room for only one world, the OWW [one-world world] now globalized. Up against this premise, the Zapatistas proposed the concept of *a world in which many worlds fit*” (Escobar 2020, 26). The pluriverse starts with the claim of ontological plurality, a world of many worlds. This is in contrast to the assumption of a common world or universal reality, in which difference is treated as mere belief, that is, as an internal differentiation of a single reality. The pluriverse is therefore very far from multi-culturalism, politics of inclusion and recognition, and cosmopolitanism. Let me unpack this a little before turning to some of its implications for climate migration.

Pluriversality, or the concept of the pluriverse, has for the most part been explored by anthropologists such as Arturo Escobar, Marisol de la Cadena, Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, and Eduardo Vivieros de Castro, often in conjunction with figures in fields such political ecology, and feminist science studies. What unites this constellation of scholars is a deep appreciation

---

(Indigenous, land-based workers and farmers, women and poor of the Global South), through “pluralizing” and “politicizing” the debate (Baldwin and Fornalé, 2017); as well as materialist and Indigenous shifts to the frame of mobilities, accompanied by the politicization and contextualization of the current twinned crises in terms of capital, labor, and land.

of the cosmologies, cosmovisions, and practices of living of Indigenous peoples in Abya Yala or Latin America. Although in different ways Indigenous people are central to this works' understanding of pluriversality (for instance, Cadena's work has focused on two Quecha individuals in the Peruvian Andes, and Escobar has focused on Indigenous, such as the Nasa, and Afro-descendant peoples, of Pacific South-West Colombia), it is worth noting that Indigeneity and Indigenous worlds are not understood in isolation from the rest of the so-called "real world." On the part of both the anthropologists and their partners in knowledge production, there is an emphasis on the relative autonomy and specificity of (Indigenous) worlds, but no appeal to purity or fixity – (criterion of identity that may be better understood as effects of coloniality). Worlds can be understood in terms of "partial connections," and as exemplified by the Zapatistas, Indigenous worlds are affirmed through partial connections with groups such as Marxist intellectuals, peasants, worker's movements, and environmentalists. These partial connections take on a new significance in territorial struggles and resistance to increasingly inventive forms of extractivism, monoculture, and dispossession, as well as a broad array of environmentalist, anti-Globalization/capitalist movements and experiments in living – including in what we might call the Global North or 'West.'

The attempt to take these worlds on their own terms is indebted to the framework of the *epistemologies of the South*, developed by Boaventura de Sousa Santos as an attempt "to build a non-Eurocentric approach to social transformation" by countering monocultures of knowledge and cognition (Escobar 2020, 68; Santos 2016). For Escobar, the epistemic plurality identified by the epistemologies of the South can also be understood as ontological. In brief, we can escalate the insight that there are many, if not infinite, ways of knowing the world, and respond that it is not the case that the world fundamentally stays the same despite the plural ways of knowing it. Rather, ways of knowing or epistemologies are themselves models of a

world, and ways of worlding. In short, there is no one world underneath apparent diversity that remains untouched and independent of how it is known.

## 1.2 Pluriversal cosmopolitics

The ontological plurality that the pluriverse describes does not assume that all differences are mere “beliefs” or “cultural values” that can be encompassed within one real world. For scholars and activists interested in the pluriverse modernity must be understood in terms of its “dark side,” of coloniality (Mignolo 2002).<sup>4</sup> From this vantage point, we see that the construction of “cultures” (that might be studied by ethnography and anthropology) and their ontologies as mere “local beliefs,” as opposed to progress and reason, is an operation of the *universe* of colonial-modernity. Significantly, the single “real world” or ontology that is imposed as universal, is dualistic. This dualist ontology cuts across many categories, but it is grounded in two antitheses, “between humanity and nature, and between allegedly superior and inferior humans” (Cadena 2010, 345). Modernity-coloniality has consolidated itself as the one world or single, universal reality, through the exclusion of the latter terms from politics. In the “single world” and narrow conception of “politics” that followed “many peoples” became “cultures,” and “nonscientific relations with other-than-humans were reduced to belief” (Cadena 2010, 345-6).

