

UTRECHT UNIVERSITY  
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

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CLIMATE REFUGEES,  
REASONS FOR ACCEPTANCE

*A change in the philosophical debate*

Supervisor: Dr. Jos Philips  
Second Reader: Siba Harb

Andrea Liuzzi  
6878903

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## ABSTRACT

Climate change will generate an unprecedented number of displaced. In this thesis, I discuss the moral character of these displaced individuals — namely, climate refugees. First, I try to find an answer whether climate refugees can be considered refugees. And then, I try to give reasons why refugees, and climate refugees in particular, should be welcomed and accepted in a recipient country. In order to do this, I investigate the very notion of refugee, trying to come up with a definition that includes all the individuals with unsolvable human rights problems in their country of origin. Then, I show that climate refugees, as the people with unsolvable human rights problems generated by the consequences of climate change, respect the criteria to be considered refugees.

Considering these individuals as refugees will generate some consistent changes and challenges in their reception — mainly, a significant change in the numbers of displaced and in the causal genesis of their displacement. These changes will substantially interfere when taking into account the reasons for the acceptance of refugees. In conclusion, I will argue that climate refugees are refugees, and there are reasons to accept them.

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# INTRODUCTION

Climate change is a threat to many political and institutional equilibriums. Among these, one of the most challenging consequences that a global environmental crisis will produce is an exodus of unprecedented proportions. Millions of people will be forced to flee from their flooded cities or villages, desertification will make many green areas of the world unliveable, and many economic activities will become unprofitable to the most. National and international institutions will have the arduous task of having to manage this global crisis. At the moment, the current institutions do not have the capacity to face up to the unprecedented changes that we have to expect.

This thesis has two objectives: first, I am going to show that climate refugees are refugees; second, I am going to give reasons why they should be admitted in a recipient country. In the first chapter of this thesis, I am going to answer two critical questions that will help us to better understand how to deal with the individuals victims of a global environmental crisis. The first question is: *what is the best way to define a refugee?* To find an answer to this question, I am going to evaluate three definitions of refugee that can be found between international norms and the philosophical literature, and I will argue for the most morally adequate. The philosophical debate tries most of the time to overcome the original definition of refugee that was given in the 1951 Geneva Convention. The two central positions that I am going to address are those given by Carens (2013) and Miller (2016). The two authors are among the most significant contributors to the philosophical debate regarding refugees and reasons for acceptance. I will use Miller's definition to provide reasons why, if an individual has unsolvable human rights<sup>1</sup> problems in her country of origin, then she can be considered a refugee. After that I have established a new fitting definition of refugee, I am going to find an answer to a second important question: is there such a thing as a climate refugee? I am going to argue that climate refugees are refugees, trying to expand Miller's definition and be more specific for what concerns the victims of natural disasters. Climate change will produce

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<sup>1</sup> In this thesis, I will not expand on conception of human rights. I will simply use them on the intuitive idea that their respect is a minimum requirement of global justice, and protecting them is a fundamental interest of all human beings (Philips, 2020).



the kind of unsolvable human rights problems that will generate an unprecedented number of displaced that, according to the definition I am going to propose, will be climate refugees.

Once that I will have established who is a refugee and that climate refugees can be defined as such, I will address the changes that the introduction of this new figure would generate, mainly a change in the number and in the causal genesis of the phenomenon. This passage will be fundamental to display the main features of climate refugees. The large numbers of individuals involved and the particular causal genesis of the climate disasters will produce an inevitable change in the perception and in the reception of these people. These changes will be a necessary base to display the reasons why we should accept refugees and the reasons why we should not accept refugees. In the third chapter, in fact, I will display the main reasons to accept refugees. I will show that when we apply these reasons for acceptance to climate refugees, they become stronger and more applicable. Then, in the fourth chapter, I will give reasons not to accept refugees, I will refute them, and I will show how these become weaker and less applicable when applied to climate refugees. These refugees are victims of structural behaviours of states, who are the same actors supposedly responsible for assisting them. However, from a moral point of view, once we have reestablished the right for environmental migrants to be called refugees, the current state system will not be able to do what needs to be done. Given this, at last in my conclusion, I will propose some conclusive statements regarding the necessity of having a clear idea of where we are standing, and how this implies having a collective look toward the future.

In the end, my addition to the debate will provide reasons according to which everybody in the philosophical debate should accept climate refugees as such. In the academic literature, there usually is a very cautious approach towards the use of the term ‘climate refugee’ or ‘environmental refugee’ (Morrissey 2009). Kovner (2017) already deeply investigated the link between climate change and human mobility, recognising a pattern in the current political discourse that prefers to refer to the people displaced by environmental catastrophes simply as migrants. Many others, both in the news narrative (Grant et. al, 2009) and in the academic literature (Myers, 1997; Keane, 2004; Bell, 2004; Farbotko & Lazrus, 2012), already discussed the figure of the climate refugee, trying to assess the duties and rights that states ought to them, investigating their causal genesis and their forced migratory route. My hope is to give a novel approach to the issue of climate refugee, first trying to identify if these future displaced individuals respect the criteria to be called refugees, and then giving reasons to accept them in a welcoming country.

## WHO IS A REFUGEE?

In this chapter, I am going to answer two critical questions. First, I am going to show what is the best way to define who is a refugee and who is not. In order to do so, I will evaluate three different definitions of refugee, showing what they lack to be morally acceptable and to include all individuals who would be morally entitled to the status of refugee. Second, I am going to show that climate refugees enter into the new definition of refugee, respecting all the necessary moral requirements to be entitled to the status.

Refugees are often mistaken for migrants. The main attribute that distinguishes a refugee from a migrant is the refugee's background. As we are going to see, a refugee has a claim to be admitted in circumstances where not everyone would automatically be allowed (Miller, 2016). In the definition I am going to end up with, it is the direct threat (United Nations, 2016) that distinguishes a refugee from a migrant, and this distinction is necessary to avoid problems to both populations. A migrant is not in danger and often simply leaves the homeland to find better economic<sup>2</sup> possibilities to improve her quality of life. Nobody imposes a threat on the migrant's life in case she would decide to remain in her current state of residence. On the other hand, the refugees' claim is based on the threat imposed on them that is generated by remaining in their homeland (Miller, 2016). I am going to argue that, when human rights are at stake, people asking for asylum generate a moral claim to be admitted.

The first definition I am going to discuss is the one proposed by the 1951 Geneva Convention, together with its 1967 optional protocol. The convention proposes a definition used in international custom and based on political persecution. One of the problems with this definition is that it does not take human rights into account. The Geneva definition is, in fact, believed of being outdated to guarantee protection to all those people in danger who, as we shall see, would be morally entitled to be considered refugees. The second definition I am going to take into account is the one proposed by Joseph Carens (2013). Carens argues for expanding the

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<sup>2</sup>David Miller (2016) specifies that the term "economic migrant" must be understood in a broad sense, so that are included all those people who decide to relocate for personal reasons. The author uses the term "voluntary migrants" to confer a broader sense to the category.

definition of refugee to include anyone fleeing serious threats to her basic rights. The problem with this wide definition is that the author does not look at the sources of the problem. On this last point, Carens' definition and the third definition I am going to discuss and further elaborate find their contrast: David Miller's (2016)

definition of refugee focuses on the source of the problem. Miller has a more narrow definition of refugee that focuses more on the necessity and vulnerability of the subjects involved. The element that distinguishes who is entitled to the status of refugee and who is not is the unsolvable threat that forces people to flee away from their country of origin. Miller includes in his definition people whose human rights are threatened by natural calamities. However, he does not elaborate on them. After I have established, looking at the pro and cons of these three definitions, what is the best way to define a refugee, I am going to elaborate on Miller's point of insoluble threat. In the end, I am going to make a point on those individuals displaced by the consequences of climate change and eventually conclude that these people enter within the new definition of refugee. My claim does not imply an immediate change in political practice. But instead, I will try to make a philosophical argument claiming that climate refugees respect the criteria to be defined as such.

