



Othering of the Environmental Migrant

Colonial Legacies in Environmental Migration Discourses

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Abstract

Environmental migration is often mentioned as a looming consequence of the climate crisis. Predictions of great numbers of future refugees dominate current academic research on the subject. Environmental migration is portrayed as a future problem. However, underlying this discourse is Europe's colonial past. European former colonial powers are some of the most polluting countries in the world, yet the people of the Global South bear the brunt of its effects. In order to fully understand the power structures within discourses on environmental migration we need to approach them with one eye on history. This thesis does so by analysing and comparing foundational texts of 1880s and 1980s discourses on environmental migration. It will establish that, over the century that passed, western understanding of the relationship between people and the environment changed completely. The 1880s notion that people are a product of their environment made way for the 1980s understanding that people and environment affect each other in equal measure. Using Edward Said's Orientalism as a theoretical framework, this thesis will show that, despite a century of change, the processes of othering show remarkable similarities — colonial legacies, conceptualisations and structures, inform the characterisation of the migrant as an 'other'. This thesis concludes that Europe's colonial past informs processes of othering in environmental migration discourses and allows former colonial powers to curtail their responsibility for the effects of the climate crisis.

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Introduction

This, I imagine, was what my forebears experienced on that day when the river rose up to claim their village: they awoke to the recognition of a presence that had molded their lives to the point where they had come to take it as much for granted as the air they breathed.¹

Environmental migration is often considered to be a looming consequence of the climate crisis — a future threat. Predictions of great numbers of refugees dominate current academic research on the subject and the dislocation of millions has become a talking point for activists and politicians. However, environmental migration discourses have their roots in the 18th century. In the colonial period, when borders were introduced; the mobility of indigenous peoples was curtailed and agricultural practices were imposed on colonised farmers, environmental migration discourse first took shape. In a time when people travelled between different environments in unprecedented numbers, concerns about the dangers thereof rose, first among the medical community. Doctors, surgeons and physicians voiced their worries for the effects of a new, wildly different environment on people's physical health. As the Scramble for Africa was in full swing, the first ideas about the relationship between migration and the environment emerged. This colonial history underlies environmental migration discourses.

Today, industrialised countries and former colonial powers who have built their prosperity and technological development at the expense of their colonial subjects, are among the most polluting in the world. Yet, the people of the Global South bear the brunt of the effects of climate change. Discourses on environmental migration are easily corrupted to distort reality and curtail responsibility, they can be used, implicitly or explicitly, to lay blame on the innocent and assign guilt to those affected. These discourses mold our reality and are easily taken for granted. It is essential to stay critical of engrained narratives and discourses and it is therefore crucial to understand and recognise the power relations within them. A critical examination of prevailing discourses forms an essential part of the effort to understand the inequality within them, as well as the structures by which they are informed.² In this thesis I will analyse and

¹ Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*, The Randy L. and Melvin R. Berlin Family Lectures (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016), 5.

² Michel Foucault, 'Truth and Power', in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon, trans. Colin Gordon et al. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 109–33.

compare environmental migration discourses in two different period in order to answer the question; To what extent does Europe's colonial past inform and shape othering in discourses on environmental migration?

This thesis will build on the work of geographer, Etienne Piguet and associate professor of human geography at Durham University, Andrew Baldwin. Piguet has written an overview of environmental migration discourses. Specifically, he described how the environment left migration theory not long after its initial introduction.³ He identified a paradigm shift whereby the environment made way for economics and politics as a reason for migration.⁴ In the 1980s, almost a century later, environmental migrants re-emerged. As climate change became a more pressing and prominent issue, the environment returned to migration theory.⁵ Andrew Baldwin discussed the racialisation of the climate-change migrant.⁶ He focussed specifically on migration as a result of climate-change and the discourses surrounding it in the early 21st century. In *Racialisation and the Figure of the Climate-Change Migrant*, he analyses how the climate-change migrant, as the object of the discourse, is racialised and produced as an effect of power.⁷ He argues that 'racial power is expressed in the discourse through all manner of tropes, each of which intersect and articulate differently through specific empirical sites.'⁸ One important aspect to this racialisation is the characterisation of the migrant both as a victim and a threat.⁹ Racialization is a form of othering whereby a group of people is ascribed a racial identity by dominating powers. In this thesis I will examine this process of othering as it relates to and is informed by Europe's colonial past.

Here it is important to note that Andrew Baldwin argues that the future-conditional tense of climate-change migration discourses means that postcolonial theories are insufficient to reach an understanding of the power structures within them.¹⁰ Postcolonial theory relies on excavating the past in the present, but Baldwin believes environmental migration theory to be

³ E. Piguet, A. Pecoud, and P. de Guchteneire, 'Migration and Climate Change: An Overview', *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 30, no. 3 (1 September 2011): 1–23; Etienne Piguet, 'From "Primitive Migration" to "Climate Refugees": The Curious Fate of the Natural Environment in Migration Studies', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 103, no. 1 (2013): 148–62.

⁴ Piguet, Pecoud, and de Guchteneire, 'Migration and Climate Change', 4.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Andrew Baldwin, 'Racialisation and the Figure of the Climate-Change Migrant', *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 45, no. 6 (June 2013): 1474–90.

⁷ Baldwin, 'Racialisation and the Figure of the Climate-Change Migrant', 1476.

⁸ Ibid., 1486.

⁹ Ibid., 1475.

¹⁰ Andrew Baldwin, 'Orientalising Environmental Citizenship: Climate Change, Migration and the Potentiality of Race', *Citizenship Studies* 16, no. 5–6 (August 2012): 635,636, doi:10.1080/13621025.2012.698485.

focussed on the future and that the predictive nature of the discourse means that the figure of the environmental migrant is a virtual one — real but not actual.¹¹ However, this notion relies on the idea that the figure of environmental migrant is as young as the fears of climate change and that their conceptualisation can only be understood in relation to the climate crisis.¹² It is true that the threats of climate change are often perceived as yet-to-come and that current-day environmental migration discourses are coloured by this perception. However, I will argue that this does not make the environmental migrant immune to the effects of history. As Etienne Piguet has shown, the figure of the environmental migrant, virtual or not, was first conceptualised in the colonial period. By answering the research question, this thesis will show that the racialisation, discussed by Andrew Baldwin himself, is informed by earlier discourses and the colonial stereotypes, legacies and structures within them.

In order to answer the research question, it is important to first elaborate on ‘othering’ as used in this paper. The process of othering denotes structures of discourses and narrative devices which allow for dominance of one group of people over another by creating difference and hierarchy between them.¹³ Edward Said’s *Orientalism* is helpful in allowing us to identify othering in writing. Said discusses, specifically, the European characterisation and dominance of the inhabitants of the ‘Orient’.¹⁴ Europeans create a dichotomy between ‘us’ and ‘them’.¹⁵

Othering often happens by means of symbolism and metaphor which sometimes make it difficult to recognise.¹⁶ However, Edward Said discusses different aspects of the process which can serve as a starting point from which to identify these preconceptions. The aspects relevant to this thesis, which are understood to separate ‘us’ from ‘them’, follow two roughly defined categories of thought. Firstly, Said argues that the process of othering requires homogenisation of large groups of people. Limited knowledge of different societies and a reluctance to understand them, leads people to define large groups with an essential, oversimplified conception of who they are.¹⁷ This essentialised definition leaves no room for individuality, or locally specific political or historical difference. Secondly, he names the infantilisation of the ‘other’.¹⁸ A belief in the superiority of the west leads to the conviction

¹¹ Baldwin ‘Orientalising Environmental Citizenship’, 635.

¹² *Ibid.*, 629.

¹³ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, Reprinted with a new preface, Penguin Modern Classics (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 3.

¹⁴ Said does not refer to this process as othering, but academics have identified it as such retroactively.

¹⁵ Said, *Orientalism*, 149.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 97.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 40.

that white Europeans have the ability to educate and guide.¹⁹ The ‘other’ is portrayed as gullible and devoid of initiative.²⁰ Therefore, this idea is recognised most immediately in the fact that the ‘other’ is often stripped of agency within western discourses.

In each chapter, I will first outline the dominant perceptions of the ties between society and the environment in that period in order to place the discourse of environmental migration in the broader context of scientific thought. Following this outline, I will take a more specific look at foundational academic texts in discourses on environmental migration and answer the following questions: How do the authors define environment as related to human societies?; What language and reasoning is used to discuss migrants?; How do these affect processes of othering?

Each chapter will look at two academic texts which were foundational to the discourses in these different periods — they sparked debate and facilitated further research and conversation. I do not wish to suggest that they are a perfect representation of the discourses at that time. However, the selected texts, gave direction to the discourse by sparking debate and bringing particular aspects within them to the forefront of the discussion.