Cadena argues that the political (understood as an antagonism between enemies) is conveniently evaded through discourses of civilization, development, and inclusion. It has become increasingly difficult to even perceive or challenge the dualist ontology that imposes itself as universal: “The pluriverse, the multiple worlds that Schmitt deemed crucial to the

---

<sup>4</sup> “In the world-making process we identify today as modernity/coloniality, the term modernity does not stand by itself, since it cannot exist without its darker side: coloniality (...) the modern/colonial world goes together with the mercantile, industrial, and technological capitalism centered in the North Atlantic, both of which carry out the epistemic mechanism of the coloniality of power: classifying people around the world by color and territory, and managing the distribution of labor and organization of society” (Mignolo 2002, 245). Decolonial and Indigenous feminist thinkers have added an absolutely vital aspect to this analysis of the coloniality of power/knowledge – that is, the foundational role of heteropatriarchy and the coloniality of gender. See (Arvin, Tuck, and Morril 2013; Lugones 2010).

possibility of the political, disappeared” (Cadena 2010, 345). By attending to the politics of conflicts between and within worlds, or political ontology, pluriversality aims to bring to light the erased and silenced antagonisms that are the fault lines of modernity.<sup>5</sup> Cadena argues that the salience of the entry of earth-beings and Indigenous territorial struggles into politics, is that it “may transform the war that has ruled so far silently through a singular biopolitics of improvement, into what Isabelle Stengers calls a cosmopolitics: a politics where ‘cosmos refers to the unknown constituted by these multiple, divergent worlds and to the articulation of which they would eventually be capable’” (Cadena 2010, 346). Cosmo-politics may feel profoundly frustrating to some since is *not* a program or blueprint but rather asks how can we “provoke thought” in a way that “is able to ‘slow down’ reasoning and create an opportunity to arouse a slightly different awareness of the problems and situations mobilizing us?” (Stengers 2005, 994). In Stengers’ usage, the cosmos is at odds with the *universe* the one world as cosmos that is the object of Kantian cosmopolitanism (Stengers 2005, 994-5). In distinction to cosmopolitanism, pluriversal cosmo-politics is: “opposed to the temptation of a peace intended to be final, ecumenical: a transcendent peace with the power to ask anything that diverges to recognize itself as a purely individual expression of what constitutes the point of convergence of all” (Stengers 2005, 995).

Political ontology, or the attention to ontological politics, lights up some of the aforementioned struggles and movements as struggles “in opposition to the ontological occupation of the territories and lives of these communities and the destruction of worlds carried out by the capitalist globalization project” (Escobar 2020, 25). In many cases what is at stake can be understood as a conflict of distinct, if interrelated worlds. As the emphasis on

---

<sup>5</sup> Mario Blaser and Cadena explain that: “Political Ontology (...) simultaneously stands for reworking an imaginary of politics (the pluriverse), for a field of study and intervention (the power-charged terrain of entangled worldings and their dynamics), and for a modality of analysis and critique that is permanently concerned with its own effects as a worlding practice” (Cadena and Blaser 2018, 6).

struggle might suggest, in the pluriverse, not all worlds or models of worlds (ontologies) are equivalent or mutually compatible. Stenger explains that, “the cosmos is an operator of *mise en égalité*, equalization, provided that we strictly separate *mise en égalité* and *mise en equivalence*, for equivalence implies a common measure and thus an interchangeability of positions” (Stengers 2005, 995). Together, these concepts of political ontology and cosmopolitics (as opposed to cosmopolitanism) indicate how pluriversality explodes the narrow horizon of “inclusion of the other,” or greater representation and recognition by the state and/or dominant political and social reality that has come to enclose “reality” (Mignolo 2002, 225). One possible objection to pluriversal cosmopolitics is that it is not sufficiently prescriptive, or able “to solve major global problems” since what it does to slow down our thinking and demands to “solve” such problems urgently and definitively (Delanty 2014, 386). In response, I suggest that what this objection misses is the point that the refusal of a single, prescriptive, universal vision or program, decided in advance, or with a supposed guarantee, is what is most promising about pluriversal cosmopolitics.

