International biopolitics and “climate refugees” as *bare life*.
A Critical Discourse Analysis of how the UN’s framing of “climate refugees” impacts climate related global humanitarian migration and refugee governance

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Abstract

This thesis investigates how the United Nations’ (UN) framing of “climate refugees” impacts global humanitarian migration and refugee governance in the context of anthropogenic climate change in which border zones become spaces of biopolitical decision making which impacts both governance strategies and International Relations as an academic field. It argues from a poststructuralist perspective that the UN’s discourse centred around climate change related human movement, the issue of “climate refugees” is downplayed, and “climate refugees” become *bare life* while their claims to legal protection are delegitimised. Thus, despite the concept of “climate refugees” becoming increasingly important in the Anthropocene, the UN’s discourse has remained vastly unchanged since McNamara’s analysis of it in 2007. The UN’s governance related discourse and reasoning concerning “climate refugees” and (humanitarian) global governance is explored through a Critical Discourse Analysis that examines a set of official UN documents which are relevant to the issue of forced human movement in the context of anthropogenic climate change. *(12 777 words)*
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1. Introduction

This thesis seeks to answer the question *How does the UN’s framing of “climate refugees” impact climate change related global humanitarian migration and refugee governance?*

Humanity finds itself in the Anthropocene, the current epoch in which humans are considered as important geological and biological agents as their actions have a direct impact on the earth’s ecosystems (McKee 2011:309-310), particularly in the form of climate change. In this context, scholars predict that until the year 2050 between 150 and 150 million people will be displaced due to the effects of anthropogenic climate change (Berchin et al. 2017:148, Bayes 2018:19). Some will be displaced internally, others across borders. The thesis utilises the term “climate refugees” to speak of those people who are forced to move across borders due to climate change (see 2.1.5). This thesis seeks to investigate how the United Nations’ (UN) discursive framing of climate refugees impacts global humanitarian migration and refugee governance.

Since the mid-1990s several cases similar to the 2020 case of Ioane Teitiota who applied for asylum in New Zealand on the basis of him feeling his life and well-being threatened in Kiribati by the effects of climate change, have been brought to Australia and New Zealand – all of whom have been rejected (Lyons 2020). Due to the increasing importance of climate change as a political issue, and with it the issue of people moving in the context of climate change, some scholars have advocated for the addition of “climate refugees” to the UN’s current understanding of “refugees” (Berchin et al. 2017; Lister; 2014, Biermann & Boas 2010) which is based on the definition of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (from here on: Refugee Convention) and its 1967 Protocol.

Other scholars, however, have raised concerns that the addition of a new category of refugees will undermine other refugees’ rights (Hartmann 2010:238), that the concept as such is too vague and environmental reasons for migration are difficult to separate from other factors (White 2019:133; Gemenne 2015:70), and that most people who are and will be displaced due to climate change will not cross a border and can thus not be considered refugees (Biermann & Boas 2010:66; Warren 2016:2125).

The thesis seeks to contribute to this debate by analysing the impact the UN’s discourse on climate change related human movement and connected human rights issues has on “climate refugees” access to human rights and climate change related global humanitarian migration and refugee governance. In order to do so, a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is used to analyse seven UN documents from the period of 2015 to 2020 that refer to climate change related human movement and human rights. The CDA is based on Schneider’s (2013b) toolbox.
and makes use of four coding categories related to climate change, climate action, human rights and human movement that each contain category related tags.

From a poststructuralist perspective it is argue that the UN’s discourse on climate change related human movement, in part downplays and depoliticises the issue of climate change and climate change related human movement through which “climate refugees” claims to access to human rights, and international legal and political processes are delegitimised. They are thus excluded from the international polis and produced as bare life, that is as life without socio-political characteristic and rights.

In the following literature review (2.1) and theory (2.2) section the context connected to the issue of “climate refugees” will be established. It will draw on existing research to outline the implications of the Anthropocene and anthropogenic climate change for politics (2.1.1) as well as for International Relations (IR) (2.1.2). Furthermore, it will illustrate in how far the issue of “climate refugees” poses a global governance challenge (2.1.3) and argue why the task of defining “climate refugees” is a complex debate (2.1.4) in the context of current international law and policy making. Due to this complexity and the lack of official recognition of “climate refugees” as a legal category, the term is set in quotation marks throughout the thesis. The literature review will then conceptualise the term “climate refugees” (2.1.5) for the purpose of the thesis.

In the theory section (2.2) relevant poststructuralist concepts that are used in the analysis are discussed. Section 2.2.1 argues that migration management, including the management and governance of “climate refugees”, is an international biopolitical issue. It then discusses the concept of bare life (2.2.2). It describes persons that are excluded from socio-political life subjecting them to decisions over their life and death, or else confinement to death worlds. The concept of death worlds is introduced in connection to the concept of necropolitics (2.2.3). Finally, these concepts are related to the issue of “climate refugees” (2.2.4).

The methodology argues for the use of a CDA in the context of this thesis (3.1) as it has the potential to highlight connections between language and political decision making. It explains how the analysed data was selected (3.2) and introduces the coding categories that were used in the framework of Schneider’s (2013b) toolbox (3.3).

The analysis (4) then presents and discusses the findings of the CDA. It is structured based on the four coding categories. First, it discusses the UN’s framing of climate change (4.1) including its recognition of climate change as a serious international issue but also its framing of climate change as requiring adaptation responses by single nation states. The thesis argues that as this discourse does not recognise the uneven distribution of cause and effect of climate
change, it contributes to the delegitimization of “climate refugees” and their construction as *bare life*. Connecting to this argument, the UN’s discourse on climate action (4.2) is debated. The thesis contends that the discourse does not only locate the responsibility of adaptation with national governments, but also partly frames climate change related human movement as an adaptation strategy which implies a voluntary decision on the part of “climate refugees”.

It further argues that “climate refugees” are framed as a non-existing category under vague umbrella terms that include different types of climate change related human movements (4.3). Thus, no meaningful distinction is made between voluntary and forced, as well as internal and cross-border movement. The thesis reasons that thereby “climate refugees” are excluded from the international *polis* becoming *bare life*, even though their vulnerability is emphasised by the UN (4.4). Lastly, section 4.5 sums up the findings of the analysis and discusses them in their entirety. The thesis then ends with and overall conclusion (5).

2. Literature Review and Theory

This thesis seeks to answer the question *How does the UN’s framing of “climate refugees” impact climate change related global humanitarian migration and refugee governance?* To this aim it analyses the UN’s framing of “climate refugees” and how this discourse might impact “climate refugees”' access to human rights. Based on a poststructuralist approach and a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the argument presented in the thesis is that the UN’s discourse on climate change related human movement downplays the issue of “climate refugees”. While the UN acknowledge the complex nature of the issue, the author contends that their framing nonetheless produces “climate refugees” as *bare life* thus delegitimising their claims to legal protection.

This part of the thesis is divided into two sections. First, the Literature Review will establish the context surrounding the issue of “climate refugees” as an important part of the CDA based on Schneider’s (2013b) toolbox (see 3.3.1). Second, the theory section will debate key concepts of poststructuralism that will be applied in the analysis.

2.1 Literature Review

In the following the impact of anthropogenic climate change on International Relations (IR), geopolitics and governance, including issues of migration and “climate refugees” will be outlined. The Literature Review will furthermore draw on how existing research has described the issue of “climate refugees” as a global governance challenge. As well as presenting a
working definition of “climate refugees” for this thesis, it will be illustrated in how far the process of defining “climate refugees” itself is marked by difficulties and controversies.