The first chapter will discuss the 1880s discourse on environmental migration, specifically analysing Friederich Ratzel’s *Anthropogeographie* and Ernst Georg Ravenstein’s *The Laws of Migration*. As it will turn out, colonial conceptions of the connection between the environment and ‘race’ shaped early notions of environmental migration discourse and shaped the processes of othering therein. In chapter two I will analyse Essam El-Hinnawi’s *Environmental Refugees* and Jodi L. Jacobson’s *Environmental Refugees: A Yardstick of Habitability*, published in the 1980s. Despite a changed understanding of the relationship between people and society, the processes of othering in the 1980s discourses on environmental migration still relied on characterisations of ‘Third World’ farmers as short-sighted and underdeveloped. Chapter three will see a comparison of the two discourses. In this chapter I will address and explain the differences and similarities between them. This chapter will also place these findings in a broader framework of Europe’s colonial past and its effects on environmental migration in order to properly contextualise the processes of othering in the discourses.

¹⁹ Ibid., 41.

²⁰ Ibid., 38.

Chapter one: 1880s

The foundations for migration theory were laid near the end of the 19th century. In these years of imperial expansion, geographers, building on the works of Alexander von Humboldt and Montesquieu, first wrote about the distribution of people as related to flows of migration.²¹ I will look specifically at *Anthropogeographie* (1882) by Friederich Ratzel and *The Laws of Migration* (1889) by Ernst Georg Ravenstein as they were important texts in the formative years of the migration theory as an academic field.²² Ernst Georg Ravenstein, a German-English geographer and cartographer, is often called the father of migration theory as he was the most prominent figure in its beginning stages.²³ He recognised a pattern and first established his theory of migration in *The Laws of Migration* in 1885. A revised edition was published four years later in 1889. This later edition first discussed environmental migration. Both Ratzel and Ravenstein were influential beyond German borders. Friederich Ratzel's work *Anthropogeographie* was another foundational text published in 1882. In 1895, the American economist, William Z. Ripley, pointed at Ratzel's brilliancy and in 1899 the French sociologist, Émile Durkheim noted that Ratzel's work laid the foundations for a universal theory of migration.²⁴ Friedrich Ratzel's text also laid the groundwork on which the Nazi's lebensraum theory was later built.²⁵

Ravenstein extensively discussed the way in which environment related to migration and named an 'unattractive climate' as one of its causes, along with bad or oppressive laws, heavy taxation, uncongenial social surroundings and compulsion.²⁶ Ratzel, on the other hand, does not explicitly list any causes for migration. Nevertheless, environment as a motivation for, as well as an obstacle to migration, can be found throughout his work.

Writing in a period of heightened colonial expansion and the scramble for Africa, the west saw unprecedented contact between human societies and people of different 'races'. As they encountered diverse peoples, many scholars wanted to explain the perceived differences

²¹ Friederich Ratzel, *Anthropogeographie* (Stuttgart: J. Engelhorn, 1882), V, 11.

²² Piguet, 'From "Primitive Migration" to "Climate Refugees"', 2; M. Durkheim, review of *Review of Anthropogeographie, Erster Theil: Grundzüge der Anwendung der Erdkunde auf die Geschichte (Anthropogéographie, Première partie: Principes de l'application de la géographie à l'histoire). 2 e éd.* by Friederich Ratzel, *L'Année Sociologique (1896/1897-1924/1925)* 3 (1898): 550–58.

²³ Piguet, 'From "Primitive Migration" to "Climate Refugees"', 2.

²⁴ William Z. Ripley, 'Geography as a Sociological Study', *Political Science Quarterly* 10, no. 4 (1895): 641; Durkheim, 'Review of Anthropogeographie, Erster Theil', 350.

²⁵ Woodruff D. Smith, 'Friedrich Ratzel and the Origins of Lebensraum', *German Studies Review* 3, no. 1 (1980): 51–68.

²⁶ E. G. Ravenstein, 'The Laws of Migration', *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society* 52, no. 2 (1889): 286.

between them. They did so, in part, to satisfy scholarly interests but their focus on ‘race’ also served a political purpose. The creation of a racial ‘other’ helped to justify the mission of empire and colonial oppression. The idea of fundamental, innate differences between people and a natural hierarchy among them, negated the necessity for equal treatment. Racial thought in science did not originate from science itself — it was a response to public thought.²⁷ ‘Race’ featured heavily in the justification of empire, the civilising mission and, by extension, migration theory.

Before analysing Ratzel and Ravenstein more closely, I will use Nancy Stepan’s *The Idea of Race in Science*, in which she outlines the changing perceptions and ideas of ‘race’ in science in Great Britain and more broadly in Western Europe, to place these first texts on migration theory in the broader context of scientific thought.²⁸ This will facilitate an understanding of what the dominant perceptions of environment were as related to human societies. Following this outline, I will take a more specific look at the aforementioned books to establish the way in which these ideas affected the role of the environment in migration theory. I will be answering the three questions mentioned in the introduction: How do Ratzel and Ravenstein define environment as related to human societies?; What language and reasoning is used to discuss migrants?; and How do these affect processes of othering?

All of these questions are closely related. In fact, I will show that the answers to the second and third questions directly follow from the first. Darwinist ideas about the connection between evolution, ‘race’ and environment shaped migration theory and created an understanding of environmental migration which, in turn, reinforced the idea of fundamental and intrinsic ‘otherness’ between people.

Environment and ‘race’ in science

In the early 18th century, a period of imperial conquest and of consequential encounters between different societies, environmental specificity was thought to have caused and affected racial differences in humans.²⁹ The ‘environment’ referred to such ecological factors as soil, air and weather conditions. These factors were reasoned to have direct effects on people’s physical appearance and health as well as their moral development. In the early years of the century,

²⁷Nancy Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science: Great Britain, 1800 - 1960*, 3. print, St. Anthony’s/Macmillan Series (Houndmills, Hampshire: Macmillan, 1987), 4.

²⁸ Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science*, 89.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 36.

environmentalism³⁰ reigned supreme in scientific thought about ‘race’. Physician, James Cowles Prichard and surgeon, Sir William Lawrence, were influential environmentalist scholars during this time.³¹ Doubts about environmentalism arose near the end of the 18th century as the scientists who believed environment to be the cause of racial differences did not succeed in proving as much to sceptics.³² Their reasoning was based on an opportunistic interpretation of biology and they failed to explain, for example, why those Europeans who migrated between climates did not see any immediate physical changes beyond the occasional tan. Instead, racial traditionalism took centre stage. According to racial traditionalism there were inherent and unchanging differences between ‘races’ determined by God in creation.³³

Darwin’s *Origin of Species* first published in 1859, transformed scientific thought about ‘race’ when, over a decade after publication, his theory of evolution was widely accepted.³⁴ A synthesis between racial traditionalism and evolutionism emerged.³⁵ These seemingly opposing positions were combined to create a new, biological understanding of human ‘races’. This understanding reflected many aspects of environmentalism from earlier in the century. As the 19th century drew to a close, scientists held that human ‘race’ formation was a past process.³⁶ Somewhere along the evolutionary line, differences had been created based on local environmental specificity, but it was believed that this process had stopped. Darwin himself argued that evolutionary changes had been the result of local environments and climates, but, for humans, this historical chapter of evolution was considered to be closed.³⁷ Thus human ‘races’ came to be defined as unchanging, categorical units. Evolutionary struggles now happened, not between individuals within these units but between the units as a whole.

³⁰ Today, environmentalism has now come to mean the concern for the protection of the environment. In thesis it is used in the denote the theory that the environment influences the development of a group of people.

³¹ Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science*, 36. James Cowles Prichard, *Researches Into the Physical History of Man* (J. and A. Arch, 1813); Sir William Lawrence, *Lectures on Physiology, Zoology, and the Natural History of Man: Delivered at the Royal College of Surgeons* (Callow, 1819).

³² Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science*, 37.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., 83.

³⁵ Ibid., 37.

³⁶ Ibid., 86.

³⁷ Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

Discursive linkages between environment and society

It was in this context of scientific thought that the foundations of migration theory were laid and dominating ideas about 'race' and environmental specificity, permeate the new discipline. I will analyse Ratzel's *Anthropogeographie* and Ravenstein's *The Laws of Migration*, to establish how the above mentioned ideas shape their arguments on environmental migration.