In sum, “the world is made up of multiple worlds, multiple ontologies or reals that are from being exhausted by the Eurocentric experience or reducible to its terms” (Escobar 2020, 69). So, while we might agree with views of climate change, specifically climate migration, in terms of the crisis of Western modernity, we can see that “the crisis is the crisis of a particular world or set of world-making practices” (ibid.). Bringing to light the architecture and categories that constitute its episteme, the OWW of modernity now appears as parochial and contingent, *and* as ontologically destructive, that is, destructive of alternative worlds on a planetary scale. This realization is not the end of the world. Rather, it is now possible to respond to the crisis otherwise and orient our efforts towards the pluriverse.

## 2.Pluriversal Politics and Climate Migration

Now that we have a sense of what pluriversal cosmopolitics is (as distinct from cosmopolitan theories of global and climate justice), we can ask: What is the relevance and import of pluriversality for climate migration? What changes when we think in the pluriverse? And how significant are these changes for philosophical understandings of climate migration, and of climate change more broadly?

1. The first change is that *we stop searching for one universal framework or global solution*. Here I am referring to frameworks and theories that begin from the assumption a one-world reality or world, but claim to have incorporated marginalized voices and perspectives, to recognize cultural difference, or to be adaptable to particular or local circumstances or needs.<sup>6</sup> The commitment to pluriversality entails a refusal of the one world-World of global, capitalist, racial-colonial modernity: and with it a divestment from the concepts of progress, universality, and development. Through the kaleidoscopic lens of the pluriverse, the rhetoric of the Anthropocene and global climate change that positions these events as a novel occasion for equality, unity, and universality of the human species on a planetary level, can be seen as a new moment of a much older discourse of coloniality. We might then, resist or at the very least “slow down” the reflex that automatically frames current and projected mass displacement and mobility in terms of the global, the planetary, and the human species (Bettini 2017, 90). It is then possible to see the OWW for what it is, and push back against its deployment in the Anthropocene, and more specifically in treatments of island territories as laboratories for climate futures, as well as the accompanying imaginary of the human species as climate refugee (Colebrook 2017; Farbotko 2010).

---

<sup>6</sup> Such an approach is in contrast to, say, the “planetary justice of the poor” (Kashwan et al. 2020).



In this respect, my position is aligned with Claire Colebrook's questioning of "the idea that survival is tied to a single scale that thought should follow in allowing one register or strata to assume all others" (Colebrook 2017, 128). Freed from this idea, Colebrook deconstructs the category of the climate refugee, by considering how the concepts of sovereignty, stability, and humanity that give meaning to the concept, are in fact "an exceptional hiatus in the history of the world that has always been one of climate change, migration, and refuge" (Colebrook 2017, 118). Instead of "preliminary mourning," for a homeless and stateless humanity, we should consider "how the 'end of the world' is really the end of the world of nations and sovereignty" (Colebrook 2017, 116). Where my pluriversal proposal parts ways with Colebrook's, however, is at the point that her account hinges on the presentation of alternative worlds as fully obliterated, that is, as "impossible," and "lost," that can thus only be viewed as virtual, and as the basis of a counter-factual of the Anthropocene (Colebrook 2017, 120-1). In response to Colebrook's reading of the Australian Aboriginal embassy of 1971 as a tragic synecdoche for all possible alternative worlds, I counter that divestment from the scale and survival of "humanity," is not a foregone or past event that "we" can only look back on speculatively (Colebrook 2017, 126-8). The myriad struggles, movements, and thinkers that persist despite the world of Man, show that the pluriverse is not merely a thought experiment. In brief, while it is time to give up on the survival and sovereignty of Man and his World, I argue that what this requires is the struggle for and with alternatives. This point takes us to the second implication of pluriversality.

2. The second change results from political ontology. In the pluriverse it is clear that *we must politicize climate migration*. This move has several ramifications. In many cases considering ontological politics enables us to see the circumstances and events that contribute to displacement (or are projected to) in a different light. What is at stake is not only global inequity, differential vulnerability, poverty, and loss of property, but the attempted destruction

of a world, and more generally, of a world in which many worlds can coexist. In other words, the collateral “loss and damage” that is thought to contribute to climate migration can in many cases be understood as a form of “ontological occupation” and “ultimate erasure of local relational worlds” (Escobar 2020, 74).