2.1.1 The Anthropocene, geopolitics and governance

In the current epoch of the Anthropocene, human beings are considered biological and geological agents since their actions have a direct impact on the Earth and its ecosystems (McKee 2011:309-310, Thornton 2018:2). The most evident among these impacts is perhaps anthropogenic climate change. At the same time, part of the Earth human population is, or will be faced with the effects of climate change (Dalby 1998:292; Merone & Tait 2018:508), among them being increased difficulties to produce food, reduced access to clean water, droughts and floods, as well as wildfires and heatwaves (Thornton 2018:2).

Predominantly, regions in the global south, such as Tuvalu (McKee 2011:311) and Bangladesh (Bayes 2018) are most affected by the effects of climate change. The thesis argues that while not all people leaving these countries do to the effects of climate change can be considered as “climate refugees”, some may fall into this – in the absence of a legal category – potential political category (see 2.1.4 and 2.1.5 for a discussion of the term “climate refugee”). It is further argued that in the absence of a legal definition of “climate refugees” as well as a vague and hesitant political discourse concerning “climate refugees”, these people lack protection and access to human rights under international law.

The following sections will discuss the implications of climate change and the resulting issue of “climate refugees” on IR and its interpretation of the socio-political world, and debate “climate refugees” in the context of geopolitics and global governance.

2.1.2 The implications of anthropogenic climate change on IR

Scholars such as Latour (2018:2) and Burke et al. (2016:502) have put out the hypothesis that we cannot understand the contemporary socio-political world without realising the importance of climate change. The thesis agrees with these scholars that climate change blurs the distinction between the local, national and global sphere as climate change affects all life on earth.

Agathangelou (2016:322) highlights that IR usually sees states’ territories as clearly demarcated concepts of the political and social existing separately from nature. In the context of climate change, however, with geopolitics shifting its concern from power over territories to control over the Earth and its resources as a whole (Gemenne 2015:70), our ways of
organising socio-political communities as well as IR’s categories and concepts to understand
them are being challenged. The thesis contends that therefore climate change also challenges
and demands changes of how populations will be governed, and borders will be understood
and managed.

Biermann and Boas (2010:60) have raised the question: “how can we build over the course
of the next decades systems of global governance that will cope with the global impacts of
climate change?” While this thesis does not engage in debates on the specifics of climate
change, it follows the academic consensus that climate change has and will have severe impacts
on human life including population groups being forced to leave their homes, at times across
borders and thus posing new challenges for the international community, international law as
well as IR as an academic field.

2.1.3 “Climate refugees” as a geopolitical and global governance challenge
As climate change, due to its universal and global effects, forces us to rethink the traditional
conceptualisations and importance of borders and state sovereignty (Latour 2018:10), it also
raises questions on how these effects will be managed (Dalby 1998:310-311). The author
argues that whereas it might be possible to prevent “climate refugees” from crossing borders
(Dalby 1998:310-311), to deny their existence by excluding them from official definitions and
thus denying them access to refugee’s rights, climate change does not respect and cannot be
stopped by borders. Thus, the effects of climate change including the creation of “climate
refugees” become an issue that challenges common notions of bounded territories and state
sovereignty.

2.1.4 Difficulties of defining “climate refugees”
People moving due to the environment or climate is not new to the 21st century. However, the
increasing effects anthropogenic climate change has is new and the creation of “climate
refugees” is one of the new challenges that climate change poses to the international
community (Thronton 2018:3). To talk effectively about “climate refugees”, this thesis argues,
it is important to define the term. The definition of “climate refugees”, particularly in the
absence of a legal definition of the term, is however subject to debate.

Warren (2016:2111-2112,2115) points out that defining and recognising “climate refugees”
as a category creates the dilemma of either constructing a very narrow or a very broad
definition. The first would exclude most people who are and will be displaced by climate
change events as they will be displaced internally. The latter would infringe on domestic law and state sovereignty by including internally displaced people and seeking to build a framework of how to govern them. Other objection to the creation of “climate refugees” as a category include the concern that the addition of a new refugee category might undermine other refugees’ rights (Hartmann 2010:238) as well as the difficulty to effectively identify “climate refugees” as climate change impacts are often linked with other non-environmental factors (Thornton 2018:24, 27).

This thesis, however, supports Berchin et al.’s (2017:148) opposition to these concerns that “the problem is not one of precise definition but lack of legal status and normative protection”. The author argues that the concern for other refugee’s rights does not solve the problem that “climate refugees” remain unprotected in the absence of a global agreement on the issue (Thornton 2018:42).

Even in the absence of international legal and political recognition of “climate refugees” states are at liberty to include “climate refugees” in their national migration and refugee policies (Berchin et al. 2017:147-148) independent of UNHCR’s Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees (from here on Refugee Convention). Due to a “discourse of fear” (Chaturvedi & Doyle 2010:206) regarding climate change and “climate refugees”, this thesis argues that it seems however unlikely that receiving states would be willing to accept responsibility for an additional refugee population (Biermann & Boas 2012:74) necessitating an international problem-solving approach.

While the term “climate migrant” as a broader term considers the complexity of the issue (Thornton 2018:19), the thesis argues that deploying this terminology instead of “climate refugee” is not well suited as a means to work towards establishing greater protection of “climate refugees”. In accordance with Bayes (2018:8), the author contends that the term “climate migrant” as opposed to “climate refugee” implies a voluntary character of “climate refugees”’ cross-border movement. In the analysis it is argued that the UN frames “climate refugees” as in part moving voluntarily although it is not the case for all people on the move due to climate change. The thesis maintains that this framing contributes to the depoliticising of the action (Thornton 2018:20) and to political actors avoiding responsibility to act.

Although, the thesis acknowledges an increasing political recognition of climate change as a socio-political challenge, it argues that the discourse surrounding “climate refugees” downplays the issue (McNamara 2007:16) and delegitimises “climate refugees”’ claims to legal protection.
According to scholars such as Durieux not enough attention has been paid to climate justice and “thus the asymmetries between causation and the bearing of harms or burdens raised by climate change” (Thornton 2018:7). Instead, an emphasis is placed on resilience strategies which shifts the responsibility to act from the main polluters to populations most affected by climate change (Methmann & Oels 2015:51-53, 63; Bayes 2018:5; Dalby 1998:304). Gemenne (2015:71) even goes so far as to call this process a “form of persecution against the most vulnerable”.

While this thesis argues for an existing power imbalance and unjust distribution of climate change cause and burden, it recognises the complexity of the question of responsibility for climate change. Although most calculations identify developed countries – particularly the USA and Europe as a whole – as the main contributors to climate change (Wei et al. 2012; Rocha et al. 2015; Clark 2011), China is currently the country with the highest CO2 and greenhouse gas emissions. Furthermore, climate change responsibility calculations lead to slightly different results depending on whether Europe (or the EU) is regarded in its entirety or if the single states are considered separately. It depends on whether current or historical responsibility is calculated, per capita or as a whole (Clark 2011). Thus, the effectiveness of identifying a main responsible party for climate change can be questioned.

Moreover, this thesis shares the view that regardless of which states are identified as main polluters, the international community will be unlikely to choose a corrective justice approach and distribute the responsibility for “climate refugees” according to responsibility for climate change. The argument put forward in this thesis is that while action is needed to provide better protection for “climate refugees”, a distributive justice approach (Thornton 2018:192) appears more promising and effective.

2.1.5 Conceptualising “climate refugees”

The Refugee Convention (UNHCR:14) defines those people with a “well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion”, who have left their country and are unable to return as refugees. As climate change events is generally not considered persecution, the definition does not cover “climate refugees”. There is thus a legal absence of the term “climate refugee” leading to instances of people being forced to leave their country due to climate change being not addressed by international law (Thornton 2018:5, 30).
The thesis argues that it is nonetheless possible to define “climate refugees” as a political category to clarify the population groups the conducted research refers to. The author contends that, as Thornton (2018:5) highlights, a distinction can be made between internally displaced people due to climate change who cannot be protected under international law, and those moving across borders. The latter group of people is referred to as “climate refugees” in this thesis.