Friederich Ratzel fits squarely within the dominant, Darwinian trends of the time.³⁸ Firstly because he discusses environment in terms of competition between societies and believes different peoples to be competing for living space. Thereby he takes an evolutionist approach to environment and land. This approach laid the foundation for the lebensraum theory of the Nazis.³⁹ More to the point, however, in *Anthropogeographie*, Ratzel describes, in unequivocal terms, how different human 'races' are a product of their environment:

[S]o können wir doch behaupten, daß der tiefe Unterschied zwischen der germanischen Rasse auf der einen und der griechischen und lateinischen auf der anderen Seite größtenteils von der Verschiedenheit der Länder herstammt, wo sie sich niedergelassen haben.⁴⁰

Here, Ratzel refers to how specific differences in environment would have resulted in distinctions between 'races'. He thereby implies that people and their customs are shaped by environment. He goes on to list locally specific differences like temperature, humidity, vegetation and the proximity of seas and swamps, and equates these to specific human traits such as gluttony, violence and melancholia.⁴¹ Furthermore, Ratzel compares the development of indigenous people of South America to locally grown fruits and vegetable thereby really driving home the point that the indigenous population are a direct product of their soil and land.⁴²

Ravenstein has a similar understanding of the ties between societies and their environment:

It strikes me that if tropical Africa or other tropical regions are ever to be "colonised" by European races, the rules instinctively followed by most of the migrants should be adhered to. A sudden transition from the temperate to the tropical world can yield no permanent results. That world can be won only, if it is to be won, by a deliberate

³⁸ Piguet, 'From "Primitive Migration" to "Climate Refugees"', 2.

³⁹ Smith, 'Friedrich Ratzel and the Origins of Lebensraum'.

⁴⁰ Ratzel, *Anthropogeographie*, 18.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., 360.

invasion persisted in during many generations of men. As regards northern Africa in particular, those Europeans who are already seated upon the shores of the Mediterranean appear to me to be most fit for this difficult task. Working their way inland, from stage to stage, each stage marking a generation of men, these European colonisers would follow the Nile valley and other available highroads traced out by nature, already availed of by their predecessors, until even the terrors of a tropical climate would cease to be terrors to the far-off descendants of the men who first started upon this mighty enterprise.⁴³

It becomes clear that Ravenstein sees dangers in the migration between environments. This follows from the reasoning that people are only adapted to one climate, the one they have grown up in, and that sudden changes pose a threat to health and wellbeing. Another interesting aspect of Ravenstein's reasoning here, is the implied importance of migration. Despite its danger he believes in the necessity of colonial conquest and calls it a 'mighty enterprise'.

Both Ravenstein and Ratzel's ideas about evolution differ slightly from those prevailing at the time. To a certain extent, both Ravenstein and Ratzel believe that acclimatisation is possible. Ravenstein argues that full adaptation is possible and happens over the course of generations. Ratzel believes that acclimatisation is a slow process, possible on a very local level.⁴⁴ He says, for example, that Spaniards will have an easier time acclimatising in Morocco than Germans because their environments are more alike and the change will only be slight.⁴⁵ This slight deviation from dominant ideas in science are especially important to migration theory — Ratzel and Ravenstein recognise dangers in the migration between environments, but they contend that this is a hurdle which can be overcome.

The figure of the environmental migrant

Both Ratzel and Ravenstein discuss migration as a dangerous affair and equate acclimatisation with strength and resilience. In order to understand the way in which migrants are viewed, it is valuable to first establish how the notion that migration is dangerous, follows directly from the asserted tie between people and environment.

Human 'races' were seen as a stable, unmodifiable product of their environment and the chasms between them were considered impassable, for many believed acclimatisation to new environments to be all but impossible.⁴⁶ Ratzel and Ravenstein also appreciated these

⁴³ Ravenstein, 'The Laws of Migration', 289.

⁴⁴ Ratzel, *Anthropogeographie*, 359.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 365, 366.

⁴⁶ Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science*, 106.

risks. They warned against the dangers of too quick and too drastic a change of environment.⁴⁷ They held that, for the lived experience of individuals, the fixed racial traits determined in bygone processes of evolution, persisted even when, through migration, they encountered new environments.⁴⁸ Migrating from an environment to which you are perfectly adapted, to an environment which is completely different from your own, was thought to put a strain on a person's physical and moral wellbeing. The close association between the environment and 'race', in scientific thought has implications for early migration theory. Nancy Stepan briefly discussed migration in her book and illustrates the dominant views of the time as follows:

So different, indeed, were the races of mankind in the present that any sudden transition of a race from its home to a new area could be psychologically disastrous. It could only be effected by a 'great sacrifice of life' and extremely slowly.⁴⁹

The notion that people were perfectly adapted to their climate and the ensuing idea that they could not be expected to immediately acclimatize to an environment wildly different from their own, made migration a dangerous affair. This is reflected in Ernst Georg Ravenstein's *Laws of Migration*:

I have pointed out in the course of my paper how large is the proportion of Italians who have settled in Northern Africa, as also is that of Spaniards, Southern Frenchmen, and Greeks. ... In exchanging their native land for the new country in which they have settled down, they underwent no violent alterations of climatic conditions, and we are justified in asserting that they will thrive and flourish there, instead of perishing prematurely, as have the long-journey migrants, who left Alsatia and Germany for Algeria.⁵⁰

Those southern Europeans here named, underwent only a very slight change in climate and can therefore be expected to carry on without much complication. Whereas those people who underwent a 'violent alteration of climatic conditions' in migrating from northern Europe to Algeria, perished prematurely.

Both Ravenstein and Ratzel discuss the perceived dangers of migration between environments in relation to the sacrificial act of colonisation. Ratzel does so as follows:

⁴⁷ Ravenstein, 'The Laws of Migration', 289.

⁴⁸ Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science*, 88.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁵⁰ Ravenstein, 'The Laws of Migration', 289.

Wenn man diese mittelbaren mit den unmittelbaren KlimaWirkungen zusammenfaßt, versteht man, wie selbst geringe Klimaunterschiede von großer geschichtlicher Wirkung werden können. Welche Menschenopfer haben die Kolonisationsversuche gerade dadurch gekostet! Ganz geringe Klimaunterschiede genügten hier zur Erzielung trauriger Effekte.⁵¹

While migration between environments was fraught with danger, white Europeans could not be deterred by this fact alone. They had to migrate for the sake of imperial expansion.⁵²

Throughout Ratzel's *Anthropogeographie*, the ability to adapt to a new environment is equated with strength and courage. He does so implicitly by applauding those colonisers who overcome unfavourable climates and suggesting that only few people are able to keep working through their hardship.⁵³ The following excerpt illustrates this:

Leichte Veränderungen, die man nicht unter den Begriff Akklimatisation stellen kann, sind schon bei Verlegungen der Wohnsitze über wenig Breitgrade hervorgetreten. Schon der piemontesische Soldat verliert von seiner straffen Haltung in neapolitanischer oder sizilianischer Garnison. Viele Nordländer entgehen den körperlichen Krankheiten der Verpflanzung, aber diesen feineren Umänderungen der Seele widersteht kaum einer in einem ganzen Volke.⁵⁴

Ratzel's use of the term 'widersteht', which translates to withstand or resist, implies that negative effects of environmental change can be overcome through vigour and resilience. By implication, those who fail to adapt are weaker.

Ravenstein's *Laws of Migration* makes a still more implicit, but no less significant connection between strength and acclimatisation. In his concluding remarks, Ravenstein explains how his work conveys lessons of practical utility with reference to colonisation of tropical regions.⁵⁵ He asserts that successful colonisation requires time and persistence.⁵⁶ Hereby he argues that perseverance in the face of opposition, will lead Europeans to successfully overcome difficulties posed by the environment.

⁵¹ Ratzel, *Anthropogeographie*, 371.

⁵² Ravenstein, 'The Laws of Migration', 286; Ratzel, *Anthropogeographie*, 371.

⁵³ Ratzel, *Anthropogeographie*, 357,358,371.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 369.

⁵⁵ Ravenstein, 'The Laws of Migration', 288.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

Processes of othering

Ratzel and Ravenstein talk about the European ‘race’ as consisting of individuals with varying levels of strength, depended on such factors as gender, age and class. Strength, which is equated with the ability to adapt, is a trait some Europeans have, and others do not. Those racial ‘others’ of the colonies and beyond, are not afforded such nuance within their groups. They are discussed in terms of their evolutionarily determined characteristics and are seen as intrinsically weak.⁵⁷ The need to migrate due to the climate, is a weakness. Ratzel implies as much by suggesting that ‘civilised’ people, withstand a change in climate better than indigenous communities:

Die Leute, welche D. Livingstone nach den Sumpfluftgegenden des Zambesi-Delta aus dem Inneren mitbrachte, litten hier fast ebensowohl von Fiebern wie Europäer. Livingstone vertritt infolge dieser und anderer Erfahrungen den Gedanken, daß die zivilisierten Menschen den üblen Einflüssen fremder Klimate besser widerstehen als die Naturvölker.⁵⁸

Furthermore, both Ravenstein and Ratzel speak in sweeping terms about all those outside of Europe while specifying small groups and societies on their own continent. For example, Ratzel distinguishes between the French, the Spaniards, the Portuguese and the Italians and even describes the subtle differences between Northern and Southern regions of Germany.⁵⁹ Conversely, he talks about Africans and South Americans without recognising any differences within those groups.⁶⁰ Here we recognise the homogenisation of large groups of people. Those people are simultaneously considered weak.