Important instances of such ecological and climactic ontological occupation are the imposition of monocultures (plantations or intensive farming), examples include the palm oil plantations and industrial shrimp farms in mangroves of the southernmost area of the Colombia Pacific, as well as new forms of extractive industries such as mountain top removal mining, tar sands, fracking and so on (Escobar 2020, 74). The way of worlding that is often illegally and violently imposed here, does not only change the relations that constitute a world or ontology, but it risks destroying them to the point that other worlds, particularly those that do not subscribe to a dualist divide of nature-culture, struggle to survive, let alone flourish. In sum, the imposition of such monocultures (whether directly through extractive industries and land-use, or through their effects in extreme weather events), can be understood as the operation of the racial-colonial-imperial capitalist world, that aims to obliterate existing and potential alternative autonomous worlds.

Spectacular “disasters,” such as Hurricanes Irma, Maria, and Dorian that battered much of the Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico in 2017 and 2019, arguably also function as a form of ontological occupation. Here, we might consider internal as well as international relocation, as in Dominica, forced as well as planned, where the planning agencies are international development agencies, charities, investors (such as the Bill Gates foundation), and the government (Flavelle 2018). We should also reflect on the insight that the almost unthinkable damage of the storms to the unique ecology of the island erased histories of marronnage kept by the forests, as well as some contemporary possibilities for relative autonomy and ways of being with “nature” (Malm 2018). In the case of Puerto-Rico, consider how the narrative of

resilience was married with colonial neo-liberal debt and abandonment, and how the hurricanes literally cleared the way for foreign settlement, investment, further erasure of sovereignty, resulting in a now contested occupation of the land and future of the Island (Bonilla 2020). Here, as elsewhere, the label of climate migrant does not extend to the patterns of mobility and residence of wealthy white emigres taking advantage of what may appear as a new *terra nullius* of climate change. To state the obvious, climate refugees, and climate migration more broadly, are thoroughly racialized categories (Baldwin 2013). In this context, anti-blackness, and the coloniality of power operate through the depoliticization and masking of the deep antagonisms that ground the political. I use both anti-blackness and the coloniality of power here, to draw attention to the point that political ontology entails acknowledging and wrestling with the differences of power and violence, as they work to re- and de-form specific racialized worlds and modes of being.<sup>7</sup> I am thinking of Christina Sharpe's insights about living Blackness in the wake of slavery and its afterlives, and within the "climate of anti-blackness," as it percolates in disasters and "marked migrations" (Sharpe 2016, 15).<sup>8</sup>

In Dominica and Puerto-Rico, the ontological occupation of the islands themselves, was accompanied by mass emigration from them. Waves of "climate migration" occurred in the immediate aftermath of the disasters and in the years preceding and following them (Bonilla 2020, 6; Evelyn 2019; Rivera 2018). In these instances, framing climate migration simply as a humanitarian issue, or as one of security and risk management does more than miss the point. The depoliticization of climate migration, and of climate change more broadly, screens and bolsters what pluriversality reveals as the real problem, that is, the global ontological occupation and destruction by one world, and the corresponding struggle for a world of many

---

<sup>7</sup> For example, consider the indignant responses to the moniker of climate refugees in the wake of Hurricane Katrina (Gordon 2009).

<sup>8</sup> Living in the wake on a global level means living the disastrous time and effects of continued marked migrations, Mediterranean and Caribbean disasters, trans-American and -African migration, structural adjustment" (Sharpe 2016, 15).

worlds. Political ontology allows us to understand climate migration as properly political – that is, as an antagonism – of different natureculture worlds, against and within the *universe* of coloniality. This politicizing shift also entails appreciating the different actors or actants involved, most crucially, what we might think of as more-than-human beings and entities, or what Cadena calls “earth-beings.”<sup>9</sup> Consequently, the problem space of climate migration needs to go beyond the poles of inclusion or exclusion (the debate over whether “we” should let “them” in or out). In this light, the stakes change, as do the kinds of solutions or strategies that we might turn to. The pluriverse therefore offers a very different route than common framings of climate migration as inevitable, and as a problem, whether the problem be conceived in terms of security threat and risk management, migration-as-adaptation, or in terms of moral duties, for instance as conceived by global justice theorist Mathias Risse, to receive “refugees” on the basis of their “right to relocation,” given by the supposedly universal claim of humanity’s common ownership of the earth (Risse 2009).<sup>10</sup>