The author supports Lister’s (2014:620) stance that not all people moving across borders in the climate change context are necessarily “refugees”. Instead, further distinctions include whether national relocation is possible, and if asylum and non-refoulement are a necessity as those fleeing are unable to return home. The author sees an inability to return home in situations such as permanent flooding i.e. through sea level rise, or drastically diminished access to resources such as clean water, and an absence of national adaptation and protection measures.

Based on the various conceptualisations and definitions of “climate refugees” by different scholars (Berchin et al. 2017:147, Lister 2014:621, Biermann & Boas 2010:63-64), this thesis defines “climate refugees” as persons who – in absence of national adaptation and protection possibilities – due to severe climate change events that threaten their existence and/or considerably affect their quality of life, are forced to leave their country for an indefinite or permanent duration.

2.2 Theory

The following theory section presents relevant poststructuralist concepts. Before illustrating the poststructuralist perspective on “climate refugees”, the thesis will outline and debate relevant main concepts. These concepts are 1) biopolitics, 2) necropolitics, and 3) bare life. The theory part concludes with a more specific section on the issue are of “climate refugees” in the context of poststructuralism.

2.2.1 Biopolitics

Traditionally, biopolitics is more linked to the nation state and the governing of life within the nation state than to the international political sphere. However, the author reasons that migration management has biopolitics as an intrinsic aspect. Thus, with the management of migration becoming increasingly mainstreamed on an international, if not global, level through institutions such as the UN, biopolitics takes to the international stage. The thesis argues that
migration management, especially when it is related to climate change with its global effects, is inherently an international biopolitical issue.

Agamben pointed out that biopolitics is concerned with the basic survival of human beings. As such, however, biopolitical governance does not include anything beyond considerations for the management of the minimum requirements for survival therefore neglecting social life (Radestad & Larsson 2018:89). As migration and its management in its essence focuses on the governance of populations, on the question who to let in and keep out, who to protect and who to let die, and in what manner and with which justification these courses of action are carried out, refugees and migrants become the “ultimate biopolitical subjects” over whom governments and international governance organisations and projects exercise sovereign power (Zeveleva 2017:41). The thesis contends that border zones, therefore, become spaces marked by biopolitical decision making over the management and movement of populations (Aradau & Tazzioli 2020:200), linked to both the national and the international level.

In the context of biopolitics, Agamben introduced the term bare life to address the creation of the individual as a ‘living animal (only) with the additional capacity for political existence” (Agamben 1998:7 cited by Radestad & Larsson 2018:89). This concept will be discussed in the next section as the thesis argues that “climate refugees” are in part produced as bare life through the UN’s discourse.

### 2.2.2 Bare life

According to Agamben bare life is created by placing a person in a grey area in between the existence as human and animal, in between culture and nature. He relates the term to the concept of homo sacer which dates back to ancient Roman law in which human life’s juridical status was defined through its exclusion, that is, through the possibility of taking away this life and thus making it expandable (Leban 2017:75-77).

The thesis puts forth the argument that “climate refugees” not only through their circumstances of forced movement due to climate change but particularly due to their lack of legal and often political existence are created as bare life. They are included in biopolitical governance through their exclusion from socio-political life giving the governing the sovereignty over decisions determining their life or death.

The author argues that when it comes to how “climate refugees” are framed and in consequence treated, we must return to the concept of bare life. While liberal democracies and democratic institutions such as the UN are largely governing through freedom instead of
“commanding” or “laying down the law” (Foucault 2009:115-116), their governing is however connected to the power of deciding on life and death. Just like regular refugees and asylum seekers (Mayblin et al. 2020:110), “climate refugees” are reduced to *bare life* when they are illegalised, delegitimised or when their rights as (inter)national subjects are removed (Vandevoordt 2020:5) through lack of legal and political recognition and they are as a result excluded from the *polis* – the political life (Zeveleva 2017:45).

### 2.2.3 Necropolitics

As – based on the arguments presented above – “climate refugees” are included in biopolitical governance through their exclusion (Mayblin et al. 2020:110), they do not hold the same biopolitical status as citizens of receiving countries. While biopolitics aims at the keeping alive and managing of those holding citizenship, the governance of “climate refugees” is based on decisions over life and death.

As this phenomenon of sovereignty that is based on the power to make this kind of decisions was termed *necropolitics* by Mbembe (Vandevoordt 2020:6) – and similarly *thanatopolitics* by Agamben (Aradau & Tazzioli 2020:200, 205) – some scholars argue that biopolitics in these instances is, in fact, necropolitics (Nasir 2017:75). These decisions over life and death include the establishing of *death-worlds* “where suffering is inflicted upon subjects without necessarily killing them”, thus reducing them to the status of the *living dead* (Vandevoordt 2020:6). This thesis argues that through the creation of “climate refugees” as *bare life* and the absence of official recognition of their existence, that is their refugee status, they are produced as *living dead*.

### 2.2.4 “Climate refugees” through a poststructuralist lens

Decisions on whether population groups are included in life-enhancing biopolitical governance or are produced as *bare life* and *living dead* are, according to Aradau and Tazzioli (2020:204), made based on the assessment of whether refugees appear to threaten the wellbeing of the host populations, the furthering of whose life and health is a priority of the political elites by whom they are governed. The latter might lead to the willing acceptance of the death of refugees who are deemed not be worth saving. This distinction and the resulting governance strategies are related to the production of *truth*.

Discourse on and framing of “climate refugees” is based on knowledge about and understanding of the material world which in turn is shaped and reinforced or changed in turn.
through discourse (Casey & Larsson 2018:445). The role of discourse in this process is to normalise understandings and interpretations of reality so that they appear natural and pre-existing, and are institutionalised as norms, rules or laws (Halperin & Heath 2017:343). (For a more elaborate discussion on discourse see 3.1.) The thesis argues that, therefore, “climate refugee” governance, too, is determined by truths-establishing discourse used to exercise control over populations.

To comprehend the UN’s governance actions regarding “climate refugees”, this thesis argues, it is necessary to gain insights into the reasoning and justifications in the UN’s discursive practices. This way, it is possible to draw conclusions on how the UN views – and frames – “climate refugees” and which potential impact this framing has on “climate refugees’” access to legal protection and human rights.

Dean (2002:125) argues that based on the separation of populations as bare life or belonging to the polis, “climate refugees” are given certain statuses. That is to say that truths concerning them are created. They are then treated in correspondence to their status, and their cross-border movement is managed. In this thesis it is argued that “climate refugees” are, despite efforts to work out a protective framework, excluded from the polis and constituted as bare life through their legal (and political) non-existence.

3. Methodology

Similar to scholars such as Bettini (2012), Hoeg and Tulloch (2019), and McNamara (2007) this thesis uses a discourse analysis. The following section will outline the methodological approach of this research aimed at investigating what implications the framing of “climate refugees” within UN discourse has on global humanitarian migration and refugee governance. To understand the potential way in which the issue of “climate refugees” is and will be incorporated in global governance strategies the author reasons that it is important to analyse how those people that can be described as “climate refugees” are framed in the discourse of global governance actors such as the UN. The aim of this thesis is to answer these questions of discourse and framing – that is the nexus of power and knowledge which produces truths (Dean 2002:124, Foucault 2009:256) – under the umbrella of the research question How does the UN’s framing of “climate refugees” impact climate change related global humanitarian migration and refugee governance? Doing so it analyses how the discourse reflects and creates power relations and how these are, will or might be institutionalised in global governance frameworks and international laws and policies. To this aim the thesis employs coding.
categories that are related to the above-mentioned questions in the context of a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (see 3.3).