## 1.1 INTERNATIONALS NORMS

The most common definition of refugee, also used in everyday political practice, is the one given by the 1951 Geneva Convention. The convention was first valid only for the member states of the European Union, as a way to regulate the migratory crisis that hit Europe after the Second World War. In 1967, with its optional protocol, the convention was made universal (Carens, 2013, 198). These two documents set the normative principles according to which each of the 145 state parties must ensure that the rights of the refugees are respected and protected according to the convention. The peculiarity of these laws and international norms is that they generally tend to be clearer than moral philosophers in defining the requirements needed to be considered a refugee. This is given by the fact that they usually propose a narrow definition that includes all the legal requirements to be considered a refugee. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) defines refugees as "people who have fled war, violence, conflict or persecution and have crossed an international border to find safety in another country" (United Nations, n.d.). While the Geneva Convention states that a refugee is a person who "is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of [his own] country".

The convention bases its definition on the political persecution that the individual has to be a victim of, to be entitled to the status of refugee. The persecution in question could be an issue of race, religion, nationality or membership of a particular social or political group (Carens, 2013, 199). This is the very first problem with this definition: focusing only on the kind of threats that are generated by some kind of persecution produces a very narrow definition. When we think of refugees and we try to find a legal status for them, we are trying to legislate on an objectively assessable situation. Excluding some categories of people that are in danger for some other reasons and that may require assistance and protection risks defining out situations with many similarities to political persecution. Moreover, it does not take into account the threat to human rights as a criterion to define whom we should grant protection. This

makes this definition, in a certain sense, outdated and anachronistic. Many critics point out that the convention was designed for a different era, and that it does not take into account the impact of a large number of refugees on the receiving countries (Millbank, 2000). Millbank also concludes that if the convention were to be signed nowadays, very few countries would be willing to do so. The most recent wave of human rights would require a more inclusive definition of refugee that is able to take into account all the unsolvable threats that are imposed on individuals in their country of origin.

To better understand the flaws of this definition, we shall look at one of the most important and central principles of the convention: the non-refoulement principle. This principle is fundamental to guarantee the protection of each refugee because it establishes the right not-to-be expelled and returned to the original land (United Nations, 1951). However, guaranteeing the right not to be returned, this principle presupposes the existence of an original land. In this sense, this rule shows how the convention is outdated in not recognising the existence of new threats to the human rights of people all over the world. *Refoulement* might assume a whole new different meaning once reasons for admittance have changed. In the future, new refugees may face different forms of threats in their home countries, and granting the right not-to-be returned to the original land presupposes that there still is one. Looking at the *non-refoulement* principle from a normative point of view, we can understand its moral weight. If someone cannot be sent back to her home country because of a matter of security, then it means that this person has a moral claim to be admitted (Carens, 2013, 226). The most common objection against the non-refoulement principle is that it bases the allocation rule on where people seek asylum (228): the moral weight of an individual asking for asylum has some moral value when that individual enters in the jurisdiction of that specific sovereign nation. This is thought to be a problem since it creates a disproportionated equilibrium of some states having to deal with a greater number of refugees because of the higher number of individuals asking for help. However, would this be the same in the case of climate refugees?

## 1.2. A SECOND AND THIRD DEFINITION: A THREAT TO HUMAN RIGHTS

As we have seen in the previous section, with the current international norm, once an individual is considered to be a refugee, that individual is entitled to make a claim for admission. Every human being entitled to the refugee status must receive protection and feasible and prominent response to her situation. However, international norms only take into account the problem of political persecution of individuals whose state failed them in personally persecuting them or not providing them with the needed protection. In this section, I will take into account the other two definitions of refugees proposed by Carens (2013) and Miller (2016), which both propose a broader spectrum of acceptance than the 1951 one. Both definitions include as central criteria the threat to basic (Carens, 2013) or human (Miller, 2016) rights. The two authors clash in the importance that they give to the source of the threat. On this last regard, I will eventually agree with Miller's position and include within the new definitions all individuals whose human rights are threatened by unsolvable problems in their country of origin. Then, in the next section, I will broaden Miller's argument for climate refugees and conclude that they should be included into the definition of refugee. Unlike the Geneva Con-

vention, my definition will be weakly normative. The convention, in facts, states the rights and duties that both states and refugees have to respect. The definition I am going to embrace lacks of this normativity since it does not automatically follow that once a refugee is defined as such, then she should also be admitted. In order to address this weak normativity, I will take into account in chapter 3 and 4 the reasons why we should accept refugees and the reasons why we should not accept refugees to find an answer to the question: *should refugees be admitted?*

Carens defines a refugee as “someone whose situation generates a strong moral claim to admission to a state in which she is not a citizen” (Carens, 2013, 196). But how is this moral claim actually generated? A refugee is someone in danger, and nobody can grant her protection if she stays where she is. All the circumstances force the individual to become a refugee. If she had to stay in her home country, she would endanger her life. The problems in the country of origin must be life-threatening, and they should leave the person no alternative but to flee away. The main philosophical and political discussion that rises from the question “who should we grant protection to” is whether we should have a fairly narrow definition or rather a much wider one (Miller, 2016, 78). Carens argues for expanding the definition of refugee to include anyone fleeing serious threats to her basic rights. A similar perspective is also supported by Dummett (2001) who embraced the argument in favour of a broader definition, claiming that the refugee status should be granted to all individuals to whom it is impossible to live with minimal conditions for a decent standard of life (Dummett, 2001). Decent living standards are defined as all those material prerequisites necessary to achieve wellbeing (Rao & Min, 2017). The risk of a broad definition of this kind is to also include those that Miller defines as “voluntary migrants”<sup>3</sup> and wellbeing risks to be a broad concept on which to base our definition. The kind of definition proposed by Carens would try to include all those individuals whose basic rights are under threat. Another problem with this kind of enlargement is that it does not matter who the perpetrator is. Miller (2016) claims that this kind of definition fails to explain why granting the refugee status is the right response. Not having a clear view of who the perpetrator is means that it could still be possible to directly intervene in the country of origin. In this way, people would not have to relocate and enlarging the definition of refugee would not be necessary since all the aid and assistance could be delivered directly to the country in need. The definitions that include basic needs and standards are claimed to be too broad because they risk to drastically and avoidably increase the number of asylum seekers, in particular when in some cases it would just be necessary to bring assistance abroad. Since the state is not necessarily the preparatory party, it may still be willing to provide and deliver the sufficient needs for its people. In addition to this, there is also a risk of abuse for this kind of argument that is wide spread in the political discourse: “*let’s help them at their home*”<sup>4</sup> is the reductive answer that rightwing political parties give to immigration, pretending that every problem is then solvable in the country of origin.

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<sup>3</sup> See note 2

<sup>4</sup> “Aiutiamoli a casa loro” is one of the most used slogans by the right-wing Italian political party “Lega” (League). In this article an example of how the slogan has been used in the past: <http://www.genovatoday.it/attualita/lega-aiutiamoli-casa-loro-polemiche.html>



Miller (2016), on the other side, is more narrow in defining who is and who is not a refugee. His contribution to the debate consists of a partial enlargement of the original definition of refugee. The author distinguishes three categories of people with unprotected human rights: those suffering from persecution and protected under the Geneva Convention; those whose human rights are threatened by natural calamities or private acts of violence; those whose human rights are under threat but that could be helped by outside intervention. Miller believes that this last category should not fall under the definition of refugee (Miller, 2016, 82). On the other hand, the first two categories define who should be entitled to the status of refugee. Miller's conception of insolvability is not deeply investigated by the author: he simply states that a threat to human rights can be considered unsolvable when migration is the only possibility for avoiding the threat. To sum up, Miller enlarges the definition of refugee from the individuals protected under the Geneva convention to also include individuals whose human rights are threatened by acts of violence or natural calamities. However, he does not elaborate on this last category. Instead, he lays down the two basic conditions that determine who is a refugee and who is not: first, there is a condition of vulnerability that characterises the state of danger of the refugee; second, there is a state of necessity in which the individual must find herself. This means that the refugee, to be recognised as such, must be unprotected and have no other alternative but to move.