In the case of planned relocation and the discourses of resilience and migration-as-adaptation, we witness an “abdication” and individualization of responsibility for climate adaptation and mitigation that naturalizes and depoliticizes its uneven impacts (Bettini 2017, 89). What’s more, when understood in the pluriverse we also grasp how relocation and migration can operate as a form of ontological occupation and destruction, where the collateral “loss and damage” exceeds all calculation (Mayer 2017; Melchior Figueroa 2011; Tschakert et al. 2017; de Shalit 2011) . Hence the resistance to planned removal and the discourse of

---

<sup>9</sup> “Undoing this discrimination requires undoing the political and politics as we know it—a task that requires more than the most radical multiculturalism welcoming to politics those previously evicted by racist politics. I would like to suggest that denouncing racism—even undoing it—may address the inferiority in question, but it does not address the epistemic roots of the antagonism between those entitled to rule and those destined to be ruled. What needs to be addressed is the epistemic maneuver that organized the political deciding what could be brought into politics and what belonged to a different managerial sphere. If embedded in the political was the silence about the antagonistic exclusion of “naturals,” the elimination of “Nature” from the same sphere completed the hegemony” (Cadena 2010, 345).

<sup>10</sup>It is worth noting that Risse turns to Hugio Grotius, 17<sup>th</sup> century collaborator and apologist for the Dutch East India Company, who earned the status of “father” of international law and justice in part through his innovative imperial division of the world (Ittersum 2010).

climate refugees by many of the communities projected to be its first victims (Mallick and Schanze 2020; McNamara and Gibson 2009; Suliman et al. 2019; K. Whyte, Talley, and Gibson 2019). Discourses of resilience and migration as adaptation advance neo-liberal governmentality as exclusive strategy on a global scale. What's more, this arguably functions as a new moment accumulation by dispossession. Whether celebrated or denounced as threat, what are produced through mass climate migration are flows of precarious and deracinated laboring bodies, and exposed land and resources (Baldwin and Bettini 2017; Nail 2019). Climate migration therefore serves, as in Marx's analysis of so-called primitive accumulation, to make living in other worlds than capital increasingly difficult, if not impossible.

3. A third change is a total insistence on what some call *mitigation over migration*. I do not mean mitigation in the terms proffered by green capitalism, but transition *to* the pluriverse and from "the death project of capitalist globalization" (Escobar 2020, 48). Understood in this sense, mitigation requires "making alternatives to the one world plausible to one-worlders; and (...) providing resonance to those other worlds that interrupt the one-world story" (Escobar 2020, 75). We might reframe mitigation in terms of the question: "how can the conditions for existence and reexistence be maintained in the face of the onslaught of developmentalism, extractivism, and modernity?" (Escobar 2020, 42). One way of understanding mitigation otherwise is, for example, thinking with the "Nasa principle of 'the liberation of Mother Earth'" (Escobar 2020, 42). Beginning with the mandate of Mother Earth, the total violence of trade-offs and the logic of substitutability or equivalence becomes obvious, not least for its denial of the "socionatural configurations" that constitute particular worlds (Escobar 2020, 40).

It should be stressed, however, that the refusal (particularly by many of those people whose dispossession is currently being planned or undertaken) of climate migration should not be understood as a pathologizing or rejecting mobility as such (K. Whyte, Talley, and Gibson 2019). It is also worth emphasizing that the centrality of territory and place, or the socionatural

relations that constitute a world, should not be read as suggesting that worlds are self-enclosed, atomistic, and unchanging. In other words, “the pluriverse does not assume that worlds are completely separate, interacting with and bumping into one another like so many billiard balls (...) however, the fact that worlds are interlinked through partial connections does not turn them all into the same thing” (Escobar 2020, 27). The emphasis on autonomy in Indigenous, anarchist, and anti-Globalization movements can be seen as a transition to modes of living grounded in “the interdependence of all living things, where nothing preexists the relationships that constitute it,” itself understood as “the great correlate of autonomy and communality” (Escobar 2020, 40) Worlds are (re)made through “partial connections,” in which mobility is and has long been crucial. It is also essential to acknowledge that for many persons (human and more-than-human) forms of fugitivity, flight, mobility, and the seeking of asylum, have been the means that they have employed to avoid the total obliteration of their worlds.<sup>11</sup> By contrast, we can see the difference of the above from an exemplary formation of OWW. What is specific about settler colonialism, is the way in which it combines migration with the attempted replacement and erasure of myriad alternative worlds (Whyte 2018). In sum, the absolute insistence on what we might think of mitigation or the liberation of Mother Earth over migration, should not be understood as an anti-migration stance or a rejection of mobilities as such. When thought in the pluriverse, what is commonly understood as climate migration is *not necessarily* destructive of the worlds migrated to. However, the outcome of mobilities cannot be determined in advance and can only be evaluated through and within specific partial connections and encounters of co-existence in place.<sup>12</sup> What we *can* say now with confidence