In 2007 McNamara conducted a study that showed that environmental refugees’ act of fleeing was largely regarded as voluntary rather than forced, and within UNHCR they were framed as displaced people rather than refugees which led to a delegitimization of the issue, particularly in regard to humanitarian aspects (McNamara 2007:16-19). The CDA that will be conducted in the context of this thesis will analyse whether there has been a shift in discourse and framing within the last 13 years, and the implication this might have on the global governing of “climate refugees”.

In the first part of this section the CDA that will be used in the analysis is outlined. Furthermore, an argument is made for the use of a CDA in the context of the thesis. In the next step, it is illustrated how the analysed data was selected. Lastly, the coding categories and the coding process are explained.

3.1 Critical Discourse Analysis

While CDA cannot offer any evidence of motivation and thought processes behind people’s actions and words they however reveal what is established as obvious truths (Schneider 2013b). They thus demonstrate the relationship between power and regimes of truths in the use of language. Thereby they focus not only on identifying these relationships but at how they are produced, thus uncovering inequalities and power structures (Fan 2019:1041).

A CDA “is ‘critical’ because it seeks to expose connections between language, power and ideology” (Halperin & Heath 2017:338). The ontology underlying CDA and the theories most prone to be related to this method (constructivism, Marxism, poststructuralism) assumes that meaning is socially constructed (Halperin & Heath 2017:356). The author shares this ontological standpoint and argues that social and political truths a created through the use of discourse and are consequently institutionalised as social or political norms, or legal rules and regulations.

When speaking of discourse, the term can be defined simply as “the use of language” (Chilton 2004:16 cited by Schneider 2013a), as “the flow of knowledge through time” (Jäger 2004:129 cited by Schneider 2013a). Thereby, the latter definition alludes to the impact of discourse on the creation and normalisation of truth implying the above-mentioned ontology. That is, our norms, values, beliefs, rules, understandings of reality, in short our truths, are not pre-existing (Schneider 2013a). Instead, they are produced through social and political
interaction. Through discourse norms, values, beliefs, rules and understandings of reality become normalised and naturalised (Halperin & Heath 2017:343) so that they are perceived as truths. Discourse which is based on these established truths further reinforces and reproduces what has generally been accepted as normal and natural (Schneider 2013a).

This thesis argues, in accordance with Schneider (2013a) and Halperin and Heath (2017:339), that the effectiveness of the establishing of such truths often depends on how much power the author of the discourse holds. CDA have the potential to expose mechanisms through which discourse is used to (re)produce truths in a specific social, political or historical context (Halperin & Heath 2017:339; Schneider 2013a). It thereby also highlights existing power relationships and inequalities, but also instances and potentials of resistance to power abuse.

The author argues that a CDA is therefore well suited to analyse the power constellation in the context of global migration and climate governance and “climate refugees’” place therein. Those fleeing due to climate change events have not yet been officially recognised as “climate refugees” yet there is a shift of perspective on the issue as it becomes increasingly relevant due to the growing impacts of climate change not only on the natural but also the socio-political world. A CDA can reveal how existing power relations between global populations as well as between those governing and the governed impact political decision making on “climate refugees” and reproduce or challenge existing truths.

In its function of reflecting on the relation between language and political action as well as on power structures, this thesis argues that CDA can contribute to emancipatory goals that are often envisioned by predominantly Marxist, but also poststructuralist scholars (Schneider 2013a). This thesis contends that CDA thus highlight systemic use and abuse of power that impacts socio-political life and can thereby lead to change of discourse ultimately evoking actual political change.

Scholars who utilise positivist methodologies might see a risk of invalidating the research’s findings through this interpretivist, and partially normative, approach as can at times be influenced by the interpreting researcher’s biases and expectations. However, the author argues that the use of systematic coding categories and a step-by-step process of Schneider’s (2013b) toolbox, based on Jäger, Chilton and Fairclough (see 3.3), ensure the possibility to repeat and test the analysis ensuring the research’s reliability (Halperin & Heath 2017:356). As the “author is part of the process whereby meaning is constructed” (Halperin & Heath 2017:357) it is possible that another researcher’s interpretation of the data might diverge in part from the analysis presented in this thesis. However, the author argues that through reliable and transparent coding and ensuring validity through plausibility in the analysis (Halperin & Heath
2017:355) the findings are no less relevant and that differing interpretations can, as Halperin and Heath (2017:356) claim, be additional data for future research.

In the following section outlines the chosen data as well as the process of gathering the texts that are analysed in this thesis. Then, in the final section of the Methodology, Schneider’s CDA toolbox and, in its context, the coding categories are illustrated.

3.2 Data selection

In the following it will be outlined which documents were chosen for the analysis. The selection process will be illustrated, and it will be argued for the texts’ relevance to this thesis’ research. Additionally, Box 1 provides an overview over the chosen documents.

To analyse how “climate refugees” are framed and related to other refugee categories a set of UN documents on the climate change and population movement will be analysed. This is done in order to draw conclusions on what impact the additional category of “climate refugees” to the UN refugee definition would have on international migration management (such as better protection of “climate refugees”, an undermining other refugees’ rights or an increased emphasis on national security). The documents have been chosen based on their relevance to both issues of migration/ refugees and climate change and can be handed in upon request both the coded and un-coded versions.

Using the keywords “climate change”, “refugees”, and “climate refugees”, both the UN’s databases (https://www.un.org/en/databases/) and the search engine Ecosia were used to find documents that might potentially be relevant to this thesis’ analysis. The author decided to focus on documents from the period between 2015 and 2020. This decision was made as 2015 was the year in which what is commonly referred to as “refugee crisis” became noticeable in Europe and the Paris Agreement was signed. By analysing documents that do not pre-date these events the author seeks to focus on the current discourse on “climate refugees” and avoid confusion and increased complexity through probable shifts (Vandevoordt 2020:1) both in climate as well as in refugee politics.

Among the documents that were found during the online search seven documents that are linked to different UN institutions and organs (UN Advisory Group for the COP 21, UNHCR, Human Rights Committee, Human Rights Council, UN General Assembly) were chosen for the thesis’ research. The selection was made randomly as the UN should have a consistent approach on the issue of climate change and “climate refugees” which, as the author asserts, results in any given documents providing a representative cross-section of the UN’s discourse.
on the topic. However, as the texts are linked to various UN bodies, the author argues that it is still possible to detect variations in perspectives, and discourse.

- Climate Change and Human Mobility Solution Agenda – Resilience – Paris COP 21, 2015
- Climate change, disaster and displacement in the Global Compacts: UNHCR’s perspectives, 2017a
- Climate Change and Disaster Displacement: An Overview of UNHCR’s Role, 2017b
- UNHCR Engagement in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), 2017c
- Addressing human rights protection gaps in the context of migration and displacement of persons across international borders resulting from the adverse effects of climate change and supporting the adaptation and mitigation plans of developing countries to bridge the protection gaps, 2018
- Tuvalu: draft resolution. Providing legal protection for persons displaced by the impacts of climate change, 2019
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Human Rights Committee). Views adopted by the Committee under article 5 (4) of the Optional Protocol, concerning communication No. 2728/2016, 2020

Box 1

The chosen documents will be coded using coding categories (see 3.3) relevant to the issues of climate change and “(climate) refugees”. The emerging discourse strands will then be analysed in their context to determine (1) which claims and perspectives are produced as truths, that is how “climate refugees” are defined and framed, (2) where “climate refugees” are positioned in relation to other refugees as well as receiving states, and (3) how this framing is manifested in UN policies and international migration governance. Apart from introducing the coding categories, section 3.3 provides an overview over Schneider’s toolbox on which this thesis’ CDA is based.