Ratzel’s and Ravenstein’s approach to environment and people does not allow for a consideration of cultural, historical and socio-economic differences between societies and individuals. When discussing humans as a product of their environment their differences become innate — they are seen as biologically predetermined. While the authors claim that they apply that idea universally, this is not how it is reflected in their argumentation. Europeans are given a cultural and political history where others are only defined through biology and the environment.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Ratzel, *Anthropogeographie*, 357,358.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 358.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 365, 366.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 359.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 358.

In early migration theory, we can also recognise the process of othering through infantilisation. The environment is seen as a single outside force over which people have no agency. The notion that your resilience stems from biologically determined weakness or strength leaves no room for agency. Moreover, much of *Anthropogeographie* and *The Laws of Migration* is dedicated to praising Europe's colonial mission and Ratzel and Ravenstein even aim to provide useful lessons for its furthering.⁶² The European colonisers are framed as both morally and physically resilient in the face of environmental differences.⁶³ Other peoples are not afforded the same level of nuance and agency.

Ratzel and Ravenstein essentialise by basing their representation of societies on their understanding of the environment in which these people 'belong'. They reduce people to the soil they live on and the air they breathe. This results in a homogenisation of peoples from environmentally similar regions. Furthermore, migrants from regions outside of Europe and, to a lesser extent, weak Europeans are stripped of all agency — they are a product of their environment and they lack the ability to adapt to change. The process of othering is clearly recognisable in the way in which Ratzel and Ravenstein portray environmental migrants.

In summary

This chapter argued that Darwinist understanding of human 'races' determined much of the early beliefs about environmentally induced migration. People were thought to be created by a certain environment to which they were consequentially perfectly adapted. Acclimatisation was only thought to be possible for strong, resilient people. From this follows the assertion that certain climates were disagreeable to certain people and an unfavourable climate was a reason to migrate.

Early migration theory not only discussed differences between 'races', it also perpetuated the idea of migration as a sign of weakness as opposed to adapting which was seen as a strength. But where the European 'race' consisted of individuals with varying levels of resilience, those outside of Europe were not awarded the same nuance. Instead, these people were painted in a single brushstroke and they were stripped of any agency or control over this outside force. Migration was portrayed as a threat because migrants were in danger of moral degradation resulting from a change in environment — simultaneously, migrants were portrayed as both a product and a victim of the environment.

⁶² Ravenstein, 'The Laws of Migration', 288; Ratzel, *Anthropogeographie*, 79.

⁶³ Ravenstein, 'The Laws of Migration', 289; Ratzel, *Anthropogeographie*, 358, 371.

Chapter two: 1980s

In the 1980s environmental migration was reintroduced into academic and political discourse after being all but completely abandoned for several decades.⁶⁴ The disappearance of environmental migration discourses in the early 20th century was due, in part, to a fundamental shift within migration theory whereby the environment made way for economics and politics as an explanation and reason for migration.⁶⁵ This will be elaborated on in chapter three. In the 1980s, as natural scientists expressed their growing concerns about manmade climate change and environmental movements gathered steam, the connection between humans and nature was the subject of renewed academic and political interest.⁶⁶ Consequently, an environmental lens was applied to migration once again.

In order to examine the changed discourse on climate migration, I will analyse two influential texts Essam El-Hinnawi's *Environmental refugees* (1985) and *Environmental Refugees: A Yardstick of Habitability* (1988) by Jodi L. Jacobson, senior researcher at the Worldwatch institute.⁶⁷ Geological scientist Essam El-Hinnawi coined the term 'environmental refugee'. He first defined it in a United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) report in 1985.⁶⁸ Thereby, El-Hinnawi inspired a new political and academic interest in environmental migration.⁶⁹ However, while El-Hinnawi was the one to introduce the discourse, Jacobson's book, *Environmental Refugees: A Yardstick of Habitability* is the most cited.⁷⁰ For instance, the 1990 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) assessment report, which formed the basis of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, cites Jacobson's estimated numbers of migration under the heading 'spatial and social differentiation'.⁷¹

⁶⁴ Piguet, 'From "Primitive Migration" to "Climate Refugees"', 6.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ James Rodger Fleming, *Historical Perspectives on Climate Change*. (New York: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2005), 135. Piguet, 'From "Primitive Migration" to "Climate Refugees"', 6.

⁶⁷ Jodi L. Jacobson, *Environmental Refugees: A Yardstick of Habitability*, Worldwatch Paper 86 (Washington, D.C., USA: Worldwatch Institute, 1988); Essam El-Hinnawi, *Environmental Refugees* (Nairobi, Kenya: United Nations Environment Programme, 1985).

⁶⁸ James Morrissey, 'Environmental Change and Forced Migration: A State of the Art Review' (Refugee Studies Centre, 2009), 3; Richard Black, 'Environmental Refugees: Myth or Reality?', *New Issues in Refugee Research* (Geneva: UN High Commissioner for Refugees, 2001), 1; Etienne Piguet, Raoul Kaenzig, and Jérémie Guélat, 'The Uneven Geography of Research on "Environmental Migration"', *Population and Environment* 39, no. 4 (June 2018): 364.

⁶⁹ Morrissey, 'Environmental Change and Forced Migration: A State of the Art Review', 3; Black, 'Environmental Refugees: Myth or Reality?', 1; Piguet, Kaenzig, and Guélat, 'The Uneven Geography of Research on "Environmental Migration"', 364.

⁷⁰ Morrissey, 'Environmental Change and Forced Migration: A State of the Art Review', 3.

⁷¹ 'Climate Change: The IPCC Impacts Assessment' (Canberra: Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 1990), 5–11.

Not long after publication, both El-Hinnawi's *Environmental Refugees* and Jacobson's *Environmental Refugees: A Yardstick of Habitability*, sparked an important debate, covering legal definitions, policy strategies and the interdisciplinary nature of environmental migration.⁷² Upon publication, both works received great interest as well as harsh critique. For example, the field of environmental studies received El-Hinnawi and Jacobson's works with marked enthusiasm while the field of refugee studies objected to their uncritical, imprecise definitions of both 'environment' and 'refugee'.⁷³ Moreover, both publications were perceived to have the politically motivated objective of drawing attention to environmental problems by means of predictions of forced migration.⁷⁴ This impression followed from Jacobson's membership to the Worldwatch Institute, an environmental think tank, and El-Hinnawi's employment at UNEP.⁷⁵ Both are politically engaged institutions. The works discussed in this chapter were never unanimously praised or agreed upon, but they sparked and shaped interdisciplinary discussions and are formative to the environmental migration discourses of the late 20th century.

One important difference between the late nineteenth century and the 1980s was a new level of globalisation and international, intercultural contact. Western discourses were increasingly influenced by academics with more diverse backgrounds. IPCC reports, of which the first was published in 1990, are hugely influential in policy making and media reporting in Western Europe.⁷⁶ Scholars from all over the world contributed to these reports. This international context changed the conversation, by giving a platform to voices from areas most acutely influenced by climatic change. The newfound influence of the Global South in academic and political conversation brought environmental issues, like desertification and flooding to the international, political stage. The influence of the Global South in UNEP is apparent from the location of their headquarters in Nairobi. Furthermore, countries who were most immediately impacted by climate change introduced desertification as one of the more important issues in the United Nations Environment Program.⁷⁷

⁷² François Gemenne, 'How They Became the Human Face of Climate Change. The Emergence of "Climate Refugees" in the Public Debate, and the Policy Responses It Triggered', in *Migration and Climate Change*, ed. Etienne Piguat, Antoine Pécoud, and Paul de Guchteneire (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, n.d.); Morrissey, 'Environmental Change and Forced Migration: A State of the Art Review'.

⁷³ Gemenne, 'How They Became the Human Face of Climate Change. The Emergence of "Climate Refugees" in the Public Debate, and the Policy Responses It Triggered', 3,4.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ Fleming, *Historical Perspectives on Climate Change.*, 4.

⁷⁷ Maria Ivanova, 'Designing the United Nations Environment Programme: A Story of Compromise and Confrontation', *International Environmental Agreements: Politics, Law and Economics* 7, no. 4 (23 November 2007): 358.

In this chapter, I will first give an overview of dominant scientific thought about the environment in the 1980s, in order to contextualise the publication of the aforementioned texts by El-Hinnawi and Jacobson. Following this outline, I will analyse the way in which these ideas influenced the role of environment in migration theory, specifically these formative publications, by answering the three questions laid out in the introduction; How do El-Hinnawi and Jacobson define environment as related to human societies?; What language and reasoning is used to discuss migrants?; How do these affect processes of othering?