So, what is the best way to define a refugee? A refugee is somebody whose human rights are compromised by factors external from the individual. Forms of persecutions and natural calamities are just examples of possible threats against one person's health and security. The person is then entitled to the status of refugee if the threat imposed is not solvable by outside intervention of any kind. The problem must be either irreversible (e.g. many of the consequences of climate change in a worst-case scenario such as floods and desertification) or immune to any possible intervention. International aids, humanitarian assistance or other kinds of outside help are not enough to alter the refugee's state of imminent necessity. In the next section, I am going to answer the question of whether individuals displaced by the consequences of climate change fall under the definition of refugee and can, therefore, be classified as climate refugees.

### 1.3 CLIMATE REFUGEES ARE REFUGEES

Now that I have answered to my first question "what is the best way to define a refugee", stating that a refugee is somebody whose human rights are under threat and whose condition cannot be solved by any outside intervention, in this section, I am going to answer my second critical question: is there such a thing as a climate refugee? I will reach the conclusion that climate refugees will become an inevitable addition to the figure, respecting the necessary criteria to be considered refugees.

In the worst-case scenario that I will take into consideration also in the next chapters of the thesis, we have to imagine and expect the failure to keep global warming from increasing of 1.5 °C (IPCC, 2018). As a consequences, oceans will rise, and natural catastrophes will devastate entire regions, forcing millions of people to relocate. The so-called 'country of origin' could remain just with few territories not under-water. Somebody could still neglect the refugee

status to victims of natural disasters who can still receive assistance at their home. However, in this worst-case scenario, there is not a country of origin anymore to which others can offer their help. A similar event would not represent the failure of a specific state that was not able to provide protection and security to its citizens, but rather it would be the failure of a global system that was not able to intervene and reduce emissions. Millions of displaced people will be one of the primary consequences of this scenario. It is now important to ask ourselves: do the millions of people forced to relocate because of the dramatic consequences of climate change respect the criteria to be considered refugees?

These displaced people have no alternative but to flee away and ask for assistance. They respect both the criteria of being in a vulnerable position in which their human rights are under threat and outside intervention would not solve the cause of displacement, because in our worst-case scenario there is not a territory anymore in which it is possible to intervene. Simon Caney (2009) shows how the human rights of the people suffering the consequences of climate change are jeopardised and to understand this should help us realise the threat imposed upon the victims of climate change. Caney claims that natural disasters would jeopardise the right to life and the right health of the people living the most vulnerable regions of the world. Moreover, their right to subsistence would be violated by the effects of droughts and crop failure caused by the floods. In the worst-case scenario in which regions of the world would be underwater, we can easily imagine how the human rights of the people living in those regions would be violated. At the same time, basic needs and the standard of living would hardly reach a decent level. The reason why the people in these regions will have to relocate is both an economic reason and an indispensable one. The threat is real, and the necessity is a vital one. If none of the human rights threats displayed by Caney (2009) is solvable by outside intervention, then the victims of the consequences of these disasters respect the criteria to enter within the now broadened definition of refugee. Therefore, the people displaced by these natural calamities are climate refugees. Individuals displaced by the rise of the oceans are the most glaring example of people with unsolvable human rights problem affected by the consequences of climate change. Moreover, in addition to them, there could also be others affected by other kind of consequences: if there is a civil war generated by a fight over the lack of water, other people will be displaced and suffer from the consequences of the environmental catastrophe. There are climate refugees, but not everybody who has a human rights problem related to climate change is necessary a refugee, because some of the problems could be considered solvable by outside intervention.

If climate refugees are refugees, it means that these individuals are morally entitled to ask for admission. However, it does not automatically follow that the hosting countries have to admit them. It is necessary to provide reasons for admittance and show how these will change once climate refugees are included within the definition. The questions are going to be: *are pro tanto reasons morally relevant for admitting refugees? And how do these reasons change when applied to climate refugees?* However, before proceeding in doing so, we first have to discuss what would change in the reception system once climate refugees are considered as such, so that we can take into account the characteristics that are going to change and that are going to make a case for climate refuge.

## 2. IF CLIMATE REFUGEES ARE REFUGEES, WHAT WOULD CHANGE?

I now hope that everybody in the philosophical debate would agree that climate refugees respect the necessary criteria of necessity and vulnerability to enter within the definition of refugee. An individual with unsolvable human rights issues in her country of origin will, in most of the cases, ask for assistance. However, it does not automatically follow that other countries have to provide her with the demanded assistance. Before going into the reasons for admittance, it is first essential to determine the what would change in the perception and reception of refugees once we have established that climate refugees are refugees. It is fundamental to undertake this passage before proceeding with the reasons for admittance because displaying these changes, I will be able to draw some knowledge on what climate refugees are and what they do. The changes in the large numbers of refugees that the new definition is going to produce and the change in the particular causal genesis will play a fundamental role later on in addressing the reasons for admittance. As we shall see, because of these changes that climate refugee would produce if included within the definition, the reasons for acceptance will become stronger or even more applicable while the reasons not to accept refugees will become weaker or even less applicable. Moreover, some of the changes that I am going to propose will highlight how the current definition of refugee proposed by the 1951 Geneva Convention is outdated in not taking into account how the inclusion of human rights within the definition would require a whole new set of approaches to meet the needs of the new refugees. Many of the changes that I am about to point out are empirical. I need to point them out and use them to the extent they will be helpful to examine later on the reasons for admitting refugees.

### 2.1. CHANGE IN THE NUMBERS AND DESTINATIONS

The UNCHR estimates that there are 25.9 million of refugees around the world (UNCHR, n.d.). This estimation was done using as reference the 1951 definition of refugee, which considers refugees people fleeing from persecutions of different kinds. However, these estimations may change once we have broadened the definition of refugee. As a matter of fact, the first consistent change that we would witness in identifying those who escape from climate crisis



as refugees is a drastic increase in the numbers. In our worst-case scenario in which we imagine entire regions of the world being underwater or hit by environmental disasters, the number of people asking for asylum would increase by the millions. The non-profit organisation Climate Central estimates that 275 million of people around the globe live in areas that will be flooded if climate change is not mitigated (Holder, Kommenda, Watts, 2017) — having millions of people around the world who identify as refugees would consequently change the psychological perception of refugees as such. If at the moment, refugees are considered to be the exception, once the numbers reach unprecedented levels, the condition of being a refugee may be standardised by the public perception. The change in the numbers of people who would be entitled to the status of refugee will be later taken into account when I will discuss the risk to overwhelm the reception system or to jeopardise the security of a country, along with the economic benefits.

Another consistent change that would be generated by the introduction of climate refugees to the equation is in the destination countries that people fleeing from devastated regions would pick. Findlay (2011) identifies six different principles from the research literature that govern migrants' destination decisions: the immutable law that pushes migrants to move over shorter distances rather than longer; some destinations are decided on the basis of the income that they offer; another criterion is the connection that migrants already have in the host country. Findlay's point is that climate change could void the criteria because of the environmental scenario that some countries will inevitably have to face. What is most likely to happen is that areas that did not attract migrants in the past will eventually become attractive in the future because of the environmental transformation (Findlay, 2011). In addition to the range of the criteria, destination countries may also be determined in base of the responsibility that the hosting country has had in causing the disequilibrium in the first place. This kind of involvement will be further discussed when I will take into account the causal connection between countries and climate change.

## 2.2. CHANGE IN THE RECEPTION

The changes that must be taken into account for a good reception of climate refugee serve to understand some aspects that the 1951 Geneva Convention did not take into account: the help required by the refugees may differ depending on their background. Irreversible conditions that may alter the global equilibrium forever demonstrate the need for a new definition that is able to take into account the new modern challenges.

