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## Climate Migration. Cultural Aspects of Climate Change\*

*Abstract:* This paper argues that climate migration—in case of climate refugees in a strict sense—differs from other forms of migration not only by its finality but also by the fact that entire communities are forced to resettle elsewhere. For such communities to migrate with dignity—that is in a way that protects the social bases of their self-respect—their host countries are required to ensure the necessary institutional arrangements enabling these people to become full and equal members within a reasonably short time. Ensuring that their equal participation rights are not merely formal but have ‘fair value’ requires taking cultural differences into account to ensure that they do not pose substantial disadvantages for participation in the political and social sphere.

### 1. Introduction

Climate change has a cultural dimension. Long term changes in local climates, more frequent extreme weather events, and rising sea levels caused by anthropogenic climate change threaten traditional ways of life where these depend on particular natural surroundings. They damage cultural heritage such as cultural landscapes, monuments, and historical sites as well as at least some cultural practices and traditions. And in some extreme cases climate changes render the traditional territory of a group of people uninhabitable. Climate change then results in migration of entire communities.

This paper argues against critics that climate migration is of a particular kind and deserves particular attention. While it shares characteristics with other forms of migration, raises similar challenges for host countries and the international order, and requires the same sort of solutions it differs in one normatively relevant respect: in view of climate change it sometimes are not only individuals but entire cities, regions and even nations which are forced to relocate.

The paper proceeds in the following steps:

1. I will first present and assess the claim that climate migration is not a particular challenge but merely one of the causes of the general migration

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\* I am very grateful to Clare Heyward, Pranay Sanklecha, Philippe Streit and the anonymous reviewer for invaluable feedback on earlier drafts.

challenge. I will argue that despite the similarities there is a normatively relevant difference. Namely, climate migration includes migration of entire communities.<sup>1</sup>

2. The second part of the paper discusses the notion ‘to migrate with dignity’ and establishes an argument showing that climate refugees have a right to the kind of institutional support they require to become full and equal members of their new societies within a reasonable time. This right is based on the value of membership as one of the social bases of self-respect.
3. The third step will thus discuss the cultural aspect of climate migration in particular and ask what kind of institutional arrangements are necessary to ensure that displaced communities are able to integrate into their new societies as full and equal members.

## 2. Climate Migration as a Distinct Form of Migration

### 2.1 Critique of the Term ‘Environmental Refugee’

Since the late 80s scholars and practitioners in refugee research debate whether it is useful to give special attention and grant a particular kind of refugee statuses to what they call ‘environmental refugees’.<sup>2</sup>

The UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees defines a refugee as a person who is

“owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted on account of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, outside the country of their nationality, and unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail him/herself of the protection of that country”.<sup>3</sup>

The debate is concerned with the question whether the refugee status should be extended to persons uprooted by environmental problems. There are several definitions of environmental refugees. One influential description of Norman Myers defines them as

“persons who no longer gain a secure livelihood in their traditional homelands because of what are primarily environmental factors of unusual scope” (Myers/Kent 1995, 18).

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<sup>1</sup> Environmental migration is not the only occasion where entire communities are forced to relocate, but cases of ethnic cleansing are relevantly different due to the grave and acute violations of human rights involved.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Bates 2002; Black 2001; Castles 2002; Keane 2004; Kibreab 1997; Myers 1996; 2002; Myers/Kent 1995; Ramlogan 1996; Stojanov 2004; Vine 2005.

<sup>3</sup> See Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, Basic Documents, 1. September 2007 (<http://www.unhcr.org/protect/PROTECTION/3b66c2aa10.pdf>).

Another widely used definition is coined by Essam El-Hinnawi understands them as

“people who have been forced to leave their traditional habitat, temporarily or permanently, because of a marked environmental disruption (natural and/or triggered by people) that jeopardised their existence and/or seriously affected the quality of their life.” (El-Hinnawi, 1985, 4)

The International Organisation for Migration uses the following working definition:

“Environmental migrants are persons or groups of persons who, for reasons of sudden or progressive changes in the environment that adversely affect their lives or living conditions, are obliged to have to leave their habitual homes, or choose to do so, either temporarily or permanently, and who move either within their territory or abroad.”<sup>4</sup>

Environmental factors forcing migration of this kind are likely to be more frequent in the future due to anthropogenic climate change. It is therefore speculated that there will be considerable numbers of climate refugees. Both the definition and the number of persons affected are very controversial: predictions have a considerable range but usually it is estimated that by 2050 there will be between 100 and 200 million environmentally displaced persons.<sup>5</sup> Despite the disagreement in detail most experts agree that such environmentally caused migration could become a massive threat for future stability and human well-being. However, some scholars argue that despite the unquestionable relevance of environmental reasons among the motivations to migrate, it is not helpful to focus on this particular phenomenon too much; rather it should be seen as only one aspect of the general challenge of migration.

Richard Black, for example, claims that classifying particular groups of immigrants as environmental refugees and giving special attention to environmental reasons for migration “is unhelpful and unsound intellectually, and unnecessary in practical terms” (Black 2001). He analyses three of the reasons often named for environmental migration: a) desertification, b) rising sea-levels, and c) environmental conflict, that is conflicts emerging from scarcities and population movements resulting from changed climate conditions. Black argues that while these phenomena certainly are reasons for relocation, they are not always a reason to migrate into a different country. In many cases it is possible to relocate locally without those dramatic circumstances implied by the word ‘refugee’. Furthermore, where relocation involves migration into another country or even part of the world, environmental reasons hardly ever are the sole reason to migrate.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.iom.int/jahia/Jahia/definitional-issues>.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, the debates and estimates of the International Organization for Migration (IOM): <http://www.iom.int/jahia/Jahia/complex-nexus#estimates>. For some of the problems concerning predicting the numbers of environmental migrants see Crisp 1999; Stojanov 2006.