Environment and society in science

As rapid industrialisation made increasingly advanced technology more widely available, people were able to dominate nature on a much larger scale. Inventions like the central heating system and air-conditioning, for example, allowed for people to control their local environment.⁷⁸ Small changes in the climate had less of an effect on people who used technology to stabilise their direct surroundings. These developments had created a division between people and their environment. However, as the 20th century neared its end, this dichotomy was called into question. Growing concern over global warming, resulting from rising concentrations of greenhouse gases in the air, complicated humanity's relationship to nature. While western society had long believed people to be a product of the environment, in the 1980s it became clear that humanity was equally able to shape and change the climate, not just locally, but on a global scale. Thus, the environment was just as much a product of people.

In the early 1980s, Biologists Eugene Stoermer coined the term Anthropocene, a notion that was later popularised by chemist Paul Crutzen in 2000. Stoermer and Crutzen held that the world had entered a new geological epoch: the Anthropocene. This new era describes the most recent period in history when human activity started to have significant impacts on the natural environment when the conception of a division between humans and people started to dwindle. By this time, understanding of the environment had widened to incorporate the global environment as an integrated whole — an interaction between biological and chemical cycles that together make up the Earth System. In the Anthropocene, it became clear that human activity could change, affect and damage this system. Stoermer and Crutzen's concept of the Anthropocene has created a paradigm shift whereby the relationship between societies and environments has been completely overhauled.⁷⁹ The Anthropocene, though not universally

⁷⁸ Stephen Healy, 'Air-Conditioning and the "Homogenization" of People and Built Environments', *Building Research & Information* 36, no. 4 (August 2008): 312–22.

⁷⁹ Mark A Maslin and Simon L Lewis, 'Anthropocene: Earth System, Geological, Philosophical and Political Paradigm Shifts', *The Anthropocene Review* 2, no. 2 (August 2015): 2.

accepted, is a very influential idea in academic and public discourse alike. Andrew Baldwin, associate professor of human geography at Durham University, maintains that the Anthropocene epoch marks as radical a shift in species awareness as Darwin's evolution theory effected in the nineteenth century.⁸⁰

The 1980s saw the emergence of this important new idea. It is in the context of this radical and rapid development in scientific thought that the re-emergence of environmental migration discourse needs to be understood. Discursive linkages between society and nature became more complicated as humanity saw itself reflected in the Earth System. Societies could not only dominate their surroundings, but also negatively affect and permanently damage it. In comparison to the nineteenth century, environmental migration discourses refocused on societies' ability to both control and preserve nature in order to ensure the habitability of their country.

Discursive linkages between environment and society

The newly complicated link between environment and society impacted ideas about mobility and migration. Now that the environment was considered to be a product of what people do to it, it was believed that it could be altered to serve the societies that were settled on it. As it had become clear that humanity was able to permanently damage the environment, the new relationship between people and their land was based on a responsibility they had over its upkeep. This is reflected in migration theory and affects the perception of migrants.

In the opening chapter of his report, El-Hinnawi briefly addresses how understanding of the interrelationship between the environment and society has changed in recent years:

Historically, natural resources have been exploited without restraint. They were considered inexhaustible because many had the capability of self-generation. However, it has recently been realised that the process of self-generation is slow and complicated. And if some natural resources are over-exploited, the stock will rapidly decrease, leading ultimately to the complete destruction of the resources on which people depend for sustenance.⁸¹

In *Environmental Refugees* El-Hinnawi recognises the effect humans have on the environment and he appreciates the importance of its 'management and protection'.⁸² But, he insists, a large

⁸⁰ Andrew Baldwin, Christiane Fröhlich, and Delf Rothe, 'From Climate Migration to Anthropocene Mobilities: Shifting the Debate', *Mobilities* 14, no. 3 (4 May 2019): 289.

⁸¹ El-Hinnawi, *Environmental Refugees*, 2.

⁸² *Ibid.*

number of people harm their local environment a great deal more than they help it. People can alter their environment to make it more prone to certain disaster triggers such as drought or flooding.⁸³ El-Hinnawi discussed at length how people exploited their surroundings for food and water, blind to the permanent marks they left on the land. He argued that overpopulation led to poverty and ill-considered agricultural practices. An example can be found in his discussion of Haiti: ‘Generations of intense population pressure, and of plantation practices which thoughtlessly stripped the ground of trees, have converted much of Haiti to a wasteland.’⁸⁴

Jacobson’s book reflects a similar understanding of human impact on the environment. Specifically, she names the effects of three environmental disasters made worse by human activity: degradation of agricultural land, poisoning of land and water by toxic wastes, and sea level rise resulting from greenhouse gasses in the air.⁸⁵ She goes on to link people’s ways of life to the declining habitability of the earth:

On every continent, the living patterns of people are at odds with natural systems. ... The large and growing number of refugees worldwide that has resulted from these trends is living evidence of a continuing decline in the earth’s habitability.⁸⁶

Here, Jacobson uses the number of environmental refugees as yardstick by which to measure the effects of manmade climate change. She argues that an overwhelming majority of refugees are the direct product of manmade climate change and the effects of land degradation and toxic pollution.

Both El-Hinnawi and Jacobson contend that the land is a product of what people do to it and that forced migration can be the result of a degradation of people’s environment. As people were believed to hold the futures of their own environment in their hands, migration became the failure to meet the responsibility of its protection and upkeep.

⁸³ Ibid., 10.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 23.

⁸⁵ Jacobson, *Environmental Refugees*, 17.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 37.

The figure of the environmental migrant

Essam El- Hinnawi was the first to formally define the term ‘environmental refugee’:

Those 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 jeopardized their existence and/or seriously affected the quality of their life.⁸⁷

Within this overarching definition, he makes a distinction between those who are permanently displaced due to manmade changes to their environment (e.g. the construction of dams); those who are temporarily displaced due to environmental stress; and those who are either permanently or temporarily displaced due to a deterioration of their resource base leading them to go in search of a better quality of life. About the latter group, El-Hinnawi says that migration depends on the refugees’ ‘perception of the change and their ability to cope with it’.⁸⁸ Hereby, he suggests that migration is a failure to cope — a final act of desperation. However, in advance of their migration, El-Hinnawi does not leave room for any adaptive strategy the environmental migrants might have in order to cope with the changes in their surroundings.

According to El-Hinnawi, environmental refugees migrate as a direct result of desertification and soil depletion. They make a home elsewhere, often in already vulnerable areas. Either in rural regions, where the exploitative practices and land degradation are simply continued, or in city outskirts, where resources are scarce. Therefore, ‘an influx of refugees causes environmental disruption of varying magnitude’.⁸⁹ El-Hinnawi conceptualises migration both as consequence of a strained environment and a trigger for future conflict over natural resources.⁹⁰ Thereby, he makes migrants responsible for their own misfortune while also burdening them with the impending hardship of others. They toe the line between victim and threat.

The way in which Jacobson characterises the figure of the environmental refugee is comparable to El-Hinnawi. She implies that migration is a failure to control and/or adapt to the environment. An important part of Jacobson’s book is dedicated to the deterioration of soil as a result of poor husbandry: ‘Pressed by growing families and impending poverty, farmers make

⁸⁷ El-Hinnawi, *Environmental Refugees*, 4.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁹⁰ Gemenne, ‘How They Became the Human Face of Climate Change. The Emergence of “Climate Refugees” in the Public Debate, and the Policy Responses It Triggered’, 6.

the decision to increase productivity that, in the long run, prove environmentally disastrous'⁹¹ Jacobson suggests that people are a victim of their own inability to produce sustainably. In a way, it means incapable people fleeing the land they themselves have wasted.

While recognising their role in the deteriorating climate, Jacobson negates the migrants' agency in adaptation and finding solutions:

In many countries, particularly in Central America, the response to enduring poverty and environmental decline has been civil war and (often illegal) migration to the United States.⁹²

She does argue that 'migration is a last resort', but Jacobson does not acknowledge other viable options open to populations at risk.⁹³ In her argument, Jacobson does not account for any adaptive power that lies with the migrants themselves.

Both Jacobson and El-Hinnawi suggest that, while people are held responsible for the upkeep of their land, environmental migrants are portrayed as not having agency over, or initiatives in, the solutions for its deterioration. Moreover, they are characterised as a threat and agents of even further disruption.