Once climate refugees would be recognised as such, there would be a change in the kind of help and assistance that these people will need from the host countries. When a refugee is being hosted in a welcoming country, if she is escaping from a war or any form of political persecution, she has specific needs to be addressed. A refugee that is escaping from a flooded village or a flooded city will have different needs to be addressed because the different emotional and empirical background will require a different kind of integration. Many institutional changes and solutions that might work to solve a migrant crisis generated by war or other causes may not be as effective when the individuals involved escape from environmental disasters. In the worst-case scenario, the climate changes that led people to flee will be irreversible,

therefore also the solution at disposable will have to face this new challenge. In The United States, for example, one alternative to formal refugee status is called “temporary protected status” (Carens, 2013, 227). When granted this status, the individual in need receives a form of protection that the government guarantees as long as the threat in the home country persists. This would not be an option anymore, and the practice would actually solve the problem of membership: spending some time in a hosting country would undoubtedly generate a connection to the country’s cultural and traditional heritage, some people could form friends and families, and after a while, they might ask to remain.

These changes better define who is a climate refugee and what this new category of refugees do. Now, we can proceed in trying to confer the normativity that the definition of refugee based on human rights lacks. In the next chapter, I will take into account the reasons why we should accept refugees and I will show how they become stronger or even more applicable once applied to climate refugees.

### 3. WHY WE SHOULD TAKE REFUGEES

Now that we have a broader definition of refugees that includes climate refugees, and now that we have established what would change once we have included these people in the figure, it is necessary to exemplify the weakly normative stand of this definition. Being a refugee entitles the individual to make a claim for admission (Carens, 2013), and this is given by the fact that the interest of the individual of fleeing from the threat to her human rights is a vital one. The insolubility of the threat leaves the claim for admission as the only possibility left. Now we shall see how this claim is morally generated. In this chapter, I am going to discuss the reasons why we<sup>5</sup> should take and welcome refugees. These *pro tanto reasons*, as also discussed by Carens (2013) and Miller (2016), have a moral relevance in the debate and do not look at the overall balance of things. A refugee is an individual with unsolvable human rights problems in the country of origin. Because of these problems, she is entitled to ask for admission. Looking at the reasons for admittance, we shall see why the admittance should be granted, and the refugee welcomed. When it comes to climate change, we shall see that their moral consideration becomes stronger<sup>6</sup>. The way in which I am going to present these arguments is from the point of view in which the hosting country has to evaluate its responsibility and moral duties to accept and welcome the refugees.

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<sup>5</sup> The “we” that I use through this discussion reflects the point of view in which the hosting country recognises the moral responsibility that is generated after the claim for admission of the refugee.

<sup>6</sup> For the sake of all arguments I am going to propose, I assume the existence of sovereign states and I do not intend to discuss their legitimacy. Moreover, for the ambitions of this discussion I am not going to have an integrated judgement. My intention is not reach an over all conclusion of the balance of admission, but rather I intend to display and discuss the possible reasons for admittance and evaluate how they are going to change once we have recognised that climate refugees respect the criteria of vulnerability and necessity to enter within the definition of refugee.

### 3.1 CAUSAL CONNECTION

The first pro tanto reason why we should take refugees is given by the moral relationship between victim and perpetrator. A causal connection between the two parties inevitably generates moral duties. If one party is responsible for having caused a problem, then it has the duty of solving it and paying the consequences of its actions. The basis of this reason can be found in the international law of state responsibility where one can find a moral significance that tries to regulate how to deal with the consequences of wrongful acts. Where a state commits an internationally wrongful act, it must pay for its consequences (Shelton, 2013). The notion of causality is a very complicated one: the main idea is that it is known that an involved actor has generated a given problem, and therefore the consequences become a responsibility. In many welcoming policies, this causal connection derives from a historical responsibility of solving damages that have been caused in the past (Pogge, 2004). The persecution that derives from the political instability of a country may be the result of a failed state victim of years of imperialism, wars and colonialism. The United States, for example, through the years, welcomed many Vietnamese refugees that were seeking for asylum (Do, 2018). The causal involvement of the US in Vietnam generated a dangerous political instability in the country that through the years forced many of its citizens away. The causal connection of the United States with the refugees seeking asylum generated the moral duty to guarantee their assistance and protection. Therefore, the causal connection has always been the *mea culpa* criterion that gives reasons for admittance in a determined country.

The substantial problem that arises when a causal connection is invoked is to determine whether the state in question was actually involved and complicit in the perpetration of the wrongful act (Shelton, 2013). On this regard, climate refugees can play a substantial change in the debate, making the causality between victims and perpetrator stronger and evident. When it comes to climate change, rich democratic countries bear a major responsibility because they have contributed the most to the environmental changes that the whole world will have to suffer (Carens, 2013).

However, I am aware that when it comes to the causal involvement in climate change, some would disagree that it is possible to charge a specific party for its contribution to global warming. More specifically, the causal connection may be harder to identify because of the time that had passed between when the “action” was pursued, and the effect is perceived. In the case of climate change and global warming, the wrongful action consists of years of neglect and persistent pollution that will generate irreversible environmental changes and disasters. The dispersion of the causality could be due to the fact that the climate is affected and altered by the actions of many different actors on different levels of interference: countries, corporations and individuals have all a role in interfering to the overall climatic balance of the planet. The result is that everybody who is involved is causally responsible. Having all the actors involved somehow responsible for the consequences, and the great dispersion generated by the time that has passed between the action and the perceived outcome generates a paradoxical scenario in which one could claim that no causality in the straightforward sense can be established.

On the other hand, I believe that in the climate discourse, it is possible to find a causal connection between the perpetrators and the victims — in this case, climate refugees. I claim that among the actors involved in the pollution scheme, it is possible to attribute to states the most responsibility. States are the only actor with the power of implementing policies focused on safeguarding the environment, and therefore, stopping the big polluters. If the causality of the climate action generates too much dispersion to produce an effective causal relationship, states have a more clear causality in the issue of climate inaction. In fact, in the question of responsibility for climate action and climate inaction, states have the responsibility to shift from a polluting production system to a sustainable one (Johl, 2020). Among all the actors causally involved in climate change, it is arduous to identify who has polluted the

most. However, states have the power to monitor all other polluting agents and eventually stop them and implement the effective policies in order to do so. To see effective results of their policies, “countries must take a comprehensive, economy-wide approach to shift from fossil fuel-dependent to clean energy economies” (Johl, 2020) and hold fossil fuel companies accountable of often funding climate denial. Of all the actors involved, states can be considered the most causally responsible since they are also the only one able of stopping the others from their pattern of behaviour. The responsibility invested by states is also recently reflected by a number of legal cases that have been brought up in front of courts: the most prominent example is *Urgenda Foundation v. State of the Netherlands* in which the court ordered the Dutch government to move faster on emission cuts (Corbett, 2018).

The conclusion that we can draw is that states are the actors mainly responsible for climate change because they are the only actor that could implement the necessary regulations to put an end to big polluting behaviours, both of individuals and corporations. Climate refugees would generate a reasonable ground for admission because the actors that might have been able to set the bases to stop climate change undertook a pattern of inaction.

### 3.2 HUMANITARIAN CONCERN

As a second *pro tanto* reason why we should accept refugees, we find a strong humanitarian concern, which is the basic principle according to which there are some people in need and somebody must provide them with the help they require (Carens, 2013, 195). This reason for acceptance is independent from the causal connection, and it revolves around the idea that those in need must be helped. Peter Singer’s drowning child is in imminent danger and independently from the causal connection of the strangers passing by, he needs to be helped (Singer, 1999). The passing by strangers have, in this way, a moral duty to save him. The moral obligation arises if those to be helped are in dire need of assistance. Intervention is required to protect the right to life of the people whose life is in danger. Humanitarian concern becomes a valid reason for admittance from the moment in which those in need have no alternative but to be rescued from the threat toward their human rights. This concern applies to any human rights problem. If brought to its extreme, the concern is necessary to preserve the life of the people in danger.