3.3 Schneider’s toolbox and coding categories

Schneider’s (2013b) toolbox which has been developed based on previous work by Siegfried Jäger, Paul Chilton and Norman Fairclough consists of ten steps that have been used as
The guidelines for the CDA used in this thesis. In the following, these ten steps will be illustrated, and it will be outlined how they have been applied during the research process. The section discussing Schneider’s ten steps is divided into three parts: 1) The preparation of the sources, 2) the coding and 3) the analysis.

3.3.1 Establishing the context and preparing the material

Schneider’s (2013b) first step instructs the researcher to establish the context of the text that will be analysed. The context includes information such as the author and the date (see 3.2). But it also refers to the overall socio-political and historical context of, in this case, “climate refugees” which has been discussed in the Literature Review and Theory part of the thesis.

In the second step additional information on the chosen texts is gathered. This includes the target audience which can overall be said to be the UN member states and their governments, although the documents are also easily accessible to the general public. This target audience led the author to expect the documents to be written in a standardised manner with the wording being meant to have a fairly neutral tone.

Thirdly, Schneider advises the researcher to prepare the material for coding. To do so the author downloaded the documents and saved them digitally. In addition, the documents were printed to be read and coded manually.

3.3.2 Coding categories

Once the material is prepared, Schneider (2013b) instructs the coding of the material in his fourth step. The material was coded using evolutionary coding. The author first compiled a list with key words relevant to the research question and the subject of climate change and forced migration. These keywords were divided into four general groups (see Box 2.1) to provide a better overview during the coding.
These four categories were developed for the following reasons: As this thesis seeks to investigate the impact of the framing of “climate refugees” on their access to human rights the author argues that a coding category that focuses on human rights is essential to analyse the nature of the UN’s discourse relating to the human rights of “climate refugees”.

Categories B and C were included in the coding process as the framing of climate change and necessary action in its context can impact how “climate refugees” are framed. If climate change is framed as a threat, “climate refugees” might be seen as victims requiring aid. This is the case, this thesis contends, particularly when the responsibility for climate change and climate action is seen to be that of either the international community as a whole or specifically that of industrialised states. On the other hand, “climate refugees” are more likely to be framed as actors if the question of responsibility for climate change and climate action remains unanswered or is seen as a shared responsibility. In this case, the thesis argues, the responsibility for “climate refugees” and climate action in the context of climate change related migration is seen to be that of “climate refugees’” countries of origin.

Lastly, category D was included as a means to investigate the perspective on refugees (including “climate refugees”) that is taken in the analysed documents. Category D is thus linked to category A as they are meant to provide insights into whether “climate refugees” are framed as actors or victims, as security threats or as people requiring humanitarian assistance.

Following this, the author read the printed copies of the selected material and highlighted the respective keywords using colour codes corresponding to the four general groups. The coding categories were then adapted to exclude irrelevant tags, include relevant tags and provide an overview over overlapping tags and discourse strands (Box 2.2).

Keywords related to the already included tags that the author had not thought of before, but which appeared frequently in the coded texts were added. These include “admit people affected by climate change” in category A; “resilience”, “minimise/mitigate climate change”,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A human rights</th>
<th>B climate change action</th>
<th>C climate change</th>
<th>D refugees &amp; security</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• human rights</td>
<td>• adaptation</td>
<td>• climate change</td>
<td>• border (security)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• humanitarian</td>
<td>• governance</td>
<td>• environment</td>
<td>• national security</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• non-refoulement</td>
<td>• management</td>
<td>• global warming</td>
<td>• migration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• climate action</td>
<td></td>
<td>• refugees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• regular migration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• irregular migration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Box 2.1
“(disaster) risk reduction” and “prevent/ avoid/ avert/ address climate change” in category B; “disaster” and extreme weather events” in category C; “displacement”, “internal displacement” and “human movement/ mobility” in category D. Furthermore, the author decided to separate discourse strands referring to refugees and those referring to “climate refugees” in specific as the distinction between the two overlapping terms allows for a better analysis of the differences in nature and framing of refugees and “climate refugees”. This led to the additional discourse strands in category A of “migration”, “displacement” and “fleeing” directly linked to climate change as well as “climate (change) refugees”.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>human rights &amp; “climate refugees”</td>
<td>climate change action</td>
<td>climate change</td>
<td>refugees &amp; security</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• human rights</td>
<td>• adaptation</td>
<td>• climate change</td>
<td>• border (security)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• humanitarian</td>
<td>• governance</td>
<td>• environment</td>
<td>• national security</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• non-refoulement/ admit people affected by climate change</td>
<td>• management</td>
<td>• global warming</td>
<td>• migration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• migration + climate change</td>
<td>• climate action</td>
<td>• disaster</td>
<td>• refugees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• displacement + climate change</td>
<td>• resilience</td>
<td>• (extreme) weather events</td>
<td>• regular migration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• internally displaced people + climate change</td>
<td>• minimise/ mitigate climate change</td>
<td></td>
<td>• irregular migration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• cross-border movement/ human mobility + climate change</td>
<td>• (disaster) risk reduction</td>
<td></td>
<td>• displacement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• fleeing climate change</td>
<td>• prevent/ avoid/ avert climate change</td>
<td></td>
<td>• fleeing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• climate refugees</td>
<td>• address climate change</td>
<td></td>
<td>• internal displacement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Box 2.2 |

After adapting the coding categories, the texts were re-read and coded as described above. The highlighted discourse strands were collected (step 6) as quotes in a list as well as in mind.
maps to examine overlapping discourse strands, connections between the analysed segments and codes and whether certain discourse strands were used exceptionally often or little (step 5).

3.3.3 Text analysis and interpretation of the findings

Apart from analysing the material based on the coding categories, Schneider’s (2013b) toolbox includes steps to identify cultural references (step 7) and linguistic features (step 8). These two steps have not been applied as rigorously as the other steps of Schneider’s toolbox as the UN’s documents are generally written in a rather standardised manner and do not offer much insight into cultural references in rhetorical features such as metaphors and idioms. The texts were however searched for features such as direct and indirect speech, modalities and evidentialities because, as this thesis argues, they can hint at understandings of reality that are (sought to be) (re)produced as truths.

Lastly, step 9 and 10 instruct the researcher to interpret the data and present the findings which will be done in the Analysis section of the thesis. The coded texts are analysed through a poststructuralist lens which the author argues to be useful to understand how the power structures in the given context are (re-)produced and shaped by discourse (Campbell & Bleiker 2016:207).

Regarding the interpretation and analysis of the findings, this thesis will use a poststructuralist approach because it takes into consideration not only material conditions but immaterial factors such as identity (Miller 1998:206) giving it an advantage over rationalist theories. The author argues that in the context of “climate refugees”, a poststructuralist CDA can offer insights into how understandings of climate change and refugees within the UN impact the framing of “climate refugees”. Consequently, conclusions can be drawn on how this framing affects policy and law-making concerning people who are forced to move across borders due to climate change.

From the standpoint of poststructuralism’s post-positivist epistemology, this thesis argues against the existence of cause-effect relationships but rather views relations and power structures as formed through human action serving to make certain policies seem natural and legitimate (Hansen 2017:160). Thus, it is possible to examine what calling a particular group of people “climate refugees” implies for our understanding of refugees, and global migration and climate governance, as well as actions and policies resulting from this understanding.
The discursive framing of “climate refugees” in a certain way, i.e. as victims, actors or security threat, shapes how they are perceived, which role they are assigned in international politics and law. It uses knowledge to produce truths which are perceived as normal and legitimate. The thesis contends that this discourse, while being an expression of power, impacts power relations either by creating, reproducing or changing them; by defining the agency, rights, obligations and treatment of “climate refugees”. Once these categories and power relations are established discursively, they are institutionalised by being translated into international law and policy and governance practices.