Processes of othering

Language is important in shaping the frames and narratives through which people and actors in conflicts are perceived.⁹⁴ Michael Bhatia, who researched conflict resolution, analysed how the use of terminology like 'bandit' or 'terrorist' can paint certain actors as lawless. Such descriptions are used to emphasise the benefit that would result from the imposition of an imperial order — they legitimise intervention.⁹⁵ Similarly, the use of certain words can paint people as ignorant or unreasonable, thus legitimising their oppression.⁹⁶ To this affect, Essam El-Hinnawi characterises environmental refugees as 'thoughtless' and 'short-sighted' for their unsustainable, agricultural practices.⁹⁷ In addition, El-Hinnawi describes environmental refugees, small farmers from the Global South, as 'both the cause and the victims' of local environmental changes.⁹⁸ Thereby he negates any responsibility, for global environmental degradation, borne by commercial agricultural companies and industrialised countries.

⁹¹ Jacobson, *Environmental Refugees*, 9.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 15.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁹⁴ Michael V. Bhatia, 'Fighting Words: Naming Terrorists, Bandits, Rebels and Other Violent Actors', *Third World Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (2005): 14.

⁹⁵ Bhatia, 'Fighting Words'.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ El-Hinnawi, *Environmental Refugees*, 23,25,26.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 30.

Depicting environmental migrants in this way, oversimplifies their identity and dismisses their experiences and voices as unreasonable and uninformed. Furthermore, El-Hinnawi's repeatedly refers to a 'flood of environmental refugees'.⁹⁹ He irresponsibly equates migrants to the natural disaster he forewarns, thereby painting these groups of migrants as inherently dangerous and destructive.

In *Environmental Refugees: A Yardstick of Habitability*, Jacobson contends that most environmental refugees will come from the 'Third World'. This term was commonly used at the time to broadly characterise the low-income countries of the Global South. There is an important difference between the way in which Jacobson discusses Western European and North American countries and the way in which she talks about the countries of the Global South. She repeatedly refers to 'Africa', 'Asia' and 'the Third World' while discussing 'Canada' and 'towns along Louisiana's petroleum corridor' in much more specific terms.¹⁰⁰ Jacobson allows for more nuance and distinctions among European countries. Socio-economic situations, policy effects and technological development are all taken into account.¹⁰¹

The divergent treatment of The Netherlands and Bangladesh in the context of rising sea levels is a case in point. Jacobson hails the Dutch for their water management, though she concedes that even they will be 'tested' when sea levels rise.¹⁰² Conversely, when discussing Bangladesh, a country of which the lowest areas are five meters above sea level, she says that it will simply 'cease to exist'.¹⁰³ Jacobson describes Bangladesh only in terms of land degradation as a result of agricultural practices and does not allow for any adaptive strategies the country might have. Thereby, much like El-Hinnawi, Jacobson essentialises the climate migrant by reducing them to victims of the environment and their own inability to control it. She characterises the Bangladeshi as void of initiative while discussing the agency and adaptive strategies of the Dutch in some detail.

In addition, she does not recognise the cultural, political or historical particularities of Bangladesh. By not appreciating countries' local specificity and repeatedly discussing entire continents without differentiation, she treats them as a homogenous group. Here too, there is a stark difference between the way she discusses countries from the global north and the global south:

⁹⁹ Ibid., 22.

¹⁰⁰ Jacobson, *Environmental Refugees*, 7, 9, 15.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 9,36.

¹⁰² Ibid., 29.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 35.

Soil erosion may cost Canada some \$1 billion annually in reduced yields but Canadians do not starve. By contrast, sharply deteriorating land resources in Africa imperil the lives of millions.¹⁰⁴

Here she compares the whole of the African continent to Canada. In her book she argues that Africa will be one of the biggest sources of environmental refugees. The countries and people of the Global South, whom she believes to be most acutely affected by climatic change, are discussed as a homogenous group with limited agency.

In El-Hinnawi's *Environmental Refugees*, we can recognise a similar homogenisation of environmental migrants as a group, though not to the same extent. El-Hinnawi talks about environmental refugees from different regions in more specific terms as he does recognise the locally specific weather and climate conditions. However, he does not consider cultural, political or socioeconomic specificity of the people. Environmental refugees are all characterised as uneducated, poor and desperate for food and water. Contrary to Jacobson, El-Hinnawi does not mention possible migrants from industrialised countries at all.

Both El-Hinnawi and Jacobson believe the 'Third World' to be the source of the largest number of environmental refugees. The characterisations of environmental refugees by both authors strips them of their voice and agency. Environmental migrants are understood to be victims as well as threats. Victims of their own incapability to preserve their land and threats to those places they will 'flood' next.

In summary

This chapter has shown that the changed perception of environment impacted processes of othering in discourses of climate migration. The notion that people have lasting impacts on the environment led to a focus people's ability to protect it. These changes in the discursive linkages between people and nature, burdened societies with a new responsibility; to preserve as well as control their local environment. Technologically advanced and industrialised countries were perceived to be more adaptable to change. Climate migrants from underdeveloped countries, on the other hand, had failed to adapt. Environmental refugees, as discussed by El-Hinnawi and Jacobson, had fallen victims of their own incompetence.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 9.

The paradigm shift discussed in this chapter, marks an important change from the 19th century discourse, but much stayed the same. The next chapter will discuss the differences and similarities and place them in a broader context of Europe's colonial past.

Chapter three: A century of change

Decades passed between the initial disappearance of environmental migration discourse and its reintroduction in in the 1980s. Over the course of the 20th century, the way in which people relate to nature was completely overhauled and by the 1980s, the climate crisis loomed large over academic and political discourses. The previous two chapters have discussed the particularities of environmental discourse in two different time periods. The table below gives a very brief overview of these findings.

Questions	1880s	1980s
<u>Discursive linkages between people and environment</u>	<p>People are a product of their environment.</p> <p>The ties between people and their environment are based on the assumption that people are perfectly adapted to only one climate.</p>	<p>People and environment affect each other in equal measure.</p> <p>The ties between people and their environment are based on a burden of responsibility for its upkeep.</p>
<u>Treatment of migrants</u>	<p>Strength is equated to ability to adapt. Migration is seen as a weakness.</p> <p>Migrants are a victim of their own inability to adapt.</p>	<p>Strength is equated to the ability to control and change the environment. Migration is seen as a weakness.</p> <p>Migrants are a victim of their own inability to control their environment.</p>
<u>Processes of othering</u>	<p>Environmental migrants are both homogenised and infantilised.</p> <p>Informed by Darwinian racial theories.</p>	<p>Environmental migrants are both homogenised and infantilised.</p> <p>Informed by technological development or lack thereof.</p>

Table 1: overview of findings chapters one and two

In this chapter I will compare the two, explain the changes and continuities, and finally, establish the relevance thereof in a broader context. This chapter will argue that Colonial stereotypes permeate 19th as well as 20th century characterisations of environmental migrants and inform processes of othering in both.

Discursive linkages between environment and society

In the two previous chapters, I have discussed the way in which the conception of the relationship between environment and societies changed over the years. In the 1880s, when environmental migration was first introduced, people were seen as a product of their environment. When the discourse was renewed a century later, people and environment were understood to affect each other in equal measure. This new perception of the ways in which people relate to their land and the ties they have to their environment, had a transformative effect on environmental migration discourses. It changed the way in which movement and migration between environments were perceived. In order to understand the nature of this change, it is pertinent to look at the reason for the disappearance of environmental migration discourses and its century long absence.

In the early years of the 20th century the environment was all but completely absent from migration theory. Etienne Piguet, professor of geography at the university of Neuchâtel, outlined the reason for this disappearance identifying the following changes as important factors; the implication that technological development decreased the impact of nature on people, and the rejection of environmentalism for its outright racism.¹⁰⁵

Firstly, the decrease in the direct impact of nature on people, followed from fast technological development and the wide availability thereof. From people's increasing ability to dominate their surroundings, followed the idea that the environment was no longer an imminent threat. This is illustrated by William Petersen's *A General Typology of Migration* (1958), one of the few texts of the mid-20th century which briefly discusses environmental migration.¹⁰⁶ Petersen's article is useful in helping us understand the changed attitude towards the environment and the resulting lack of interest in environmental migration. He classifies migration resulting from an 'ecological push' as 'primitive migration', believing it to be 'related to man's inability to cope with natural forces'. He links the migration of prehistoric primitives to a lack of material culture.¹⁰⁷ When discussing 'contemporary primitives', Petersen argues that this type of migration is merely an engrained social pattern. He holds that this pattern can be broken and that nomad peoples can be settled with implementation of sufficient force.¹⁰⁸ This classification of environmental migration as a primitive social pattern, renders

¹⁰⁵ William Petersen, 'A General Typology of Migration', *American Sociological Review* 23, no. 3 (1958): 256–66; Piguet, 'From "Primitive Migration" to "Climate Refugees"', 4.

¹⁰⁶ Petersen, 'A General Typology of Migration'.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 259.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 260.

ecological factors almost irrelevant. It suggests that environmental migration is merely a lingering practice of the past. Due to such attitudes, for a long time, migration was not considered through an environmental lens and instead understood in terms of politics, economics and culture.