Of course, intervening in case anybody is in need may risk to overwhelm the limited resources of a given reception country. Opening to those in immediate need for assistance has a price to pay, and some may argue that there is a national interest in preserving some given resources to strictly use them only for nationals’ needs. As I will show in the next chapter, this self-national interest translates in something more beneficial for the hosting country than the price that it has to pay. In addition to this, as also Peter Singer (1999) points out, the moral weight generated by the humanitarian concerns would be heavier than the preservation-argument.

For the case of humanitarian concern, climate refugees would make this reason for admission stronger and even more applicable. As we have previously seen, climate refugees would require imminent assistance since their human rights would be jeopardised by the climate crisis which, in the worst-case scenario, would devastate and flood their home country, generating humanitarian reasons for admission. In addition to this, a global environmental crisis of unprecedented proportions would also represent a form of shared global experience that would manifest on different scales and levels of reception. Such a shared experience would generate a common consensus and awareness over the topic that would make it easier to relate to it. In a very factual analysis, given the source of the problem, climate refugees would be more relatable and would, therefore, produce a more sharable base on which develop

humanitarian concern.

### 3.3 NORMATIVE PRESUPPOSITIONS OF THE STATE SYSTEM

Another pro tanto reason why we should accept refugees is based on the normative presuppositions of the state system (Carens, 2013). The normative presuppositions of the state system become a fruitful reason for admittance from the moment we all benefit from the international system that provides law and order. The main reason why we endorse this system is, in fact, the benefit guaranteed by being a part of it. The idea is that if we uphold such a system, then we should also be willing to compensate the losers when they happen to undergo evident problematics.

Everyone is under the rule of a sovereign state that is supposed to provide a safe place to live for its citizens. It is through sovereignty that each country has exclusive authority over its territory and the people that are within its borders. This authority provides both duties and responsibilities over its citizens. The most prominent example of how this authority can be used by a sovereign country is what in political science is called the state monopoly of violence (Munro, 2013). The monopoly of violence is one of the two extremes in between which a state must exercise its duties. To one extent, the state is legitimised to use violence if necessary to maintain the public order. On the other side, states have a strong obligation to provide and guarantee security and assistance: they have, in fact, an interest in maintaining their control over of the people within the territory, and a duty to provide them with the necessary security to guarantee a decent standard of living.

For the case of refugees, their state failed to provide them with the security that they were supposed to receive. In the current humanitarian crisis, the duty to admit refugees that states have “derives from their own claim to exercise power legitimately in a world divided into states” (Carens, 2013, 196). This is given by the fact that being part of a failed global institution generates the duty of making some provisions to correct this evident failure. The welcoming state has reasons to admit the refugees of another failed state to repair the flaws of the state system. The main objection that can be made on this regard is that it is not that evident why a given country *A* should take the refugees of another country *B* when there is no causal connection or involvement between the two, even though both *A* and *B* are sovereign countries and are part of the state system. Carens (2013) does not resolve this issue providing a justification of why being part of a state system generates the normative presupposition of solving the complications of citizens of other states. However, climate refugees make a good case of why this reason for admission should be accepted by everybody.

In the case of a global environmental crisis that will force millions of people to flee away from their uninhabitable home country, it will not be because of the failure of a specific state system that generated the crisis. These environmental crises will be the outcome of a persistent polluting behaviour that has been brought about by decades of joint transnational action and inaction. In this scenario, the normative presuppositions of the state system would assume a whole different meaning: with the presuppositions that the institutional reception programs



would work, the failure that states would face would be a global one, to which everybody partially contributed. In this case, the moral duties of the state system would be strongly interconnected with the causal connection previously discussed that generated the crisis. Among the duties that being a sovereign state guarantees, there is the obligation and political necessity to maintain and guarantee a form of public order. As we have previously said, the state is legitimised to use many forms of action in order to preserve and guarantee the security needed by its citizens. In case of a crisis to which the state can be held accountable, there would be a form of moral and political obligation to do everything that is needed to repair the damage. In the case of climate refugees, they would be the party that needs to be ‘compensated’ for the damage.

### 3.4 COMMON OWNERSHIP

Diametrically opposite to the idea of the normative presupposition of the state system, a fourth often invoked reason why we should accept refugees is the conception of common ownership of the Earth. The idea is that refugees and migrants, in general, should also be able to find open borders in front of them because of the conception of a common ownership (Miller, 2016, 39). More specifically, according to this conception, planet Earth as a whole is conceived as a common good to which all human beings are entitled. The idea of common ownership has been deeply discussed and elaborated by Mathias Risse (2015) in his *On Global Justice*. Risse argues for the idea that all the resources and spaces of Earth are collectively owned by all human beings. To understand common ownership, it is necessary to understand what this principle would entail. The main debate concerning common ownership discusses the conflict between simply being entitled to travel and being entitled to relocate (Niesen, 2017). One of the danger is that the right to relocation based on this very broad principle would entitle too many people to move freely whenever they like. For this reason, a natural cosmopolitan right should be backed up by necessary reasons that force somebody to relocate. Refugees in general would make a good case for a necessary reason that forces them to relocate because, by definition, they find themselves in a vulnerable state of necessity that does not leave them any other option but to flee away.

The main problem with common ownership is that, according to some authors, it does not automatically follow that from a shared space and set of resources, then everybody is entitled to everything. Abizadeh (2014) strongly criticised common ownership as a reason why there should be a collective ownership of the Earth. The author moves critiques also against the same conception developed by Risse (2015), according to whom there should be an idea of “equal division ownership”. However, Risse does not fail in developing a common ownership that explains how shared space and resources can be distributed. In Risse’s conception, in fact, private properties still have a role, and each co-owner has an equal share of property right. This argument serves to preserve and not automatically dismantle the many social institutions that require the existence of property. Moreover, adjudicating that everything is owned by everybody would inevitably generate some problems of control and supervision. However, even though there can be this kind of resistance against this conception, I still believe that being in the compromised conditions that entitle an individual of making a request for admission can still be a valid reason why her common ownership should be recognised. In addition to this,

in a worst-case scenario in which part of the original property does not exist anymore, climate refugees would bring a consistent addition to the debate.

In a worst-case scenario, climate refugees would be left with no more ownership of their original land. The most hit regions of the world will become inhabitable and force millions of people to flee away. In a common ownership conception, the loss of the territory would result in a loss also for the people who did not inhabit those territories. Considering an “equal division of ownership”, climate refugees would have reasons to demand a new division of the given resources and territories. If, after a first division of ownership, a part of the population remains without its ownership because of the consequences of unmitigated common behaviour, then it is fair to ask for a new share. In this worst-case scenario, the only possible answer that states could give to respect a conception of common ownership would be to accept the refugees and assure them with a reasonable new division of ownership.

### 3.5 SELF-INTEREST

Self-interest is often given as a valid reason why we should take refugees by people who look at the personal gain obtained out of open reception policies. Intentions often determine the moral relevance of an action, and in this regard, self-interest plays a role in many moral accounts. Many moral accounts have an impartial point of view, and this means that the interest a person has becomes part of the picture once it comes back in its relevance to the moral story. Self-interest becomes, in this sense, a morally relevant *pro tanto* reason to take into account. The moral calculus of a utilitarian perspective is a good example in which self-interest plays an important role. In addition to this, self-interest as a reason for admission is a valid reason independently by the presence of an underlying problem or a migratory crisis. When it comes to welcoming refugees, self-interest could simply become an economical and productive justification that allows more people to enter inside a country. On one side, there is a personal gain that increases people’s wellbeing and fosters the economy. On the other side, those people in need receive the help, assistance and integration required. Help assumes a double form: the welcoming country helps the refugees welcoming them and protecting their human rights, while they help the country’s labour market.