Reflecting critically on these processes can enable a potential emancipation from and resistance to existing power relations should they be found to be unjust or harmful (see 3.1). The author makes the argument that this might be the case in instances in which “climate refugees” are produced as bare life. That is, when they are denied access to human rights and political decision-making processes through an exclusionary framing that produces them as “expandable” and “socially dead” persons (Leban 2017:76, 77) and thus as bare life (see 2.2.2).

Keeping this in mind, the CDA will focus on the (re)presentation, or framing, of “climate refugees” – as security threats, victims in need of humanitarian action or other. The texts include general documents on the linkage between climate change and migration, as well as more context-specific documents such as a draft resolution for providing legal protection for “climate refugees” and a statement on the case of Ioane Teitiota. Thus, they provide both an insight into the overall perception and framing of “climate refugees”, as well as the beginning gradual institutionalisation of “climate refugees”.

**4. Analysis**

This thesis seeks to answer the question: How does the UN’s framing of “climate refugees” impact global humanitarian migration and refugee governance? It argues that the UN’s discourse centred around climate change related human movement the issue of “climate refugees” is downplayed, and “climate refugees” become bare life while their claims to legal protection are delegitimised. The following analysis is divided into five sub-sections. First, it will be examined how climate change itself is framed by the UN to provide context to the issue. Second, the UN’s manner of relating climate action to the issues of climate change in general and “climate refugees” in particular is discussed. Third, the framing of “climate refugees” is discussed in the context of discourse related to legal refugee status. Fourth, the UN’s framing of “climate refugees” in the previously discussed context and in connection to human rights is
examined. And lastly, the findings are summed up and debated in relation to each other. All quotes from and references to the examined UN documents within the analysis are connected to the four coding categories and related discourse strands.

4.1 Analysis of coding category C: The framing of climate change

In this thesis “climate refugees” are operationalised as people who have been forced to permanently or indefinitely leave their home moving across borders due to climate change events such as permanent flooding (due to sea level rise), perpetual draughts or drastically diminished access to resources. Therefore, the author argues, it is necessary to not only analyse how the UN frames “climate refugees” but also how climate change itself is framed since the perception of climate change impacts the extent to which measures concerning those most affected by it are taken. In the following section it is argued that the UN discourse frames climate change as a serious and increasingly challenging issue. However, the analysed documents focus on resilience as climate action that needs to be taken by those nations hit hardest, albeit with the aid of the international community. The thesis argues that this setting, while not making a distributive justice framework impossible, contributes to a discourse that produces “climate refugees” as a non-category and thereby excludes them from the polis and constructs them as bare life.

The author sees the UN’s recognition of climate change as a serious global issue that has implications on human lives and requires an international solution reflected in the above-average appearance of the tag climate change (category C) with 373 mentions. It is followed by the tag disaster (category C, 141 mentions), and human rights and climate change related displacement (category A) with 118 mentions each (see Box 3.1 which shows how often the tags belonging to category C were mentioned on the left, and on the right portrays the most often appearing keywords throughout the four categories). It is further underscored by the use of the following evidentiality as these are rare in the UN’s documents which are written in a largely neutral tone avoiding active language and first person perspectives: “Climate change is a current reality” (UNHCR 2017c:1 l2).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category C: climate change</th>
<th>All categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>climate change: 373x</td>
<td>climate change (C): 373x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>disaster: 141x</td>
<td>disaster (C): 141x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>environment: 58x</td>
<td>climate change + displacement (A): 118x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>global warming: 6x</td>
<td>human rights (A): 118x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>extreme weather (events): 4x</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Box 3.1

Connected to the tag are discourse strands that explicitly underscore the UN’s perspective on climate change as “the defining challenge of our times” (UNHCR 2017b; see also UN General Assembly 2019:2, l.50-51). However, apart from the Human Rights (HR) Council (2018:5, l.38-41) which highlights the inequality of climate change that nations “who have contributed so little to its causes […] find themselves at risk”, the other documents overwhelmingly do not consider this inequality. The thesis contends that climate change is thus framed as a challenge that is equal in effect to all international actors who have a shared responsibility to take climate action (see 4.2). The thesis argues that this framing makes a corrective justice approach unlikely but maintains the possibility of developing a distributive justice approach (see 2.1.4) of responding to the effects of climate change including “climate refugees”.

Another dimension is added through the question of recognising and highlighting the anthropogenic character (see 2.1.1) of climate change. The thesis argues that while human responsibility for the causes of climate change is not explicitly acknowledged and underscored, and thus an integral part of official discourse, responsibilities for climate action and “climate refugees” will remain located with national authorities rather than providing international protection.

While the anthropogenic nature of climate change is acknowledged by the HR Committee (2020:8, l.1-2), the remaining discourse refers to climate change as a “challenge” (UNHCR 2017b:4, l.1-2; see also UNHCR 2017a:1, l.1-3) and “global problem” (UN General Assembly 2019:2, l.50-51), a “threat multiplier” (UNHCR 2017b:4, l.21-23), a “driver of displacement” (UNHCR 2017b:14, l.1-3) or else “human mobility” (HR Council 2018:3, l.36), as contributing “to human rights harms” (HR Council 2018:4, l.39-40) and “posing unique threats” (HR Council 2018:6, l.14-15; see also HR Council 2018:5, l.38-39). The author argues that this discourse downplays climate change as a force of nature dependent on human action, or at least remains silent on the causes of climate change. In this context, it becomes
therefore more likely that “climate refugees” as their home nations’ responsibility are excluded from the international polis and are constructed as bare life (see 2.2.2).

4.2 Analysis of coding category B: Climate action in the “climate refugee” context

The thesis argues that the UN acknowledges that measures to protect “climate refugees” need to be taken using statements linking the coding tags of displacement and climate change (category A) through a language of urgency. For instance, the UN General Assembly (2019:1 ll.15-16) notes “with extreme alarm the growing numbers of persons displaced […] as a consequence of the impacts of climate change” and is “deeply disturbed by the alarmingly high numbers of displaced persons throughout the world as a consequence of the impacts of climate change” (UN General Assembly 2019:2 ll.1-2).

Within coding category B (climate action) the most used keyword with 57 mentions is adaptation (see Box 3.2) to climate change. Additionally, those keywords describing responses to the inevitable effects of climate change (adaptation, resilience) are mentioned about as often (74 times) as those keywords describing responses to (partly) avoidable climate change effects (mitigation and minimisation [47 mentions], disaster risk reduction, prevent, avoid, avert; 78 mentions in total). The thesis argues that this shows an emphasis on adapting to climate change and mitigating its effects as far as possible without specifying by whom these actions should be carried out. As already mentioned in section 4.1, the argument presented here is that this creates the impression of an equally shared burden and responsibility within the international community. The author contends that the effect of this discourse is probable to lead to the delegitimization of “climate refugees” and their production as bare life. This is due to responsibility for them being discursively and ultimately politically as well as legally located with their home countries and “climate refugees” are denied access to international protection frameworks.
There is the claim by Teitiota, a Kiribati citizen who had been rejected as “climate refugee” first by New Zealand courts and then by the UN, too, as well as one of the dissenting opinions included in the HR Committee’s (2020:13 ll.25-45) statement on the case, that the Kiribati government has not implemented vital adaptation measure. It is further alleged that attempts so far have “largely been ineffective” (HR Committee 2020:2 ll.14-18) rendering the government “powerless” in face of climate change (HR Committee 2020:3 ll.31-33).