Black's main concern is that summarizing all cases of environmental relocation understood in this loose way under the term 'environmental refugees' leads to an inflation of the term. This bears the danger that the term loses its normative thrust of implying an urgent need of help for people in a desperate situation. He fears that contrary to the intention of those using the term to campaign for systematic and consolidated support for those affected by dramatic environmental problems, the inflated use of the term might lead to further restrictions of asylum and immigration.

## 2.2 Defence of the Term 'Environmental Refugee'

While Black's arguments are convincing given the intention of his paper, something relevant would be lost by relinquishing the concept of environmental refugees entirely.<sup>6</sup> The term 'refugee' implies—according to its initial definition—that a person facing a severe threat which is outside her control in her homeland (the original definition refers to unacceptable forms of discrimination) is in a situation where she is abroad and no longer able to seek protection from her own government (in many cases because the government itself is involved in the discrimination). Environmental refugees should therefore be regarded as persons who find themselves in a situation characterised by this description due to environmental reasons. Black and other critics of the term 'environmental refugee' are right to point out that for most of the cases of environmental migration discussed in the literature this would not be the case.

Nonetheless, there are and will be even more cases where these stricter criteria are fulfilled. Prime examples are the Small Island States in the Pacific many of which—because of rising sea levels—will be first uninhabitable due to salinisation and subsequently will be completely lost to the sea.<sup>7</sup> Within the next decades states like, for example, Kiribati and Tuvalu will lose their territory and—given that they are unlikely to find a new territories for their states—will cease to exist as states. Unless these states prepare their dissolution well, their former citizens will find themselves in a situation to which the term 'environmental refugee' seems appropriate given that the following criteria are fulfilled:

1. The uprooted person is facing a severe threat beyond their control and needs to seek refuge in a different state. Or grow gills.

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<sup>6</sup> Unlike Bell I do not want to dismiss Black's critique concerning the danger of inflating the term 'refugee' entirely. See Bell 2004, 138. As I will show, it is possible to distinguish different kinds of forced migration, take the plight of each group seriously and reserve the term 'refugee' for a group of persons who are in a particular predicament, namely a situation where they lack a government supporting even their basic interests.

<sup>7</sup> This is at least one widely accepted scenario. Recent evidence shows that many islands probably will not disappear completely into the sea given that many of the relevant islands are reef islands which are "dynamic landforms that are able to reorganise their sediment reservoir in response to changing boundary conditions (wind, waves and sea-level)" (Webb/Kench 2010, 4). However, this is not true for all affected islands and even if these changes mean that many islands as geographical landmasses remain, this does not mean that they will continue to be suitable for human settlement. This new evidence thus suggests that the situation might be less bleak than hitherto feared, however, it is very likely that there will be still cases where entire communities need to leave their homes and resettle elsewhere.

2. The uprooted person's former government is either no longer existing or for other reasons linking to extreme climate events strictly unable to support its (former) citizen's fundamental interests.
3. Like political refugees, such environmental refugees are dependent on the international order for ensuring that she will have the opportunity to settle, earn her livelihood, and gain citizenship in another state.

Therefore, even though the critics are right to warn against the inflationary use of the word 'refugee' it is important to note that some cases of environmental migration fit the underlying criteria for refugee status and are currently not sufficiently considered by the United Nations Convention on refugees.

### 2.3 Climate Migration

Moreover, while it is occasionally necessary to distinguish between refugees and other forced migrants—especially due to the even greater vulnerability of refugees—it is also important to distinguish between different reasons for relocation.<sup>8</sup> Different reasons for relocation lead to different rights and duties both for immigrants (including refugees) and host countries. That is, while there are some special claims that people have in view of being environmental *refugees*, there are other claims they have in view of being *environmental* refugees or forced migrants.

Black points out that in many of the cases currently discussed under the label of environmental migration the environmental circumstances are not the only reasons and often not even the most pressing ones. He criticises the term 'environmental refugee' not only for the 'refugee' part discussed above but also for the description 'environmental'. He argues that environmental reasons are mixed in with other motivations and often come down to little more than economic reasons. Citizen from Kiribati, for example, might have very good reasons to emigrate to one of the neighbouring countries like Australia or New Zealand quite independent from the threat of rising sea levels: Kiribati is one of the world's poorest countries and offers few opportunities and a low standard of living.<sup>9</sup> Communities fleeing from desertification also have other reasons to leave the subsistence level lifestyle of herdsman and migrate to places offering a wider range of occupational choices and more secure incomes. I assume that Black's claim is that if we divide environmental migrants out of the number of migrants fleeing severe poverty we will lose sight of the need for more general strategies of reducing global poverty.

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<sup>8</sup> This paper concentrates on forced migration. Even if not all cases of environmental migration fulfil the strict criteria for refugee status whenever there are sufficiently grave environmental reasons for migration, this migration cannot be considered voluntary but rather as a case of forced migration. For a more detailed discussion on forced migration see Turton 2003.

<sup>9</sup> For Kiribati's economic situation see *The World Fact Book*, ed. Central Intelligence Agency, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/kr.html> (accessed 02.06.2010) and *Der Fischer Weltalmanach*, [http://www.weltalmanach.de/staat/staat\\_detail.php?id=140447](http://www.weltalmanach.de/staat/staat_detail.php?id=140447) (accessed 02.06.2010).

However, despite the difficulty of disentangling different motivations for migration and despite the relevance of economic reasons intermingling with environmental reasons, it remains important to distinguish between different causes of relocation, because the reason for leaving will have implications on what is normatively required both of the immigrants and of the receiving states. That is, for people fleeing from a temporary flood or armed conflict the requirements are different than for people relocating because their homeland is lost to rising sea-levels. At least four different kinds of considerations seem to be relevant:

1. *Degrees of voluntariness*

The claim to be admitted somewhere is stronger if there are no real alternatives to migration. This relates particularly to the features of refugee status but also to circumstances that do not fulfil these strict criteria but nonetheless leave the individual only with extremely poor options if he remained in his native country.