The second factor raised by Piguet is the rejection of environmentalism and, more broadly, any connection between ‘race’ and environment. Darwinian reasoning was important in the legitimising of colonial rule and its biological foundations were arbitrary and opportunistic. The rise of eugenics in the early 20th century and its role in the Second World War solidified the dangers of race-theory. Furthermore, Nazi Germany’s use of Ratzel’s concept; *lebensraum*, meant that academics were hesitant to approach migration as related to environment at all. Theories which linked ‘race’ to the environment were completely abandoned after the 1940s.¹⁰⁹ People stayed far away from environmental migration, in part, because of the connotations it held with the Nazi Germany.¹¹⁰

The link between migration and the environment did not return till the 1980s when concerns about global, climatic change and its drastic effects on people and their land, were raised. The notion that people could permanently change the climate led to a new association between land and people — a relationship based on responsibility and sustainability. When discussions about environmental migration were reintroduced, a lot had changed. Race-theory, with its arbitrary roots in biology and the environment, was rejected; new, scientific understanding of climate change introduced a feeling impending doom; and societies were laden with a fresh burden of responsibility — the upkeep of the environment.

The figure of the environmental migrant

As the century progressed, quick developments in scientific thought had profound impacts on discourses of environmental migration. The figure of the environmental migrant toes the line between western conceptions of settled society and disorderly nature. Their characterisation is informed by the discursive linkages discussed above — as these changed, so did the environmental migrant.

In both discourses, responsibility plays an important role, it provides a frame through which the figure of the environmental migrant is perceived and colours them culpable. The

¹⁰⁹ Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science*, 170.

¹¹⁰ Piguet, ‘From “Primitive Migration” to “Climate Refugees”’, 4.

idea of responsibility in environmental discourses, can easily be corrupted to deflect the burden of finding solutions. Therefore, it is important to analyse where this responsibility falls.

The colonialists of the 1880s felt that they had a responsibility to be a moral guide and educator to the indigenous people of their Empire. In order to do so they had to migrate to and from the colonies, risking their own physical and moral wellbeing in the process. Native people were deemed to be underdeveloped and colonial powers believed they were in need of education.¹¹¹ The responsibility to educate entailed, among many other things, imposing European agricultural practices on indigenous societies.¹¹² They were told how to use their land more efficiently in order to produce higher quantities.¹¹³ These practices often generated profound social, cultural and political change in the oppressed communities. They determined the future of local agriculture and created a system of dependency between the colonised and the colonisers.¹¹⁴ A century later, in the 1980s, farmers of the Global South were denounced for their poor husbandry and blamed for the decline of their local environment. The stereotypes of underdeveloped, uneducated farmers prevalent in the 20th century discourse, were reminiscent of the preconceptions of the colonial period.¹¹⁵ In the 20th century, the burden of responsibility shifted to local societies, particularly farmers, native to land on which the changing climate is most acutely felt. In the 1980s, indigenous people were laden with the new responsibility to take care of, and preserve their local environment in the face of global climatic change. Thus, indigenous societies were both infantilised through colonial stereotypes and held responsible for environmental change.

Western powers felt a responsibility over their colonial subjects when they stood to gain from it. Under a guise of moral duty, colonisers dictated how the indigenous community was to manage the land in order for them to produce in higher quantities. However, by 1980s, burdened with new knowledge on the effects of the climate crisis and the role of industrialised countries therein, they washed their hands of it. Instead, by means of the same colonial stereotypes, this responsibility was placed with the migrants, many of whom were from former colonies.

Throughout both discourses, a narrative of strong versus weak persists. Those who migrate due to environmental factors are weaker than those who adapt to, or change an

¹¹¹ David M. Kaplan, ed., *Encyclopedia of Food and Agricultural Ethics* (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2019), 95.

¹¹² Kaplan, *Encyclopedia of Food and Agricultural Ethics*.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 96.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 95.

¹¹⁵ Betsy Hartmann, 'Rethinking Climate Refugees and Climate Conflict: Rhetoric, Reality and the Politics of Policy Discourse', *Journal of International Development* 22, no. 2 (2010): 234.

unfavourable environment, and stay. When people meet their responsibility they are seen as strong. The ideas in which this narrative is rooted have changed. In the 1980s the idea of the migrant as weak was no longer related to people's personal inability to adapt in order to overcoming health risks, but rather the failure to change the environment to suit people.

Thus, the characterisation of the environmental migrant is informed by the relationship people have to their land. As the relationship changed, so did the foundation in which the figure of environmental migrant was rooted. Still, there are important similarities in the way in which the environmental migrant is portrayed in the different periods. While the 1980s saw a more diverse group of people contributing to scholarly and political debate, the narrative which is introduced in this period is, in some ways, similar to that of the 1880s. A narrative of strength and weakness which draws on colonial stereotypes of short-sighted and destructive peasants, persists.¹¹⁶ It is important to note that we cannot speak of continuity in this specific characterisation — for decades, the figure of environmental migrant did not exist at all. Nevertheless, certain stereotypes continued to live in western society and, thereby, Europe's colonial past informed the later characterisation of the environmental migrant.

Processes of othering

In both the 1880s and the 1980s discourses of environmental migration contain processes of othering whereby the migrant is characterised as a racial 'other'. While these processes are not the same, they both reflect similar colonial stereotypes and simplified conceptions. Othering in the 20th century happened under veils and behind smokescreens. This stands in contrast to the straightforward racism of the 1800s. The difference is due, in part, to the previously discussed developments — the rejection of racism, the denouncing of colonialism, and the sour taste left by the Second World War. The gaze of the 20th century academic is fundamentally different from the gaze of the 19th century academic. Nevertheless, there are also similarities in the processes of othering. These similarities are mostly found in the homogenisation and infantilisation of the environmental migrants. In both discourses, migrants and potential migrants, are portrayed as a homogenous group. They are discussed only in very general terms without nuance or regard for locally specific context. Furthermore, migrants are stripped of their agency. They are portrayed as underdeveloped, uneducated and short-sighted.

This absence of agency relates to another aspect of these discourses which aids the conception of a racial 'other'; the ambiguity of the migrants' position. Environmental migrants

¹¹⁶ Hartmann, 'Rethinking Climate Refugees and Climate Conflict'.

are not afforded any agency and are characterised as victims of climatic change and their own inability to adapt. Conversely, as established in previous chapters, migration is also portrayed as a disruptive danger. These seemingly contradictory labels, which are seen in the discourses of both centuries, play an important role in the process of othering. Firstly, because the labels ‘threat’ and ‘victim’ set the migrant apart from the unmarked and the normal.¹¹⁷ Secondly, because it positions the migrant in a liminal space. In the introduction to the first addition of his seminal book, *Ain’t no Black in the Union Jack*, Paul Gilroy argues that racialisation happens in the oscillation between problem and victim.¹¹⁸ The label of victim, suggests an ability to feel but not to act.¹¹⁹ Thus, in both discourses migrants are a group of people who are portrayed as objects more than subjects.¹²⁰ The label of threat or problem, portrays them as an external force and renders their action disruptive.¹²¹ Gilroy argues that the liminal positioning pushes the ‘other’ out of historical context into a narrative of inevitability.¹²² The oversimplified explanation of their feelings and actions depicts them as intrinsic. Thereby, a narrative of inevitability pushes the racial ‘other’ outside of ‘our’ realm and outside the European sphere of responsibility.¹²³ As shown in previous chapters, these labels are reflected in both the discourses of 1880s and the 1980s.

Through oversimplification and liminality, environmental migrants become a racial ‘other’. If less overt, the othering of the environmental migrant in the 1980s still shows similarity to the othering in the 1880s, despite a century of drastic change and development. This is important to be aware of because these discourses can be easily corrupted to avoid responsibility and wilfully disregard the need for change.

The legacies of colonialism

Environmental migration discourses are best conceptualised through colonialism.¹²⁴ They are riddled with colonial conceptions and legacies. It is important to place these findings in the broader context of European colonial legacies and the other ways in which they effect environmental migration discourses. This thesis focussed on colonial ideas in processes of

¹¹⁷ Baldwin, ‘Racialisation and the Figure of the Climate-Change Migrant’, 1476.

¹¹⁸ Paul Gilroy, *There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* (London: Hutchinson, 1987), 11; Baldwin, ‘Racialisation and the Figure of the Climate-Change Migrant’, 1476.

¹¹⁹ Gilroy, *There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack*, 11.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Baldwin, Fröhlich, and Rothe, ‘From Climate Migration to Anthropocene Mobilities’, 292.

othering, but Europe's colonial past is reflected in multiple other ways. A comprehensive discussion of these aspects falls outside the scope of this paper, but their mention is indispensable to understanding the context of othering and the potential effects. Theories on othering can shed light on the voices which have not been listened to and unearth the effects of physical as well as metaphorical borders between people.