It is known that refugees have a strong economic impact on the workforce. The pattern that is usually followed consists of first-generation migrants who are often willing to take jobs not everybody is willing to take (Rippenkroeger, 2017), and it is evident how the process has no hurt for natives (Bahar, 2018). What usually happens next is that the second-generation would seize the opportunity that was given to them by their parents (Rippenkroeger, 2017), taking the possibility of giving back their skills and knowledge to the country that first welcomed them. The opposite more populist rhetoric claims that refugees and immigrants will “steal our jobs”. Even though many studies and analyses of the labor market show the opposite (Wydick, 2018), many people are still eradicated with an idea that is the product of a populist mechanism that tries to gain consensus by looking for a common Other to blame. On the contrary, it is possible to find evidence that suggests that asylum seekers have helped to foster the economy and once they “become permanent residents, their macroeconomic impacts become positive” (D’Albis et al., 2018).



If we only keep the conventional category of refugees, we will have to deal with relatively few people. In the case of environmental refugees, the great numbers of relocated people will first make it difficult for everybody in need to find their position in the labour market. In a second moment, after the first allocating difficulties will be overcome, each country that opened its borders will start benefit from the great number of skills, ideas and possibilities that the 'new' people will have to offer. The unprecedented increase in the numbers can be welcomed from the recipient countries as a great opportunity to fill all the gaps in the labor market and in all the spaces that can be offered and at the moment remain disused.

### 3.6 FINAL REMARKS

It is possible to identify in the philosophical literature many reasons why we should accept and welcome refugees. The mainline of arguments I used comes from Carens (2013) and Miller (2016) and takes into account the causal connection between the crisis and the actors involved; issues of humanitarian concern according to which we should provide to people in need the assistance they require regardless of our involvement; the normative presuppositions of the state system which reflect the duties and responsibility of each sovereign state; common ownership, according to which the whole planet is conceived as a common good to which everybody is entitled; and lastly selfinterest, which reflects the advantages and the benefits that good welcoming policies will bring.

The outcome is that the reasons for assistance can be of various kind, and each of them can find its usual resistance. However, when it comes to climate refugees, moral reasons entitle these individuals to receive the assistance and reception that they need. So finally, for all the reasons previously discussed, after a global environmental crisis, the only possible acceptable policy that states should guarantee to foreign refugees is providing them with the assistance and help required.

To conclude, we saw how, when it comes to climate refugees, the reasons for admittance become even stronger and more applicable. In the next chapter, I will examine the reasons why we should not take refugees. In this case, we shall see how they become weaker or not applicable when applied to environmental refugees. In light of climate refugees, there is going to be a shift in the direction of arguments for admissions.

## 4. WHY WE SHOULD NOT TAKE REFUGEES

In this chapter, I am going to discuss the reasons why we should not grant the refugee status to people asking for asylum<sup>7</sup>. Most of these reasons try to preserve a sort of personal or national interest and reflect the worry for people of being culturally conquered or politically destabilised. In a worst-case scenario, the people who did not report any severe damage could wonder if it is just to welcome those in need with the risk of exacerbating their conditions. The clash is between insiders and outsiders: how well can one know what it means to be on the other side? But most importantly, even if one knew what it means, when it comes to deciding whether to accept the outsiders or leave the system as it is without risking its collapse, what would she choose? The fear for a collapse is expressed in Michael Walzer's *Spheres of Justice* in which the American philosopher expresses his concern for the disappearance of distinct communities, which would no longer exist in case states would not have the power to close their borders (quoted after Singer, 1999).

The common opinion that these reasons try to reflect is a rhetoric that is often used in popular discourses. For each reason, I will try to understand where its bases stand and how it would change once we have included climate refugee in the definition of refugee. I will show how these considerations become weaker and less applicable when applied to climate refugees. The way in which I am going to present these arguments is again through the point of view of the welcoming country. The first three reasons (4.1 - 4.3) proposed try to reflect the argumentative attempt to detach any personal involvement or responsibility from the problem. These three reasons are usually not taken into account in the philosophical debate due to their psychological drive. However, they represent the face of the popular discourse that is worth considering

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<sup>7</sup> As part of the debate, even though I will not investigate it, it is worth mentioning the argument about self-determination that is used to justify the right to close borders and not welcome migrants or refugees. The general thought is that in order to shape your life you have to have an influence on the political community. If the community is completely open, the political determination is jeopardised. Self-determination is, in fact, the "right of a democratic public make a wide range of policy choices within the limits set by human rights" (Miller, 2016). Another use of self-determination was made by Christopher Wellman (2008) who sees in a principle of self-determination both the right to freedom of association and the freedom not to associate with unwanted people.

and taking into account. On the other hand, the last three reasons (4.4 - 4.6) reflect a more general concern for the changes that open reception policies would generate.

#### 4.1 IT'S NOT MY FAULT

The first reason why we should not take refugees is usually used as a part of a rhetoric according to which if a person has no involvement in a specific action or situation, then she has no moral responsibility to fix it. Not welcoming refugees becomes, in this sense, the reflection of the kind of argument that does not want to get involved in other people's problems. The fact that some people are in need could be just a part of the human condition, and it is not our fault if some are more in need than others. When in most of the cases refugees are forced to flee away from their home countries because of political instabilities, wars and persecutions, this fault-argument is somehow a reflection of a possible causal involvement that makes people wonder if it is their fault. As I have already shown in the 'causal involvement' section in the previous chapter, accountability plays an important role in defining people's and state's responsibilities. However, when it comes to refugees, it might be harder to see the actual connection between actors. In determining the involvement of a certain party in the interference of a given equilibrium, the most desirable outcome would be a binary one: either the party committed the action and contributed to destabilising a certain political status, or the party was not involved.

As already discussed in the previous chapter, climate change is a global action problem in which states are the actors more causally involved, due to their power and responsibility to mitigate the consequences of the global environmental crisis. The causal involvement leaves no doubt: the actors responsible of having caused the problem are also morally and causally responsible to find a solution. In addition to this, it is also worth wondering the moral stand of somebody who was not causally involved in the action that caused the problems. In Peter Singer's famous Drowning Child thought experiment (Singer, 1999), the famous utilitarian philosopher wonders if the causal involvement in a given situation actually plays a substantial difference in the moral responsibility: saving a drowning child would not endanger the saviour's life, but his clothes would have to get wet and muddy. The most obvious answer would accept the price of having wet and muddy clothes to save the child's life. Singer then mentions that there are also other people walking by and that they could also save the child. However, the presence of other people does not limit the moral responsibility to do what is ought to do. When one has the possibility to intervene, the moral responsibility to save one person's life outweighs getting some mud on your clothes. The reception of refugees, either if they are the product of a global environmental crisis or other political instabilities, should embrace this superior moral principle over the fight of who is more involved. However, in the reasons why we should not take refugees, we shall see in the next sections that getting muddy is not the only price to pay.

#### 4.2 WELCOMING MIGRANTS WILL NOT SOLVE THE UNDERLYING PROBLEMS

Another often proposed reason why we should not accept refugees is that welcoming people that flee from wars or political persecutions will not solve the political instability of their home country. The same kind of reasoning also works for climate refugees since welcoming migrants that flee from natural disasters will not solve climate change. However, this is true only in a very limited sense. The help that is given to the asylum seeker is a personal and individual one. Human rights as such are granted to every single individual and the fact that the causal connection that pushed the person away still persists should not be a reason why not to help. Moreover, implementing effective measures of welcoming and integrating foreign individuals embraces an attitude prompted to promote a form of global solidarity that in the long-run will show its results. Thus, it is not completely true that welcoming migrants will not solve underlying problems. The country of origin usually benefits from having their citizens welcomed in foreign countries since this implies business networks between countries, investment for the countries that are overcoming conflicts and refugees transferring technologies and knowledge back home (Bahar, 2018). These are just some of the benefits of living in a globalised world and “the question of whether or not some person deserves to be considered a refugee is distinct from the question of what is the best solution for a larger problem” (Carens, 2013, 203).