---

<sup>11</sup> There is a large literature on this topic. See (Gallagher 2021) for a provocative assessment of *the Black refugee tradition*.

<sup>12</sup> “whether we acknowledge it or not, place convenes our being together, bringing human and nonhuman communities into the shared predicaments of life, livelihood, and land. Place calls us to the challenge of living together. At root, this is a challenge of worldviews involving many different ways of being whose relationships are interdependent yet asymmetrical, sometimes harmonious and other times in conflict, and that for this reason require definite protocols for balance and understanding. Place calls us to the struggles of coexistence in this pluriverse, a world of many worlds” (Larsen and Johnson 2017, 1).

is that the continuation, and indeed intensification, of business as usual, with climate migration unevenly imposed as the only plan and inevitable reality, is an agenda for world destruction that must be stopped.

## **Conclusion**

I end by reiterating Stengers' question: "How can this proposal be distinguished from issues of authority and generality currently articulated to the notion of "theory"?" in order to reflect on the limits and position of philosophy and the philosopher vis-à-vis the pluriverse (Stengers 2005, 994). Pluriversality is a serious challenge to the coloniality of knowledge and the hegemony of the epistemologies of the Global North in part because it values grounded knowledges, cosmologies, and relational ontologies. On Kimberly Hutchings's assessment: "pluriversality pushes us away from the possibility of specifying what the attainment of global justice might mean, and toward the importance of the cultivation of particular kinds of virtue in the context of ethical practices of coexistence and collaboration" (Hutchings 2019, 120-1). Pluriversality therefore jams the gears of international, global, and planetary justice, but does so through an invitation to a kind of virtue ethics. The virtues that we are called on to cultivate here, are those of the diplomat and of "the idiot" rather than the expert (Stengers 2005, 1002).<sup>13</sup> It seems to me that the call to humility and the arts of negotiation, the emphasis on the knowledge that emerges from relationship, a kind of depersonalization and re-communalization without guarantee (in which the practice of philosophy is not divorced from "life"), the partiality of commitment and struggle, and the abandonment of the authority of universal theory – puts the philosopher in a position that is as uneasy as it is exciting. I wonder whether the philosopher trying to engage with the pluriverse or engage in pluriversal thinking

---

<sup>13</sup> As in Deleuze's conceptual character of the idiot. Someone who did not speak Greek language and therefore cut off from the civilizational community. The one (in Deleuze's usage) who slows everything down in situation that is believed to be an emergency: "We know, knowledge there is, but the idiot demands that we slow down, that we don't consider ourselves authorised to believe that we possess the meaning of what we know" (Stengers 2005, 995).

is in relatively uncharted ground, and what, if any, philosophy's role should be. Perhaps this ungrounding and pause to thought, is what is required if we are to do justice to thinking climate change, and our place in it.