The thesis argues that these claims highlight the power imbalance created by the above argued for effect that climate change effects and responsibility for climate action are largely framed as an equally distributed within the international community (see 2.1.4), albeit this not being done so continuously. It is not the aim of the thesis to investigate and judge whether Teitiota’s claim, or the UN’s stance that it is the Kiribati government’s responsibility to adapt to climate change and protect its citizens (HR Committee 2020:2 ll.14-18, 13 ll.25-45) is correct. What this thesis argues instead is that both discourses seek to establish certain truths. While Teitiota and his representatives seek to challenge the non-existence of “climate refugees” as a legal category, the UN reinforce the existing truth of its non-existence. They seek to normalise the perception that climate change adaptation, and thus “climate refugees”, is first and foremost a national responsibility which then is institutionalised in migration governance strategies and international law.

This thesis argues that these truths the UN is about to establish through its discourse negatively impact “climate refugees” access to legal protection and human rights. It contends that the notion that it is “climate refugees”’ country of origin’s responsibility to “protect against displacement” and to “address the underlying causes that force people to move by pursuing ambitious mitigation [...]” (HR Council 2018:11 ll.19-24; see also HR Council 2018:3 ll.6-7; UN General Assembly 2019:2 ll.45-47) contradicts the cross-border nature of climate change.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response to inevitable climate change</th>
<th>Response to avoidable climate change effects</th>
<th>Unspecific response to climate change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>adaptation: 57x</td>
<td>mitigation/minimisation: 47x</td>
<td>address climate change: 21x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>resilience: 17x</td>
<td>disaster risk reduction: 19x</td>
<td>climate action: 11x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>prevent/ avoid/ avert: 12x</td>
<td>preparedness: 8x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>management: 2x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>governance: 1x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74x</td>
<td>78x</td>
<td>43x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Box 3.2
Due to its trans-border characteristic, the author reasons, it is impossible for single nations to effectively protect their citizens against climate change by solely focusing on climate change causes within their own territory. It is furthermore argued that by placing “climate refugees” outside the jurisdiction of international law and protection frameworks, they are excluded as international citizens from the polis thus becoming bare life. Instead of remaining biopolitical subjects of their home country, “climate refugees” are subjected to the necropolitical (see 2.2.3) sovereignty of international decision-making bodies.

According to Gemenne (2015:71) a refusal of the term “climate refugee” simultaneously implies a depoliticization of climate change and forced climate-related human movement as one of its effects. In this sense, the thesis maintains that while a protection framework based on corrective justice appears unlikely to become reality, even for a distributive justice framework (see 2.1.4) discourses of acknowledgement of the imbalance between cause and effects of climate change are needed to improve legal protection for “climate refugees”. However, it is the thesis’ argument that at the moment the UN’s discourse links “climate refugees” access to human rights (category A) to equally divided international climate action, and effectively to climate action (category B) as national responsibility depoliticises the issue which constitutes an obstacle to the empowerment of “climate refugees” and the amelioration of their situation.

In addition to framing climate action as a largely national responsibility, some passages of the analysed documents frame human movement in the context of climate change as an adaptation strategy to climate change (see i.e. HR Council 2018:15 ll.28-29; HR Council 2018:5 ll.16-18). While the purpose of the thesis is neither to confirm or negate the truthfulness of this statement, it argues that the emphasis on – preferably national – planned relocation as adaptive strategy (HR Council 2018:15 ll.28-29) implies a voluntarism of forced climate migration and downplays the political importance of climate change and “climate refugees”.

This aspect of the UN’s discourse creates a contradiction between the legitimate – and required – voluntary resettlement as climate action and the delegitimised cross-border “flight from climate change” as the thesis argues that throughout the analysed documents no precise distinction between the different groups of people moving in relation to climate change is made (see 4.3). The thesis contends that therefore “climate refugees” are placed outside the polis and death-worlds (see 2.2.3) are created. The thesis reasons that these death-worlds are manifested through discourses such as that related to the case of Teitiota (Lyons 2020; HR Committee 2020). In this case, the UN argued for Kiribati’s responsibility and capacity to adapt to climate change and protect its citizens (see i.e. HR Committee 2020: 5 ll.12-18) and judged it unlikely
that he would “face serious harm” despite the evidentiality that “Kiribati undoubtedly faced challenges” (HR Committee 2020:5 ll.12-13). He is thus placed outside the jurisdiction of international migration and climate governance in a place of fear and suffering – as he claims – due to diminished habitable land and resources such as clean water and crops (HR Committee 2020 p.15 ll.45-46).

The thesis argues that the UN’s discourse does not only place Teitiota – who might or might not qualify as “climate refugee” – outside its jurisdiction but also those people who are currently and in the near future in a similar, potentially more extreme situation, and might have a stronger claim to qualify as “climate refugees” based on the conceptualisation used in this thesis (see 2.1.5). Thus, a practical legal and political non-existence of “climate refugees” is produced so that they find themselves in limbo between political subjects governed by national biopolitics and bare life subjected to international necropolitics and confined to death-worlds.

4.3 Analysis of coding category D: Refugee status of “Climate refugees”

In the following section the thesis argues that while the UN recognise climate change as a driver of human movement and connected human rights harms, the discourse in the analysed documents blurs the distinctions between voluntary and forced movement. It further contends that the framing of climate change as a contributing non-human factor to human mobility instead of an anthropogenic cause that while at times being linked to other human factors such as violent conflict, can be a creator of “refugees” itself. It is the argument of the thesis that through this discourse, “climate refugees” are produced as bare life without access to international legal and protection frameworks.

4.3.1 Framing “climate refugees”

As mentioned, the UN contend that “the 1951 Convention relating to the status of Refugees, together with the 1967 Protocol thereto, remains the foundation for international refugee protection” (UNHCR 2017a p.3, ll.18-20). Thus, refugees are legally defined as people who move across borders due to a “well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion”. This thesis argues that as anthropogenic climate change is currently not perceived as one of the factors identified in the Refugee Convention, “climate refugees” are currently not afforded the same means of protection as other refugees.
As already argued in section 4.2, the UN discourse on “climate refugees” is in part contradictory. Supporting this observation, the coding category D in connection to overlapping discourse strands of category A brought out the following findings: On the one hand, they recognise the challenges faced by “climate refugees” – similar to those faced by other migrants and refugees (HR Council 2018 p.6 ll.14-15) which “is clear [to contribute] to human rights harms and related human movement” [emphasis added] (UNHCR 2017b:4 ll.39-40). On the other hand, this thesis argues that discourse strands framing climate-related human movement as voluntary as well as broad, vague terms to refer to “climate refugees” delegitimise their claims to and exclude them from international protection schemes and produced as bare life.

As already argued, international protection is tied to “the inability of the country of origin to protect against serious harm” (UNHCR 2017a p.2 ll.31-32) and situations in which “an act or an omission of a State party has already adversely affected his or her enjoyment of such right, or that such effect is imminent” (HR Committee 2020 p.6, ll.13-15; see also: HR Council 2018 p.8, ll.5-12). In the first instance, however, it is the country of origin’s responsibility to “protect against displacement” and to “address the underlying causes that force people to move by pursuing ambitious mitigation […]” (HR Council 2018 p.11 ll.19-24; see also: HR Council 2018 p.3 ll.6-7; UN General Assembly 2019 p.2 ll.45-47).

In this context – drawing on overlaps of coding categories A (“climate refugees” and human rights), C (climate change) and D (refugees), the thesis argues that climate change is discursively constructed as a contributing factor (see i.e UNHCR 2017b7 ll.26-32) rather than a main driver of forced human movement. The argument of the thesis is that this is done by highlighting the complex relation between climate change (category C) and human mobility (category D) in discourse strands such as the following to a vague language to refer to “climate refugees”: “[t]he relationship between climate change and human mobility is complex” [emphasis added] (HR Council 2018:4 l.21) and “establishing clear causality between the adverse effects of climate change and human movement can be difficult.” [emphasis added] (HR Council 2018 p.4 ll.28-31).