2. *Responsibility*

If the responsibility for the situation which requires migration lies with a particular other state, this state has a particular responsibility to either change the circumstances in the migrant's native state or to itself protect the migrant's interests, for example, by facilitating immigration or special advocacy for the migrant's interest in international negotiations. This does not mean that others are not called upon to help—the ability to help—is another much discussed foundation for such duties. It means, however, that responsibility for causing the problem offers a further reason to provide help and might be a decisive criterion when deciding who of the possible helpers is actually required to step forward.

3. *Expected duration*

If the relocated person can be expected to return to her native country in the foreseeable future the host country is under less strong obligation to worry about her political participation rights and general integration into the host society.

4. *Scope of migration*

The requirements for accommodating individuals might be different from those appropriate when dealing with the relocation of entire communities.

Environmental migration—and more specifically migration caused by anthropogenic climate change (climate migration)—happens to be on the obligation aggravating side of all these distinctions.

1. While much climate migration is a move from worse to better environmental and climatic circumstances, there are still many cases where migration is strictly unavoidable (as in the case of the Small Island States who will be lost to the sea in the foreseeable future but also in circumstances of extreme drought and desertification).

2. Most of the climate damages are found in the global South whereas most of the causes of climate change are found in the actions of the developed North. In view of the common sense idea that those who cause a problem have special obligations to help those suffering from it, climate refugees from the developing countries seem to have a special case for admittance in or at least support from the developed countries in the North.<sup>10</sup>
3. Given that many climate changes are not temporary phenomena, accommodating climate migrants must take into account their long term plans and thus consider questions of political participation as well as cultural identity and social integration.
4. This is particularly true in case where entire communities lose their native territory and institutional arrangements. While it might be sufficient to expect individuals to integrate into a new society and to adopt their cultural ways (bar sufficient provisions for individual religious freedoms and other basic liberties), there might be a case for demanding cultural provisions for immigrating communities.

This last aspect—as well as its strict finality—differentiates climate migration from mainly political or economic migration. If a particular region becomes unable to support the population living there or strictly uninhabitable it is not only individuals or families seeking to find a better life elsewhere, it is the entire community. While individual political and economic migrants often can keep ties with their native culture if they chose so, extreme cases of climate migration might lead to the complete loss of particular communities as communities and thus of particular cultures as instituted entities.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> As mentioned before corrective justice is not the only and most likely not the most important reason for attributing duties to help those suffering from climate change to the North given the difficulty of attributing responsibility for a long-term multi-source phenomenon like climate change. Further reasons are, first, that the rich industrialized nations are much more able to assist those suffering in the South than their own poor governments. Secondly, distributive justice in terms of the benefits and burdens of climate change also suggests redistribution given that the benefits accumulate in the North and the burdens in the South. All the reference to responsibility adds is an additional further claim which strengthens the duty to help within one's capacities which everyone faces.

<sup>11</sup> Another aspect which differentiates climate migrants from other forced migrants is that they are not suddenly displaced but often know that they will eventually have to leave their homeland but usually have a timeframe of some decades to prepare. At first sight this is an advantage because it allows time to prepare relocation, to search carefully for a new home and to start adjusting to the chanced lifestyle even before leaving one's traditional home. However, at the same time it is a disadvantage since potential host countries might consider such potential immigrants mainly as economic migrants which can be turned down more easily than someone whose relocation is more urgent.

### 3. Migrating with Dignity

#### 3.1 What Does It Mean to Migrate with Dignity?

This paper focuses on this last aspect of climate migration: scenarios where entire communities lose their homelands forever. In particular, I will focus on climate refugees in the strict sense: populations that are (due to be) displaced by anthropogenic climate change find themselves abroad and no longer have their own (national) government to support their interests. The main question is: what needs to be done to ensure that these communities can migrate with dignity?

The expression ‘to migrate with dignity’ is taken from the addresses of Anote Tong, President of Kiribati, before the UN General Assembly.<sup>12</sup> In these speeches President Tong presented the situation of Kiribati which is according to the dominant scientific view due to be uninhabitable and lost to the sea in the next fifty years. He claims the Kiribati are entitled to international support and asks not only for countries willing to receive immigrants but also for preparing cooperation to support job-training in vocations where there is a need for skilled labour in the respective host countries. The expression ‘to migrate with dignity’ thus refers to the claim that those uprooted from anthropogenic climate change are due more than a place to stay and means of subsistence. Rather, ensuring the dignity of those uprooted by climate change entails—according to President Tong—providing the support those migrants require to be able to get decent jobs in their new societies.

The term ‘dignity’ is ambiguous and often supercharged with emotion. Using it bears the danger to dramatise the debate without offering clear criteria as to where the crux of the problem lies. That a situation threatens someone’s dignity is a dramatic claim since it suggests that the very personhood of those affected is at stake. I follow President Tong’s use of the expression ‘to migrate with dignity’ intentionally to suggest that the situation of climate refugees in the strict sense is a situation which is likely to have a significant influence on a person’s self-understanding, self-respect and thus on their conception of their personhood. However, more needs to be said as to what exactly are the relevant aspects of forced migration and why these dangers justify the use of dramatising terms.

In the following I first suggest that the intuition underlying President Tong’s requests is the claim that concern for the dignity of climate migrants requires ensuring the institutional preconditions for full and equal membership in their new societies. Full and equal membership requires, first of all, full citizenship rights. But apart from the formal rights it also requires that the political rights and liberties have ‘fair value’, that is, are of roughly equal value for all members despite all their differences. I then argue that full and equal membership is an interest fundamental enough to generate duties in others. This argument is based on the idea of the social bases of self respect. Finally, I argue that this concern for full and equal membership has political and cultural implications as well as the economic preconditions that President Tong is concerned with.