#### 4.3 IT'S NOT AS BAD AS THEY SAY

A third reason is the product of distrust in the media and in the stories heard from people in need of assistance. This general lack of trust produces the stream of thoughts according to which we are not ought to accept refugees since the situation is not as bad as they say. This works both as an explanation of why we should not welcome refugees, and as justification for indifference. The recipient country will never fully understand what it means to be a refugee until it actually experiences itself the same kind of events that force people to flee away. This kind of response does not recognise that the people forced to leave their home country because of a sudden endangerment of the political or environmental conditions would rather not to. In addition to this, it also seems the case that it is as bad as they say, and the human rights problems that refugees report are real. Migration is a very challenging and expensive process and, with a lack of empathic effort, some people do not see this. However, this might be forced to change after a communal traumatic experience: climate change as a global phenomenon will eventually hit everybody, and if not directly, every country will pay some consequences. “It's not as bad as they say” might not work anymore once we have all experienced how bad it can be.

#### 4.4 IT RISKS TO OVERWHELM THE SYSTEM

One of the main fears concerning the welcoming of refugees has to do with the limited resources that are available for the people. Welcoming every single person that asks for help risks to overwhelm the reception system. The outcome of such a strategy would be counterproductive since the institutional structures supposed to guarantee their service may not function anymore for anybody. “If too many immigrants came within a short period, they could overwhelm the receiving state, leading to chaos and the breakdown of public order” (Carens, 2013, 277). For some not to overwhelm the institutional structure of a country is part of the preservation of their national interest. “We cannot help them if first, we cannot help ourselves” would be the main line of argument that expresses this concern. The price to pay, in this case, would be the possible collapse of the institutional structures supposed to work for us. Such a collapse would manifest itself with the inability of these institutional structures to guarantee their regular work: the outcome would be the complete dissatisfaction both of refugees and regular citizens. On this regard, one example is the alleged breaking point reported by the U.S. immigration system after 2014: the country claimed of having reached a point of being unable to provide the humanitarian assistance for the migrants and the basic controls on the rising numbers at the Mexican border (Shear, et al. 2019). In the following years, President Donald Trump declared that the “country is full” and ‘not welcome’ messages were adopted (Miller & Lemire, 2019). The overwhelmed system is a card often played by the political actors.

An overwhelmed system recalls the very famous example of the lifeboat ethics proposed by Garrett Hardin (1975). The author uses the metaphor of a boat in which welcoming swimmers in need would result in an unproductive decision that would lead to a tragedy for all. The argument goes against any help that should be provided to the poor because of the alleged tragic consequences. Carens (2013), on the other hand, sees reasons why the people on the boat have at least the moral obligation to take as many people as they can without jeopardising their conditions. One cannot leave another person to drown if she is able to intervene. A similar drowning metaphor is also used by the previously mentioned Peter Singer (1999). Singer has a clear view of the moral responsibility over his drowning child. Other people are passing by the drowning child, meaning that there are also other actors that could perform the action and pay the price for us. As if there was more than one single boat in Hardin’s example that could take in drowning swimmers. Here, it is important to look at the situation in a practical way. In practice, allowing every asylum seekers inside a single country is not something that in the regular reception system would happen. Countries have established a fair share distribution of migrants to avoid the collapse of their reception system (Betts et al. 2017), and even though this is still a very open and debatable issue, in normal conditions, it is unlikely that one single country would have an obligation to open to everybody. However, as we have previously discussed, this condition could drastically change in the aftermath of a global environmental crisis that could restrict the choices for destination countries. In this case, we would have to rethink of the whole reception process because not having any other ‘person walking by the drowning child’ would generate a higher moral involvement. Therefore, the states left with the resources would have a higher moral responsibility to intervene and ‘save the drowning child’.

In conclusion, the reception system may risk to be overwhelmed by the consequences of a global environmental crisis, and this could be a practical and morally relevant reason not to admit refugees. However, the moral responsibility of the states with the possibilities to intervene and welcome the refugees would highly increase once they will become the only actors with the ability to save the drowning child.

#### 4.5 IT'S A RISK FOR THE FABRIC OF OUR SOCIETY

Along with the economic threat previously discussed, there is also an existential threat that the most sceptical of reception policies often drag into the debate (Farrah & Muggah, 2018). The main idea is that taking people that are so different from us would culturally challenge the basis of our society. David Miller outlines *the preservation of the national culture* as one positive reason state can restrict immigration (Laegaard, 2007). The idea is that a common culture is one of the basic characteristics that the members of a nation have in common. The common culture is the objective focus of nationality (Laegaard, 2007). The fear is that a broad welcoming policy risks to drastically change this common culture. Losing what culturally ties a nation is perceived as a risk for the fabric of society as a whole. However, some think “appeals to cultural preservation as a justification for restrictions on immigration serve mainly to disguise the ways in which such restrictions protect non-cultural, and arguably illegitimate, interests” (Carens, 2013), such as interests in labor flows. One paper asserts that 30% of migration across economic sectors can be explained by business lobbying activities (Mishra et al., 2008). Controlling for a native country’s view on immigration, the main determinants remain economic, showing a contrast between the public presentation and the structural determination of the issue (Dancygier & Donnelly, 2013).

Culture, as one of the main component of a nation’s fabric, is often invoked in the debate regarding the acceptance of refugees. Bob Birell, demographer president of the Australian Population Research Institute, claims that mass immigration is a threat to traditions based on heritage, sporting culture and common language (News, 2010). The threat perceived is against national identity. The idea is that a national culture embeds all those values that constitute all the country’s tradition, language and habits. The worst perceived threat against a country’s culture is the idea of its perishability. “Assimilation is figured as annihilation” (Appiah, 2005), but for both parties: the assimilation of a new culture generates a novel identity both for the hosting and the hosted. Both sides annihilate themselves generating something new. The destruction of one country is often associated with the loss of communities and the consequent destruction of human life. In this regard, Scheffler (2007) points out how this national identity can also be a national interest: the unity of a country is, in fact, determined and sustained by a shared sense of history, the recognition of common practices and traditions, habits and styles. The risk of including a great number of individuals inside a country can be ground of cultural and traditional conflicts. However, the author also believes that framing such a complicated issue in terms of national identity and national culture may oversimplify the phenomenon, risking to “make the shape of possible solutions harder to discern” (Scheffler, 2007). In addition to this, I find Ronal Dworkin’s proposal very fruitful when it comes to the issue of immigration and acceptance of refugees: the idea is that “we inherited a cultural structure, and



we have some duty, out of simple justice, to leave that structure at least as rich as we found it” (Dworkin, 1985). This preservation ethics works as a safeguard of a given cultural structure. However, it does not necessarily exclude assimilations that can result in fruitful additions and varieties.

The opposite stream of thought that tries to safeguard culture from any kind of ‘contamination’ can be potentially dangerous, as we have seen all the reactionary nationalists turning the debate into a xenophobic and racist rise, especially in Italy and Hungary during the 2014-2016 migratory crisis (Farrah & Muggah, 2018). The main problem of this kind of reaction is that fear seems to be more important than facts. According to the research firm Ipsos Mori, in 2018, the average Italian claimed that the country’s population that was born abroad was 26%, seventeen points above the actual percentage (Villa, 2018). Surveys show that the perceived ‘invasion’ is always higher than the actual one (Villa, 2018). Despite the perceived threat, it is a fact that most of the people in need come from countries with different cultural traditions. It was through the hostile representation of the Other that many countries developed an anti-refugee attitude (Hall et al. 1997 and Narkowicz, 2018). The moral stand in this situation requires to wonder once again the price that we are willing to pay to save the drowning child. Getting muddy, in this case, would be translated as cultural integration that some are not willing to reach.

In the future, climate refugees are going to assume a central role in all migration issues. The effort for an effective integration will be required both from the recipient country and the displaced individuals: we have to reach the conclusion that society is in a continuous change and that things cannot just be crystallised as we prefer them. The world of tomorrow is not going to be the same one as the world of today, as climate change will drastically change the settings and the actors of the migration game.