### Works Cited

- Agamben, Giorgio. 2008. "Beyond Human Rights." *Open* 15 (Social Engineering): 90–95.
- Arvin, Maile, Eve Tuck, and Angie Morril. 2013. "Decolonizing Feminism: Challenging Connections between Settler Colonialism and Heteropatriarchy." *Feminist Formations* 25 (1): 8–34.
- Baldwin, Andrew. 2013. "Racialisation and the Figure of the Climate-Change Migrant." *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 45 (6): 1474–90. <https://doi.org/10.1068/a45388>.
- Baldwin, Andrew, and Giovanni Bettini. 2017. "Introduction: Life Adrift." In *Life Adrift: Climate Change, Migration, Critique*, edited by Andrew Baldwin and Giovanni Bettini. London: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Bettini, Giovanni. 2017. "Unsettling Futures: Climate Change, Migration, and the Obscene Biopolitics of Resilience." In *Life Adrift: Climate Change, Migration, Critique*, edited by Andrew Baldwin and Giovanni Bettini. London: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Bonilla, Yarimar. 2020. "The Coloniality of Disaster: Race, Empire, and the Temporal Logics of Emergency in Puerto Rico, USA." *Political Geography* 78 (April): 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2020.102181>.
- Cadena, Marisol de la. 2010. "Indigenous Cosmopolitics in the Andes: Conceptual Reflections beyond 'Politics.'" *Cultural Anthropology* 25 (2): 334–70. <https://doi.org/DOI:10.1111/j.1548-1360.2010.01061.x>.
- Cadena, Marisol de la, and Mario Blaser. 2018. "Introduction - Pluriverse: Proposals for a World of Many Worlds." In *A World of Many Worlds*, edited by Marisol de la Cadena and Mario Blaser. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Colebrook, Claire. 2017. "Transcendental Migration: Taking Refuge from Climate Change." In *Life Adrift: Climate Change, Migration, Critique*, edited by Andrew Baldwin and Giovanni Bettini. London: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Delanty, Gerard. 2014. "Not All Is Lost in Translation: World Varieties of Cosmopolitanism." *Cultural Sociology* 8 (4): 374–91. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1749975514532261>.
- Enking, Molly. 2019. "U.S. Won't Take Climate Refugees Displaced by Hurricane Dorian." *Grist*. September 13, 2019. <https://grist.org/article/u-s-wont-take-climate-refugees-displaced-by-hurricane-dorian/>.
- Escobar, Arturo. 2020. *Pluriversal Politics: The Real and the Possible*. Latin America in Translation. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Evelyn, Kenya. 2019. "For Caribbean Nations, Climate Change Means Shrinking Populations." *Grist*. December 16, 2019. <https://grist.org/justice/for-caribbean-nations-climate-change-means-shrinking-populations/>.
- Farbotko, Carol. 2010. "Wishful Sinking: Disappearing Islands, Climate Refugees and Cosmopolitan Experimentation." *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* 51 (1): 47–60. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8373.2010.001413.x>.
- Flavelle, Christopher. 2018. "This Tiny Country Says It Can Beat Climate Change." *Bloomberg.Com*, July 2, 2018. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2018-07-02/dominica-s-plan-to-survive-climate-change-has-a-hard-road-ahead>.