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<sup>12</sup> See Tong 2008; 2009.



As mentioned above President Tong demands not only commitments to accept Kiribati immigrants but also preparatory cooperation to ensure adequate job training:

“[...] my government has developed a long-term merit-based relocation strategy as an option for our people. As leaders, it is our duty to the people we serve to prepare them for the worst-case scenario. This strategy involves the upskilling our people to make them competitive and marketable at international labour markets. We want to make them competitive and marketable at international labour markets. We want to target labour markets where skills or labour gaps exist and provide those labour for them. We believe this offers a win-win situation for all. We shall be able to provide countries with labour and those countries shall be able to provide potential new homes for our people. The strategy provides our people with an option so when they choose to migrate, they will *migrate on merit and with dignity*. They will be received by their adopted countries not as burdens, but as *worthwhile members of the community*.” (Tong 2008, 3, emphasis by me)

There are two considerations:

1. It is more likely to find countries willing to receive Kiribati immigrants if these immigrants are a valuable contribution to the workforce rather than a burden on the social systems.
2. Kiribati immigrating as skilled professionals have a different status and considerably better opportunities to integrate into society.

Here the focus is on the second aspect. For President Tong, to migrate with dignity requires the opportunity for the immigrants to compete on the labour market and thus to become worthwhile members of the community. Or, the other way round, President Tong’s speeches thus suggest, that to migrate *without* proper preparation and job-training means that the Kiribati immigrants would find themselves in an undignified situation. They would—according to the assumptions of President Tong—lack the skills to be competitive on the job market of the industrialised nations and would thus be dependent on social support. It is likely that this would not exactly endear them to their new societies which are then likely to regard them as a burden.

The main question now is, whether this situation really qualifies as undignified? In every society there are people who are—temporarily or continuously—excluded from the kinds of job that secure both economic independence and social esteem. Are all these people necessarily in an undignified position? I do not think so. They certainly are in a vulnerable position, but in some cases—for example, when not-working is the result of voluntary choice or working is for a particular person strictly impossible—the absence from the labour market is not seen as exclusion. Furthermore, economic independence is not the only social basis of self-respect and even when this condition is not fulfilled people

might have sufficient other groundings for their self-respect. If President Tong's claims are to make sense there needs to be a further assumption: while economic independence and social esteem through appropriate jobs are among the social bases of self-respect more generally,<sup>13</sup> they are particularly important for those who are entering a new society. That is, economic independence and social recognition on the basis of one's position in the work-force are not only important in themselves but also as means to eventually gain full and equal membership in a new society. The danger of migrating without the proper preparation is thus not only that the immigrants would feel as a burden on their new societies but more fundamentally that they would not feel as members or at least future members of these societies at all.<sup>14</sup> In contrast to other citizens they lack historical, relational and possibly cultural bonds with their new state and until such bonds develop their conception of membership rests mostly on their sense of contributing to the joint project of society understood as a system of cooperation.

Becoming a member of a new society always is a long and difficult process. This process is greatly facilitated when there already are cultural or religious links. It is also greatly facilitated if both the old members and the new members of the society feel that the new members are making a valuable contribution to society. Conversely, this process is hindered when either group cannot help seeing the immigrants as a burden on the existing society.

According to this interpretation to migrate with dignity means to ensure the social bases of self-respect best understood here as the institutional preconditions necessary to allow immigrants to become—within a reasonable timeframe—full and equal members of their new societies rather than a marginalised group at their fringes. Full membership refers to the full participation rights associated with citizenship. Equal membership refers to the more substantial understanding of being an equal in a cooperative enterprise which is based not merely on the formally equal participation rights but also on a roughly equal opportunity to actually contribute to this cooperative in one's individual way.<sup>15</sup>

Full and equal membership is an ideal which requires not only adequate institutional arrangements but also an inclusive public culture and individual efforts. This essay focuses solely on the institutional dimension without denying the importance of the others preconditions of realizing full and equal membership.

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<sup>13</sup> For literature on work as a social basis of self-respect see, for example, Kildal 1998; Lane 1982; Moriarty 2009.

<sup>14</sup> It is important to distinguish between formal membership expressed by attaining citizenship and a more substantive understanding of membership. For membership understood as a social base of self-respect merely formal membership is insufficient. As will be shown below the value of membership as one basis of self-respect relies on the understanding of political membership as (1) a prerequisite for self-determination as well as (2) a way of acknowledging the status as a person capable of full membership in society understood as a fair system of cooperation. For both of these conditions it is important—as shown below—that the political rights and liberties are not merely formal but have what Rawls calls 'fair value.' To achieve such 'fair value' the political rights and liberties must not be qualified by social and economic pressures, discriminations, and exclusions.

<sup>15</sup> While Tong focuses on the importance of contributing to the labour force and achieving equal standing with the other members of society in socio-economic terms, this is not the only form of contribution which matters. The contributions of care-givers, artists and others, who contribute in ways not measurable in merely economic terms, are by no means less important.

### 3.2 The Importance of Full and Equal Membership

In the previous section I interpreted President Tong's claims about migrating with dignity as claims about ensuring the institutional preconditions for full and equal membership. To argue that the Kiribati have a right to the kind of institutional support they need to migrate with dignity, I now need to show that full and equal membership is an interest important enough to generate duties in others.

This raises several questions:

1. Is migrating with dignity an interest important enough to generate duties in others?
2. Who is the bearer of these duties?