Colonial powers drew invisible lines on the landscape disregarding its geographical features and settled societies. Borders imposed by distant political authority curtailed the mobility of indigenous people, many of whom had long standing traditions of environmental mobility.¹²⁵ In addition to the imposing of country borders where they had not been before, European colonial powers introduced artificial, biological borders between people. They imposed a norm of immobility.¹²⁶ Important in understanding the discursive linkages between migration and environment is the idea that movement is anomalous. The notion that people belong in a certain place and that they are meant to stay there, colours migration discourse. It suggests that migration is irregular and disruptive.

While the conceptualisation of the relationship between society and the environment has changed, the result is much the same: Whether it is for their own health and safety or for a responsibility over their local environment — people are tied to their land. However, outside of modern, western, human society, species have always migrated due to environmental changes. Humans as well as butterflies, birds, rodents and bees. Nature is not static and migration is an adaptive strategy — a logical and calculated response to environmental change.¹²⁷ Nevertheless, western societies still perpetuate the notion that people belong in a certain place, even if the reason for this belonging has changed from biological determination to human responsibility. As a result, migrants become a disturbance, a problem — a crisis.

Former colonial powers are the most polluting, and many countries of the global north have profited of colonised peoples and their environment. While it is important not to underestimate the self-determination of former colonies, many western countries undeniably affected the mobility of oppressed societies and, in part, shaped their agricultural practices. Yet countries in the Global South are disproportionately affected by climate change.¹²⁸ With the

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Thomas Nail, 'Forum 1: Migrant Climate in the Kinocene', *Mobilities* 14, no. 3 (4 May 2019): 378.

¹²⁷ Baldwin, Fröhlich, and Rothe, 'From Climate Migration to Anthropocene Mobilities'; Richard Black et al., 'Migration as Adaptation', *Nature* 478, no. 7370 (October 2011): 447–49; François Gemenne and Julia Blocher, 'How Can Migration Serve Adaptation to Climate Change? Challenges to Fleshing out a Policy Ideal', *The Geographical Journal* 183, no. 4 (December 2017): 336–47; Nail, 'Forum 1'.

¹²⁸ Lisa Sun-Hee Park and David Naguib Pellow, 'Forum 4: The Environmental Privilege of Borders in the Anthropocene', *Mobilities* 14, no. 3 (4 May 2019): 399.

1980s belief that people and environment affect each other in equal measure, you run the risk of concluding that all people are equally to blame for the changes we see in the earth's climates.

Conclusion

This thesis has shown that, despite almost a century of quick development in scientific thought, discourses on environmental migration in the 1880s and 1980s show similarity in their conceptualisation of the migrant and in processes of othering. I have argued that colonial legacies, conceptualisations and structures, shape environmental migration discourses and that, in order to fully understand the power structures within them, we need to apply a postcolonial lens.

Countries of the global north place the migrant outside of historical context and ignore the role of the west in their development. Industrialised countries and former colonial powers disregard their own role in the climate crisis and environmental migration by assigning responsibility to the ‘other’ they have created. Through processes of othering, culprit countries are justified in doing nothing.

In the first chapter of this thesis, I analysed the 1880s discourse on environmental migration by looking, specifically, at foundational texts by Ratzel and Ravenstein. This chapter established that Darwin’s understanding of human ‘races’ informed early ideas about environmental migration. People were thought to be a product of their local environment to which they were consequentially perfectly adapted. Any movement between different environments was believed to be a dangerous strain on their wellbeing.

The second chapter saw an analysis of the works of El-Hinnawi and Jacobson, published in the 1980s. When they reintroduced environmental migration, conventional science had moved to the understanding that people and environment affect each other in equal measure. This shaped environmental migration discourses because it resulted in a reimagining of the ties between people and land. In the 20th century, migrating away from one’s environment was believed to be undesirable because people had a responsibility over its upkeep.

The third chapter established that, aside from the afore mentioned differences, there are many similarities within these discourses, specifically in the processes of othering. Both discourses treat migrants as a homogeneous group, oversimplifying their identity and infantilising them by not allowing for their agency within the narrative. Furthermore, the imposing of borders and settled agriculture by colonial powers introduced a norm of immobility. This colonial legacy frames a myriad of agricultural practices as backward and all environmental migration as disruptive. Normative immobility is reflected in the strong ties

between people and their environment in both the discourse of the 1880s and the 1980s. Former colonial powers are among the most polluting countries in the world, but by means of colonial stereotypes and imperial legacies of borders and agricultural gold-standards they create a racial 'other' and are able to place the burden of responsibility on the shoulders of the migrants themselves.

Environmental migration is often discussed as a catastrophe-to-come — a result of future climatic changes. However, from the comparison made in this thesis, I conclude that discourses on environmental migration have their roots in the colonial period. It is crucial to be aware of colonial legacies because an understanding thereof sheds a light on the people who are not heard within the discourse. Nevertheless, Andrew Baldwin's assertion that the predictive nature of the discourse, makes a postcolonial perspective unproductive when trying to understand its power structures, should not be completely tossed aside. It is true that the future tense, complicates the figure of the environmental migrant. They are discussed as yet-to-come and therefore, even in their conceptualisation, do not yet exist.¹²⁹ This thesis has shown that, despite of this, the past informs the way in which the environmental migrant is portrayed in these forewarnings and predictions. However, the interplay between the past and the future in discourses of environmental migration, while falling outside the scope of this thesis, warrants further consideration and research.

One important difference between the 1880s and the 1980s, which this thesis has not discussed in much detail, is the diversification of academic and political conversations. In the 1980s, the world had become more globalised and academics from the Global South, who had not been listened to before, could now contribute to environmental migration discourses. Nevertheless, as I have shown, the western notion that countries of the Global South are underdeveloped and therefore less strong or resilient, persists. This seemingly paradoxical result is undeniably significant and formative to environmental migration discourses. The role of countries of the Global South in international political programs like UNEP as been discussed in articles like *Designing the United Nations Environment Programme: a story of compromise and confrontation*.¹³⁰ The effects of the diversification of the research field in this way, is an interesting and important avenue for further research.

More recently, a new approach to environmental migration has emerged and it has opened the floor for critical discussion. This new discourse characterises environmental

¹²⁹ Baldwin, 'Orientalising Environmental Citizenship', 635.

¹³⁰ Ivanova, 'Designing the United Nations Environment Programme'.

migration as an adaptive strategy.¹³¹ While this approach gives a lot more agency to the migrants, some scholars, like philosopher Thomas Nail, have pointed at other problems with this approach.¹³² Nail holds that, by framing migration as a solution, this discourse does not recognise the need for widespread and thorough reform instead providing another way by which industrialised countries can curtail responsibility. He argues that it does not deal with the problem itself and only addresses its effects.¹³³ Here, agency, which is important in the process of othering, plays a very different role from the discourses discussed in this paper. It would be valuable to look specifically at othering in this new discourse to see whether an allowance for migrant's agency does away with the racialised 'other' in environmental migration discourse.

Furthermore, in chapter one, I name gender as one aspect, on the basis of which Ravenstein and Ratzel differentiate between weak and strong within European societies. Gender merits more specific and thorough analysis than this single mention provides as it is an integral part of understanding the notions of strength and weakness as discussed in this thesis. A good place to start is *Gendering Resilience: Myths and Stereotypes in the Discourse on Climate-induced Migration* by Delf Rothe. Rothe has analysed the gendering of resilience in European policy proposals on climate migration and found a highly gendered discourse.¹³⁴ Examining gender in the context of colonial environmental migration discourses, could be a valuable addition to the research done in this paper. Gender, while falling outside the scope of this thesis, cannot be dismissed as unimportant. It is crucial to recognise the intersectional nature of the environmental migrant.

In short, the dangers of an uncritical acceptance of engrained narratives and discourses lie in the potential allocating of blame where it does not belong. This thesis has established that environmental migration discourses perpetuate the characterisation of the migrant as a racial 'other' and place them at a distance from western societies. These discourses rely on colonial legacies to fashion a scapegoat out of the environmental migrants.

¹³¹ Black et al., 'Migration as Adaptation'; Gemenne and Blocher, 'How Can Migration Serve Adaptation to Climate Change?'; Nail, 'Forum 1'; Chris Methmann and Angela Oels, 'From "Fearing" to "Empowering" Climate Refugees: Governing Climate-Induced Migration in the Name of Resilience', *Security Dialogue* 46, no. 1 (1 February 2015): 51–68.

¹³² Nail, 'Forum 1'.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 379.

¹³⁴ Delf Rothe, 'Gendering Resilience: Myths and Stereotypes in the Discourse on Climate-Induced Migration', *Global Policy* 8, no. S1 (2017): 40–47.

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