#### 4.6 IT’S A RISK FOR OUR SECURITY

One last reason that is often proposed against the welcoming of refugees, in particular when they come in large numbers, is the fear that we might welcome in our country people that could pose a threat to the security of our society. Most of the displaced already showed that they are willing to find illegal ways to find their way inside the country (Carens, 2013), and this could lead to a pattern of illegal behaviours. Taking the fear of welcoming criminals inside the country to its extreme, some might reject the idea of open the borders because of the threat to security posed by potential terrorists. UNCHR Representative Mr Damtew Dessalegne and the Commissioner for Administration and Human Rights Ms Eliza Savvidou already stressed the importance not to conflate refugees with terrorists (Dessalegne & Savvidou, n.d.). The fallacious argument that tries to make of every refugee a dangerous criminal is usually generalised by the right-wing political parties, especially across Europe. They claim that the overcrowded refugee boats that try to find a safe harbour in Europe carry numerous terrorist and jihadists ready to undermine the security of the civilised Western world. Dessalegne and Savvidou take a moral stand according to which “to deny refugees a safe haven would undermine universal values without making Europeans any safer” (Dessalegne & Savvidou,

n.d.). They highlight the state's legitimacy to ensure the safety and security of its population, and this is also stressed in the 1951 Refugee Convention, which excludes from its scope any person who has been connected to any serious crime. However, Andersen, Mayerl (2018) and Antunez (2019) recognise still today the dangerous cognitive link between the possibility to suffer a terrorist attack and Islam. Moreover, what should really matter is the threat itself rather than the nationality of the source of the threat. In this regard, Carens (2013) shows how the cognitive link that attempts to connect a given nationality, tradition or religion to acts of terrorism is a fallacious one. He points out how citizens of the same nationality of the targeted country were involved in recent cases of terrorism or attempted terrorism. Terrorism is not a phenomenon strictly related to refugees. It is plausible that among a given group of displaced, some could be a threat to the security of the welcoming country. However, it is less plausible that all of the hosted individuals will engage in threatening behaviours.

For what concerns climate refugees, this specific objection would simply stand as before. The only difference that some people could perceive is strictly connected to the great number of refugees that would be entitled to ask for assistance once we have included climate refugees into the definition of refugee. The reasoning produced by the cognitive link between refugees and terrorists would point out that the greater the number of people we welcome inside a country, the greater the risk of finding dangerous individuals. However, this objection does not really hold for climate refugees whose background would propose a completely different narrative from the refugees who flee from political instabilities and persecutions. The real problem lays in the reception policy that sometimes is not able to perform the adequate screenings on the welcomed individuals. There are already some individuals that pose a threat to everybody's security present in the hypothetical hosting country. What the welcoming country can do is dealing with them with the usual means that they have (e.g. police, secret service, screenings). There is no reason to condemn millions of refugees because of a small number of threatening individuals.

#### 4.7 FINAL REMARKS

I have proposed a series of reasons that seem morally relevant in trying to back up the position according to which we should not admit refugees. Even though they all come from a different tradition and philosophical presupposition, they all try to reflect a common opinion that is afraid and feels the uncertainty of the important changes that will inevitably affect the way we are used to living. The six reasons I have proposed can be divided into two subcategories: the first one comprehends the first three arguments — it is not my fault; it is not as bad as they; it does not solve the underlying problem. These reasons try to give an explanation of why we should not accept refugees looking for a personal detachment from the situation. These positions do not take into account that not being involved does not discharge them from the moral obligations that lay down their responsibility for the other. The second subcategory is the one that comprehends the second set of arguments — namely, welcoming migrants would risk to overwhelm the reception system of the country; it would be a risk for the fabric of society; it would be a risk for the security of the people. This second subcategory reflects the common fear of being conquered.



The reasons I have proposed were already weak in the first place. Moreover, when applied to climate refugees, they certainly do not become stronger. We can conclude that the large numbers of refugees that an environmental crisis would produce and the different cultural background from which these 'new' refugees could arrive do not strengthen reasons not to admit refugees.

## 5. CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I established that climate refugees are refugees and there are reasons to admit them. In order to do this, I tried to find an answer to the question “*what is the best way to define a refugee*”. I have displayed three different definitions of refugee: from the one proposed in international law, following the 1951 Geneva convention, to the two definitions displayed by Carens (2013) and Miller (2016). I have embraced Miller’s broad definition concluding that individuals with unsolvable human rights problem at their country of origin should be recognised as refugees. Then I tried to show how climate refugees, as victims of environmental disasters, enter within this definition respecting both the criteria of necessity and vulnerability laid down by the new definition.

From the new definition of refugee, I displayed some basic notions and information of what would change once climate refugees are included within the definition. After this passage, I could then explore the possible reasons to accept or refuse refugees, so that I could add to the new definition of refugee the normativity that was lacking from the beginning. I have shown how reasons for acceptance become stronger and even more applicable applied to climate refugees and how reasons not to accept become weaker and even less applicable. In the end, a refugee should be a person with unsolvable human rights problems in the country of origin; climate refugees respect this definition and can, therefore, be classified as refugees; there are moral, practical and undeniable reasons why we should accept these refugees.

To conclude, I want to signal another theme. Throughout the chapters of this thesis, it is clear how I intended to draw climate refugees as a sensible category that will most likely have to suffer the consequences the human-made environmental disasters that will hit our planet on a global scale (National Geographic, 2019). The question that comes up next and that will be addressed in the future is the following: *how are we going to deal with a possible new wave of refugees of unprecedented proportions?* Reading and writing about the refugees status, international law and the changes that climate change could produce on the whole reception system, I have realised that at the moment, there is an institutional inadequacy in international and domestic laws. The current definition of refugee does not adequately take into account how new modern threats might produce new demanding challenges for reception systems all over

the world. Moreover, not taking into account the notion of climate refugee might potentially lead to the endangerment of these people to whom it should be guaranteed assistance and protection. It is clear how migration will be the first adaptive response associated with climate change (McLeman and Smit, 2006). The intensity of the change will determine the intensity of the migratory response. The incapacity for some people to cope with the consequences of the changes will inevitably and irreversibly force them to flee away (Drabo and Mmbaye, 2011). Moving away from the flooding cities will be the most rational and natural survival strategy that people will embrace. If such change had to happen today, it would represent a global institutional failure. The outcome would have an unprecedented impact on all reception institutions that it is unlikely than any country on the planet would be ready to face the challenge. The second failure would be a moral one: climate refugees are not legally refugees, and neglecting their status would endanger these individuals even more. However, luckily, we will not have to witness these catastrophic consequences of climate change today.

As already mentioned, I do not demand the immediate change of the political praxis. However, I believe it is fundamental to have awareness of where we are standing. This will be my last point, and to better understand it, I need to make use of a religious simile: I believe we have to be more Janus. Janus is the Roman god of beginnings and endings, usually represented with two faces. The statue of the god used to stay at the entrance of the Roman city where it would stand with a face facing inward and with the other facing outward. The two-faced god would always have two eyes towards the things that have been, while keeping the other two towards what will have to be. On our side, because of our mortal and limited condition, only a single pair of eyes were tragically attributed to us. This leaves us the choice of deciding to look at what we consider most important. I have always thought of this rhetoric figure as the perfect example to grasp the limited human condition of having to prioritise what is just before our eyes. I always thought we could not be Janus, but that Janus was only a tendency toward which we should all aim: reaching an ideal point of awareness in which we can see who we were and who we will become. I have now reached the conclusion that we can have this personal tendency toward this ideal state of awareness, but there are issues in which this state is more factual and less ideal. When discussing climate change, our limited two-eyes condition does not involve the tragic choice of prioritising our perspective because the eyes that should be revolved toward this state of awareness can be the eyes of the entire global population. Billions of eyes together have the power of prioritising the past, while having a perspective toward the future, and becoming aware of where we are standing. In this way, we can realise with consciousness and awareness the changes that need to be made.

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