Regarding the first question, I claim that migrating with dignity means to migrate in a way that protects the social bases of self-respect by enabling full and equal membership. I rely on the following argument whose premises are discussed below to show that migrating with dignity understood this way generate duties in others:

1. Full and equal membership is—in the context of modern democratic states—one of the social bases of self-respect.
2. Self-respect is a fundamental interest—or in Rawlsian terms—a primary good.
3. Fundamental interests and primary goods create duties in others not only to prohibit their destruction but also to assist in their provision.

With regard to the second question I suggest (but will not develop the argument here) that the responsibility for ensuring conditions suitable for migration with dignity lies with the industrialised nations for three reasons:

1. The industrialised nations are best able to provide what is necessary to ensure migration with dignity (ability to pay principle).
2. They also have duties to help the victims of climate change for reasons of distributive justice: they hold a greater share of the benefits of Greenhouse gas emissions while encountering fewer of the burdens associated with the resulting climate change.
3. They are particularly called upon, finally, due to reasons of compensatory justice. While compensatory justice is a difficult notion and raises many problems, it is fair to say—from a common sense point of view—that the industrialised nations are at least partly responsible for the predicament of those suffering from climate change and therefore should be required to compensate for at least some of the losses.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> For arguments supporting the claim that the industrialised nations (the global North) are mainly responsible for bearing the main burden both of mitigation and adaptation costs of climate change see Shue 1999 but also the wider discussions on this point in Caney 2005; 2006a; b; Meyer 2009; Meyer/Roser 2006; Neumayer 2000; Posner/Sunstein 2007.

In this paper the focus is solely on the first question. In the following I thus aim to show that membership is an interest sufficiently important to generate duties in others to provide the support needed to ensure that full and equal membership in their host societies is achievable for climate refugees.<sup>17</sup>

*Premise 1*

The first premise is that full and equal membership in society is—at least within the context of liberal democratic states—one of the social bases of self-respect. While I do not provide a full argument I hope to show that this hypothesis is convincing within the context of the political culture of modern democracies.

Self-respect is an ambiguous concept:

“Self-respect is often defined as a sense of worth or as due respect for oneself; it is frequently (but not always correctly) identified with or compared to self-esteem, self-confidence, dignity, self-love, a sense of honor, self-reliance, pride and it is contrasted (but not always correctly) with servility, shame, humility, self-abnegation, arrogance, self-importance.” (Dillon 2009)

Different understandings of self-respect focus on different possible aspects. I will here rely roughly on Rawls’s conception claiming that self-respect has at least two important dimensions:

1. A sense of one’s own value and the conviction that one’s interests matter.
2. A confidence in one’s abilities to take charge and responsibility for one’s life (see Rawls 1999, 386).<sup>18</sup>

Despite the ambiguity on the exact meaning of the concept, there are two aspects on which there is wide agreement:

1. As I will discuss in more detail in Premise 2, self-respect is quite universally seen as something of great importance.
2. Self-respect is neither fully dependent on external feedback nor fully independent. The reactions of others often have substantial impact on whether a person can develop a secure sense of her own worth.

Feedback from others can happen both on the personal level in the encounter of individuals but it can also happen in the encounter of institutions. States in

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<sup>17</sup> Theoretically, it is imaginable that such communities relocate as communities and thus are able to protect existing patterns of full and equal membership. Practically, it is very unlikely that a suitable territory could be found where these communities could move to in order to re-establish their institutional framework on a new territory.

<sup>18</sup> Rawls’s conception of self-respect is controversial; however, for the present purposes the critiques are not immediately relevant. For a fundamental critique see, for example Eyal 2005, but also the relevant passages in Cohen 1989; Daniels 1989; Shue 1975; Taylor 2003.

particular have great power to injure people's sense of self-respect by official discrimination and arbitrary exclusion from full and equal participation in political and social cooperation. Arbitrary (gender, race, origin based) exclusion implies that a particular group of persons are seen as lacking—without good reasons—the right and/or capacity to decide and pursue their own interests and/or a certain group of person's interests matter less than those of others.

All forms of arbitrary discrimination are in direct opposition to what I take to be the political culture of modern democracies with its fundamental liberal intuitions expressed by Dworkin (2000, 5) in the following way:

1. "It is important, from an objective point of view, that human lives be successful rather than wasted, and his is equally important, from that objective point of view, for each human life."
2. "Though we must all recognize the equal objective importance of the success of a human life, one person has a special and final responsibility for that success—the person whose life it is."

And they are also direct threats to the two aspects of self-respect identified above. While self-respect has several different bases, it is hard to see how within this cultural context a person could be called having self-respect if she accepts either that her own interests are generally less important than those of others or that she should not be involved in deciding her own fate (see also Rawls 1996, 76). That is, institutional arrangements implying such claims can be seen as attacks on self-respect.

Conversely, full membership in the social and political cooperative schemes implies recognition for one's status as citizen equipped with

1. the right to develop and pursue an individual conception of the good (where this does not violate the equal rights of others), and
2. the capacities necessary to be a fully cooperating member of society.<sup>19</sup>

Equal membership implies that no one's interests generally matter more than anyone else's. That is, the burden of proof lies with those who would like to argue that in a particular case the interests of some citizens are more urgent or more fundamental. Equal membership also implies that we should take part in deciding our political arrangements as equals. This requires—as we will see below—not only equal formal participation rights but also that factors which prevent some citizens from making use of their equal rights in a disproportionate way are—were possible—reduced.

This is to say that being offered or being denied full and equal membership has significant impact on people's self-respect and thus can be seen as one of its

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<sup>19</sup> In Rawlsian terms these capacity includes not only the power to develop and pursue a conception of the good but also the power of justice, that is, of being able to recognize the prima facie validity of the claims of others and to adjust one's life plans to respect their rights, too. While these capacities differ among different people for society understood as a cooperative scheme all that matters for full cooperation is to pass a certain threshold to be considered as equals (see Rawls 1996, 19).

social bases. This does not mean that everyone's self-respect depends solely on the ability to participate fully and equally in political affairs. It means, however, that being denied full and equal membership is a serious challenge to self-respect because it implies that one's interests matter less or that one is not sufficiently able to decide for oneself what one's interests are and how one would like to pursue them.