- Gallagher, Sean. 2021. "The Black Refugee Tradition." *Black Perspectives AAIHS* (blog). April 7, 2021. <https://www.aaihs.org/the-black-refugee-tradition/>.
- Gordon, Ruth. 2009. "Katrina, Race, Refugees, and Images of the Third World." In *Hurricane Katrina: America's Unnatural Disaster*, edited by Jeremy I. Levitt and Matthew C. Whitaker. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Hartmann, Betsy. 2010. "Rethinking Climate Refugees and Climate Conflict: Rhetoric, Reality and the Politics of Policy Discourse." *Journal of International Development* 22 (2): 233–46. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jid.1676>.
- Ittersum, Martine Julia van. 2010. "The Long Goodbye: Hugo Grotius' Justification of Dutch Expansion Overseas, 1615–1645." *History of European Ideas* 36 (4): 386–411. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.histeuroideas.2010.05.003>.
- Kashwan, Prakash, Frank Biermann, Aarti Gupta, and Chukwumerije Okereke. 2020. "Planetary Justice: Prioritizing the Poor in Earth System Governance." *Earth System Governance* 6: 100075-. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.esg.2020.100075>.
- Kitroeff, Natalie, and Daniele Volpe. 2021. "'We Are Doomed': Devastation From Storms Fuels Migration in Honduras." *The New York Times*, April 6, 2021, sec. World. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/06/world/americas/migration-honduras-central-america.html>.
- Lugones, Maria. 2010. "Toward a Decolonial Feminism." *Hypatia* 25 (4): 742–59.
- Lustgarten, Abrahm. 2020. "The Great Climate Migration Has Begun." *The New York Times*, July 23, 2020, sec. Magazine. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/07/23/magazine/climate-migration.html>.
- Mallick, Bishawjit, and Jochen Schanze. 2020. "Trapped or Voluntary? Non-Migration Despite Climate Risks." *Sustainability* 12 (11): 4718. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12114718>.
- Malm, Andreas. 2018. "In Wildness Is the Liberation of the World: On Maroon Ecology and Partisan Nature." *Historical Materialism*, 1–35. <https://doi.org/doi.10.1163/1569206X-00001610>.
- Mayer, Benoit. 2017. "Migration in the UNFCCC Workstream on Loss and Damage: An Assessment of Alternative Framings and Conceivable Responses." *Transnational Environmental Law* 6 (1): 107–29. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S2047102516000078>.
- McNamara, Karen Elizabeth, and Chris Gibson. 2009. "'We Do Not Want to Leave Our Land': Pacific Ambassadors at the United Nations Resist the Category of 'Climate Refugees.'" *Geoforum*, Themed Issue: Gramscian Political Ecologies, 40 (3): 475–83. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2009.03.006>.
- Melchior Figueroa, Robert. 2011. "Indigenous People and Cultural Losses." In *The Oxford Handbook of Climate Change and Society*, edited by John S. Dryzek, Richard B. Norgaard, and David Schlosberg. Oxford: The Oxford Handbook of Climate Change and Society.
- Mignolo, Walter D. 2002. "The Zapatistas's Theoretical Revolution: Its Historical, Ethical, and Political Consequences." *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)* 25 (3): 245–75.
- Nail, Thomas. 2019. "Forum 1: Migrant Climate in the Kinocene." *Mobilities* 14 (3): 375–80. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17450101.2019.1609200>.
- Risse, Mathias. 2009. "The Right to Relocation: Disappearing Island Nations and Common Ownership of the Earth." *Ethics & International Affairs* 23 (3): 281–99.
- Rivera, Agnes M. Torres. 2018. "I'm One of Puerto Rico's Climate Change Refugees." *Teen Vogue*. July 5, 2018. <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/hurricane-maria-made-me-a-climate-change-refugee>.
- Santos, Boaventura de Sousa. 2016. *Epistemologies of the South: Justice against Epistemicide*. Abingdon; New York: Routledge.

- Shalit, Avner de. 2011. "Climate Change Refugees, Compensation, and Rectification." *The Monist* 94 (3): 310–28.
- Sharpe, Christina. 2016. *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Stengers, Isabelle. 2005. "The Cosmopolitical Proposal." In *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy*, edited by Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel, translated by Liz Carey-Libbrecht. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Suliman, Samid, Carol Farbotko, Hedda Ransan-Cooper, Karen Elizabeth McNamara, Fanny Thornton, Celia McMichael, and Taukiei Kitara. 2019. "Indigenous (Im)Mobilities in the Anthropocene." *Mobilities* 14 (3): 298–318. <https://doi.org/DOI:10.1080/17450101.2019.1601828>.
- The World Bank. 2018. "Groundswell: Preparing for Internal Climate Migration." Text/HTML. World Bank. 2018. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/infographic/2018/03/19/groundswell---preparing-for-internal-climate-migration>.
- Tower, Amali. 2021. "Climate Change, Forced Displacement, and Peace & Security: Biden Administration Actions That Ensure Rights." Climate Refugees. [www.climate-refugees.org](http://www.climate-refugees.org).
- Tschakert, Petra, Jon Barnett, Neville Ellis, Carmen Lawrence, Nancy Tuana, Mark New, Carmen Elrick-Barr, Ram Pandit, and David Pannell. 2017. "Climate Change and Loss, as If People Mattered: Values, Places, and Experiences." *WIREs Climate Change* 8 (5): e476. <https://doi.org/10.1002/wcc.476>.
- UK, Foresight. 2011. "Foresight: Migration and Global Environmental Change." London: The Government Office for Science.
- Whyte, Kyle Powys. 2018. "Settler Colonialism, Ecology, and Environmental Injustice." *Environment and Society: Advances in Research* 9 (September): 125–44. <https://doi.org/doi:10.3167/ares.2018.090109>.
- Whyte, Kyle, Jared L. Talley, and Julia D. Gibson. 2019. "Indigenous Mobility Traditions, Colonialism, and the Anthropocene." *Mobilities* 14 (3): 319–35. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17450101.2019.1611015>.