*Premise 2*

The second premise is that self-respect is a fundamental interest or primary good. As mentioned above this is a quite generally shared intuition and once more I will not provide a full argument but just some comments to show its plausibility.

Dillon presents it as "essential to the ability to live a satisfying, meaningful, flourishing life—a life worth living—and just as vital to the quality of our lives together" (Dillon 2009). Rawls explains its importance with respect to its impact on agency: "Without it nothing may seem worth doing, or if some things have value for us, we lack the will to strive for them." (Rawls 1999, 386)

Given the above mentioned fundamental convictions—that people's lives matter and that it is first of all each person herself who takes responsibility for her life—these suggestions explain why self-respect is seen as a fundamental interest, an interest that needs to be fulfilled before other interests become influential or a primary good, something every reasonable person wants no matter what else she wants. Unless I cannot find value in my life and confidence to realise my aims other interests are not likely to have much meaning either.

*Premise 3*

The third premise is that fundamental interests or primary goods create duties in others. Here too I will not provide the full argument but just provide some reasons to back the claim that this assumption is reasonable. In the following I briefly sketch two important background theories supporting this claim.

A first way is to rely on interest-theories of rights which claim that some interests are important enough to impose duties in others (see Raz 1984, 182). Fundamental interests are among those interests who do this. Given the fundamental importance of self-respect people thus have, first of all, a negative duty not to injure other people's self-respect. What this duty entails is controversial given the uncertainties involved in determining how external factors impact on self-respect rather than mere self-esteem.<sup>20</sup> The duty is thus best understood as relating to the social bases of self-respect. Threatening these bases violates the duty. Preventing the social bases of self-respect from being undermined not only requires refraining from arbitrary discrimination but also some active provision and protection of the social-bases of self-respect such as institutional arrangements supporting full and equal membership in the political sphere.

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<sup>20</sup> On the distinction between self-respect and self-esteem see Dillon 2009. For the related distinction between appraisal and recognition respect in particular see Darwall 1977.

A second possibility to argue how important interests create duties is offered by Rawls. Rawls does not claim that fundamental interests by themselves create duties. Rather, he relies on the device of the thought experiment of agreement in an original position behind a veil of ignorance to explain the normative significance of his principles of justice. He claims that what he calls primary goods are things that people in the original position would choose as contents of their most fundamental principles of justice. Since the agreement here is hypothetical the normative force does not rely on the fact of agreement. Rather the claim is that no one has any principled grounds to object to duties developed from the principles of justice which were worked out by help of this process given that the process insures that only positions acceptable from an unbiased point of view pass the test. The primary good in question, when talking about self-respect, once more cannot be self-respect itself (given its dependence on internal—non-distributable—dispositions as well as external feedback) but rather its social bases. The resulting duty is to create institutional arrangements which do not threaten but rather strengthen the social bases of self-respect (Rawls 1999).

These are but two ways in which the fundamental interest in self-respect or the primary good relating to self-respect can be seen to create duties in others to provide what is necessary in terms of the social bases of self-respect. However, given the dominance of these theories in modern liberal thinking this should suffice to claim that the premise is not unreasonable.

### *Conclusion*

Together the three premises—(a) full and equal membership is one of the social bases of self-respect, (b) the social bases of self-respect are fundamental interests or primary goods, and (c) fundamental interests or primary goods lead to a duty to create institutional arrangements enabling and facilitating their protection—support the conclusion that there is a duty to create institutional arrangements which enable and facilitate full and equal membership.

This argument applies to the situation of climate refugees in the following way. As said before Climate refugees in the strict sense lose not only their homeland but also their membership in society given that their societies cease to exist due to their displacement. Given that it is unlikely that there is an option for the entire politically constituted community to relocate, climate refugees will have to enter other pre-existing states. According to the previous argument emphasising the importance of full and equal membership, they not only have a right to be admitted somewhere when their homeland becomes uninhabitable but also to full citizenship as well as institutional arrangements aiming to ensure the fair value of their formally equal political rights and liberties. Obviously such membership is not an instant affair: what is required are institutions which enable and facilitate their becoming full and equal members within a reasonable time.

### 3.3 The Prerequisites of Full and Equal Membership

The question is now which institutional arrangements are required to enable and facilitate full and equal membership in the case of climate refugees.

As discussed above President Tong is particular concerned with provisions for upskilling his Kiribati countrymen to enable them to claim their status as full and equal members by becoming worthwhile members of the labour force. The underlying assumption is not only that host societies would be more willing to accept immigrants on equal terms if these immigrants can be seen as a valuable contribution rather than a burden. It is also assumed that immigrants who are competitive in the labour-market are able to integrate more confidently. For equal terms of membership both the external and the internal dimension are necessary and an institutional arrangement which has positive consequences on both accounts can thus be seen as a very suitable way to enable and facilitate full and equal membership. The aim should thus be arrangements which secure the inclusion of at least substantial parts of the immigrating group of climate refugees into the economic life of their host society.

The importance of this socio-economic dimension as one of the preconditions of full and equal membership is second only to the importance of the formal rights of free and equal membership. This dimension is so fundamental that its omission in the addresses of President Tong can only be interpreted as a wish not to state the obvious. Given the importance of membership for self-respect—and especially the importance of having a way to participate in the decisions concerning the institutional framework of one's life—the international community is obliged to safeguard that climate refugees will have the opportunity to gain the full rights of citizenship in their host countries reasonably quickly.<sup>21</sup>

There is however, a third dimension of full and equal membership which currently does not get the attention it deserves: namely the cultural dimension. There are two distinct claims:

1. Membership in a *cultural* community also is an important interest.
2. Cultural differences can undermine the equal standing of members of society just as much as socio-economic differences can and thus can affect the social bases of self respect.

The last part of this paper focuses on the second claim. The first claim will not be discussed and defended but will be referred to in the discussion of the second claim as a consideration which needs to be taken seriously when debating how citizenship equality can be achieved in the context of cultural diversity.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> This paper does not deal with the question which countries are obliged to integrate which and how many climate refugees.

<sup>22</sup> For the most influential liberal accounts of the value of cultural membership see Kymlicka 1989; 1995; Miller 1995; 2007.



## 4. The Cultural Dimension

As discussed in the first part of the paper one distinctive difference between climate refugees and other refugees is that environmental changes may force entire communities to leave their homeland and settle elsewhere without any hope of ever returning to their homeland. Climate change threatens not only the livelihood of these people but also their sovereignty as political entities and their integrity as cultural communities.<sup>23</sup> When immigrating into a different country they are entitled to the kind of support necessary to become full and equal members of their new societies within reasonable time. The membership at stake here is understood predominantly political. Society is understood as a fair system of cooperation and the self-respect of its members is partly based on their recognized ability to be contributing members of this scheme both in political and economic contexts.

### 4.1 Cultural Differences and Full and Equal Membership

But every society is culturally shaped. Politics too is culturally shaped. Multiculturalists, post-colonialists, feminists and other proponents of minority rights have been arguing for a long time that mainstream liberalism neglects the importance of cultural differences in the political sphere.<sup>24</sup> The most important claim in this context is that cultural differences can undermine equal citizenship just like socio-economic differences. That is, even when formally equal political rights and fair opportunity in the economic sphere are realized, cultural differences can lead to disadvantages in terms of participation and thus in terms of regarding oneself as a full and equal member of society. An example should illustrate the claim. It seems clear that politicians speaking a minority language face a clear disadvantage in election campaigns: unless they invest in intensive language training they have a smaller chance to convince the electorate of their ideas. Even despite their efforts they still might be limited in terms of the rhetorical skills so influential in democratic campaigning. This disadvantage seems comparable to the disadvantage faced by a poor politician competing against rivals with much larger funds for campaigning.<sup>25</sup>

This shows that at least some cultural differences make a difference to whether citizens have a roughly equal chance to influence political outcomes and thus a roughly equal chance to see themselves as actively constituting members of society understood as a fair system of cooperation. However, the argument multiculturalists (and feminists) make is more subtle than claiming that cultural differences *as such* undermine equality (though as the example above suggests there are some cultural peculiarities which directly challenge equal political par-

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<sup>23</sup> As said before, the chances that a territory is found into which the community could immigrate as community to re-establish its institutional framework are negligible.

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, Benhabib 1996; Gutmann 1994; Kelly 2002; Moller Okin 1989; Parekh 2000; Walzer 1997; 2007; Young 1990.

<sup>25</sup> For such cases see Rawls's discussions of the prerequisites of equal liberty (Rawls 1999, 198).

ticipation). Rather, multiculturalists argue that because political institutions cannot be culturally neutral, the equal standing of minorities is threatened. Cultural differences make a difference not (merely) because they might interfere with political participation as such but because they make it harder for some to participate in the culturally shaped institutions set up by others. It is thus not *impossible* for cultural minorities to participate as equals, but under some circumstances participation on equal terms requires them to change (at least in part) who they are. The minority language politician in my example can participate as an equal with equal opportunities in election campaigns only if he gives up on using his own language in his political activities. Ensuring the necessary fluency might even require that he predominantly uses the majority language in all his communications. Multiculturalists claim that requiring assimilation in order to participate as an equal does not treat people as equals, because it takes at least some elements of the majority's way of life as a standard that other people have to meet.

The language case is helpful for showing that cultural differences can make a real difference to political participation but it is not helpful for explaining why this is morally troubling rather than simply unfortunate. If democracy requires communication so that we all understand each other, then we need a shared language. Given the existence of multiple languages some will have to use a language other than their mother tongue to participate. It is clear, furthermore, that it makes sense to use a majority language for common usage so that fewer people have to learn a new tongue. There are other examples that can make the point that it is not cultural difference as such that threatens equal political liberty but rather cultural difference in view of an uncritically accepted cultural standard.

For example, in her critique of deliberative democracy Iris Marion Young argues that political discourses are shaped by particularly white, bourgeois, and male ways of thinking, thus making it harder for women and minorities to participate as equals.

“Deliberative theorists tend to assume that bracketing political and economic power is sufficient to make speakers equal. This assumption fails to notice that the social power that can prevent people from being equal speakers derives not only from economic dependence or political domination but also from an internalized sense of the right one has to speak or not to speak, and from the devaluation of some people's style of speech and the elevation of others.” (Young 1996, 122)

What she calls feminine ways of thinking and arguing (esp. story telling), for example, are not recognized as valid alternatives or additions to male ways of thinking (competitive arguments). In order to be taken seriously as equally competent and legitimate political actors women therefore need to resort to male ways of thinking and arguing. I am sceptical whether these really are characteristically male and female ways of thinking. However, there are culturally different ways of thinking and societies tend to consider some as appropriate and others

as less so. In this evaluation they do not always consider that unusual styles of thinking are not necessarily inferior. This bias means that some people are more encouraged than others to speak up, some are taken more seriously than others, and some claims will not get the attention their substantive content deserves. Furthermore, if members of an immigrant group are continued to be seen as strangers due to their cultural distinctness their right to speak out on affairs that affect all citizens might be questioned and their contributions might be taken less seriously than those of traditional members. That is, even features that do not affect the ability to participate as such might influence whether one is taken seriously or not.

#### **4.2 Assimilation and Full and Equal Membership**

That is, cultural differences can undermine the equal standing of citizens with regard to political participation. These differences can thus endanger the sense of being full and equal members of society for cultural minorities—and thus this aspect of their self-respect. The most apparent solution to this problem—the solution often implicitly favoured by liberal practise—is to encourage a certain degree of cultural homogeneity within society and thus to expect a certain degree of assimilation. The most convincing understanding of this claim is that immigrants can be expected to adjust to the shared public conception of justice of their new country and respect its rights and liberties. However, the assimilation implicitly required usually is more than this commitment to shared ideals of justice but also includes cultural peculiarities and acceptance of wider cultural norms (such as, for example, dress codes). The most obvious objection to this extension is that it cannot be conducive to self-respect to be required to change to fit the cultural expectations of someone else. In the case of displaced communities assimilation must be considered particularly threatening because these communities cannot rely on anyone else to preserve what they consider valuable about their culture. They would be required to choose between continuing their own cultural traditions and thus preserve the very existence of their culture and the option of full and equal membership in a substantive sense. Either option would mean sacrifices in terms of the bases of self-respect.

As the above discussed examples show the solution is likely to lie somewhere in the middle between requiring cultural assimilation and giving up on the notion of a shared culture altogether. There are two commitments pulling into different directions:

1. Societies need some of shared commitments, practices and norms of behaviour. Citizens need to be in some sense equal to be considered—and to consider themselves—as full and equal members of society.
2. Societies need to account for the value of cultural membership and individual self-realization and thus take seriously the different cultural affiliations among its members.

Accordingly, the challenge to secure full and equal membership for communities displaced by anthropogenic climate change requires efforts both from the immigrants and from the host country:

1. To become full and equal members of their new societies immigrants have to familiarise themselves with the political institutions of their new home as well as with the underlying historical and cultural assumptions of the political and public culture. They have to respect the shared understanding of justice and the rights and liberties of their fellow citizens who might practice them in ways that seem strange and/or distasteful to the immigrants.
2. To enable communities displaced by anthropogenic climate change to enter their society as full and equal members the host states have three different sets of duties:
  - (a) to grant to climate refugees relatively easily and quickly the full rights of citizenship,
  - (b) to assist immigrants in acquiring the necessary skills to participate as full and equal members in its economic, social and political institutions (This includes both the professional training President Tong is concerned with as well as the language training and legal, political and cultural information just mentioned.),
  - (c) to ensure that its political culture and practices are sufficiently sensitive and responsive to the disadvantages arising from cultural difference (This might include arrangements like special representation to ensure that the government is aware of potential conflicts and problems.<sup>26</sup> It might further require openness to change where current practices lead to avoidable and unjustified discriminations: this might mean a stronger commitment to the principle of liberal neutrality in the justification of regulations as well as more effort to accommodate cultural differences in the implementation of such neutrally justified regulations.),<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> The usual list of measures intended to ensure a fair inclusion of minorities and their interest in political debate consists of: reserved seats in parliaments, committees, and other influential institutions; proportional representation; redrawing the boundaries of constituencies to ensure certain majorities; consultations with group representatives, and using quotas when selecting party candidates for election lists. See, for example, Benhabib 1996; Kymlicka 1995; Kymlicka/Norman 2000; Parekh 2000. Different approaches are suitable in different circumstances and many approaches are controversial given that they rely on group representation and thus are open to two important objections. It is claimed that group representation undermines rather than enables political equality among individual citizens. Furthermore, there is the danger that groups are represented by traditional rather than elected elites and that there are minorities within minorities whose interests are entirely neglected if not positively harmed. For promising accounts of ways to ensure a fair hearing to minority voices see Young's accounts of deliberative justice (Young 1996; 2000; 2002) as well as Pettit's account of contestatory democracy (Pettit 2000).

<sup>27</sup> For accounts of liberal neutrality which are explicitly open to take into account cultural difference see, for example, Bader 1999; Bielefeldt 2003; Zellentin 2009.

- (d) to ensure that the political institutions provide a framework suitable to allow cultural groups to form cultural societies which allow them to cultivate different cultural traditions (this amounts to a substantive understanding of freedom of association), and finally,
- (e) to foster a tolerant public culture which accepts that different citizens employ their equal rights and liberties in different ways, some of which appear strange and even objectionable to others (provided that no one violates the rights of others).

## 5. Conclusion

Many of these claims are likely to apply for displaced individuals as well as for displaced communities. However, communities losing their territory to climatic changes at the same time lose their constitution as an institutionalised cultural community. By contrast for most other cases of migration there remains a cultural motherland which continues to influence (and in many cases to support) the understanding of this particular culture in exile. This is to say that for displaced communities the importance of preserving those aspects of their culture that they consider valuable must be particularly urgent. Any—even implicit—pressures for assimilation must be felt with a particularly strong kind of regret and must question the sense of truly being full and equal members—equipped with full participation rights despite their cultural differences.

Consequently, in the case of climate refugees—understood as entire communities displaced by anthropogenic climate change—‘to migrate with dignity’ requires particular efforts of the host countries to ensure full and equal membership. Given the importance of full and equal membership as social bases of self-respect those immigrants are entitled to this support as a matter of right.

Apart from provisions to ensure preconditions of equitable participation in political and economic terms the preconditions for full and equal membership also requires attention to the cultural dimension of political and societal membership. What is called for is an openness to accept cultural differences within society and the commitment to treat all citizens as equals despite their cultural differences. This means that the culturally shaped interests of the new citizens should be given the same weight as those of the original citizens when deciding (and reconsidering) aspects of coordinating law which affect people’s culturally shaped life plans. This does not mean equal impact in the legislative process but an equal chance to a fair hearing of the interests and arguments at stake. Since majority rule is likely to give an advantage to the mainstream culture of the host country, special provisions are necessary to achieve that the minority views of immigrants are ensured their fair hearing.

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