The references to “climate refugees” are very vague and connected to the perceived complexity of the issue. The thesis maintains that it expresses itself in wording such as “[s]ome people who are displaced in the context of climate change and disaster may fall within the refugee definition” [emphasis added] (UNHCR 2017a:1 l.32-33; see also UNHCR 2017a:2 ll.15, 27-37; UNHCR 2017b:4 ll.22-32; UNHCR 2017c:4 ll.24-25; UN General Assembly 2019:1 l.29). The thesis argues that this alone does not account for the production of “climate refugees” as a legal and political non-category that is excluded from the polis. Instead, this is
done through “encourage[ing] use of the term ‘migration, displacement and planned relocation’ under the umbrella term ‘human mobility’” (UNHCR 2017c: ll.23-25). The author reasons that through the term “human mobility”, “climate refugees” are delegitimised and their existence is discursively negated as the term silences the forced, involuntary character of climate-related cross-border movement and instead implies in part a voluntary (see 4.3.2) connotation of indistinct population groups.

The thesis further argues that the above made interpretation is underscored through the preferred use of the terms (categories A and D) “displacement”, “migration” and “human movement” to the term “refugee” or else “fleeing”, particularly in relation to climate change (see Boxes 3.3 and 3.4; see also box 3.5 in section 4.4). The argument presented in this thesis is that – despite gradual acknowledgement of the relation between climate change and human movement – “climate refugees” are framed as practically non-existent and are thereby are produced as bare life that is excluded from the political and legal processes on the international sphere.

| displacement & displacement + climate change | 162 mentions |
| migration & migration + climate change | 135 mentions |
| human movement/ mobility & human movement/ mobility + climate change | 123 mentions |
| refugees/ fleeing & refugees/ fleeing + climate change | 113 mentions |

Box 3.3 illustrates how often tags linked to various categorisations of human movement included in coding category D combined with these categorisations in direct relation to climate change (coding category A) were referred to in the seven analysed documents. On the left, the key words used during the coding of the texts are listed. On the right, it is shown how often these words appeared in the text in total. Box 3.4 focuses solely on coding category D. It shows, on the left, how often human movement related key words were used – each on its own as well as in total. On the right, it portrays how often (border) security related key words were used on their own as well as all combined.
4.3.2 Voluntarism and “decisions to move”

The thesis contends that the framing of people moving in the context of climate change as (in part) voluntary contributes to the downplaying of the severity the impacts of climate change have on human beings and the resulting (forced) cross-border movement. Displaced people, migrants and refugees’ act of changing location (in the context of climate change) is at times referred to as “decision to move” (see i.e. HR Council 2018:4, ll.29; 9 ll.4-5). It is argued in this thesis that the use of the word “decision” in connection to people moving in the context of climate change implies a general choice of these people to move or stay where this might not always be the case.

The aspect of the UN’s discourse outlined in the previous paragraph suggests a certain amount of agency (see also HR Council 2018:13 l.48; HR Council 2018:13 ll.48-49; HR Council 2018:7 ll.21-23) over “climate refugees’” act of leaving home due to the effects of climate change by relating “climate refugees’” agency both to “addressing climate change” and “its impacts […] related to human mobility” (HR Council 2018 p.7 ll.22-23), as well as emphasising the possibility of “taking decisions freely to move” as part of climate action (HR Council 2018 p.13 ll.49-50). It thus negates contexts in which people are forced to flee because their homelands have become uninhabitable due to the effects of climate change or the living conditions have become too unstable and dangerous. As a further consequence, “climate refugees” are discursively constructed as a group of people which, while it might be vulnerable, is not in essential need of protection. The thesis argues that this perception of “climate refugees” are (re)produced as truths resulting in their discursive production as international biopolitical non-subjects, or else bare life confined to through these discourses produced death-worlds as an effect of the legal (law making) and political (policy making) institutionalisation of these truths.

The thesis moreover employed coding categories (D) to analyse in how far “climate refugees” were framed in terms of border security. It can be concluded that due to the hardly
existing use of terms related to (border) security and illegal migration (see Box 3.4 in section 4.3.1) “climate refugees” are discursively constructed as actors (see discussion above) or people in need of humanitarian aid (see 4.4) rather than as security threats. The hypothesis is put forth that this is linked to the discursive non-existence of “climate refugees” as refugees, but acknowledges that the exploration of this hypothesis would distract from the original research question: *How does the UN’s framing of “climate refugees” impact climate change related global humanitarian migration and refugee governance?*

### 4.4 Analysis of coding category A: “Climate refugees” and human rights

While the UN states that those who move (across borders) due to climate change “[…] should be protected” [emphasis added] (UN General Assembly 2019:2 ll.13-15; see also ll.37-38), the modality “should” in this statement implies in part a willingness to work towards protecting “climate refugees”, and in part an acknowledgement that “climate refugees” are not yet covered by international legal and political protection frameworks. However, the thesis argues that overall there is more discourse to be found on climate change and its role on human movement than the legal status and human rights related status of “climate refugees” (see i.e. 373 mentions of climate change in comparison to 118 mentions of human rights: Boxes 3.1 and 3.5).

The following table shows how often human rights/ humanitarian action related key words (left) and key words referring to climate change related human mobility (right) were used throughout the seven analysed documents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Human rights/ humanitarian</th>
<th>Climate change related human mobility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>human rights: 118x (3rd most used keyword in total)</td>
<td>displacement + climate change: 118x (3rd most used keyword in total)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>right to life: 29x</td>
<td>human movement/ mobility + climate change: 82x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>humanitarian: 20x</td>
<td>migration + climate change: 33x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>asylum/ admit people moving in climate change contexts/ non-refoulement: 13x</td>
<td>refugee/ fleeing + climate change: 19x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Box 3.5

When it comes to the framing of “climate refugees” – and generally people moving in the context of climate change – in terms of human rights the UN are – based on discourse strands linked to coding category A – largely focusing on those people’s vulnerability (see i.e. HR
This vulnerability is often linked to "human rights protection gaps in the context of migration and displacement of persons across international borders resulting from the sudden-onset and slow-onset adverse effects of climate change" leading to a demand for "necessary means of implementation of adaptation and mitigation plans of developing countries to bridge the protection gaps [...]" (HR Council 2018 p. 3, ll. 3-7).

The thesis argues that "climate refugees" are thus discursively produced as a group of people which is dependent on the protection, and thus the good will and humanitarian spirit, of others which stands in contradiction with the above argued for framing of this responsibility being located with national governments instead of international governance. Therefore, the thesis contends that, on the one hand the need of "climate refugees" for international legal protection is acknowledged (see i.e, HR Council 2018 p.6 ll.16 referring to those fleeing in the context of climate change being "unable to have access to safe, affordable and regular migration pathways"). Yet, on the other hand – given the arguments made above – "climate refugees" are constructed as a legal and political non-category and thus as bare life. The thesis further argues that in the context of this framing and the resulting legal and political position "climate refugees" find themselves in, they are dependent on foreign national as well as international necropolitical decision-making to let them live or die or else confine them to death-worlds.

4.5 Discussion of the findings

The analysis has investigated the question: How does the UN’s framing of “climate refugees” impact climate change related global humanitarian migration and refugee governance? It bases its findings on a CDA focused on the coding categories A ("climate refugees" and human rights”), B (climate action), C (climate change) and D (refugees and security) which include category-related keywords and discourse strands, as well as grammatical and linguistic features of the analysed documents. It argues that the UN’s discourse centred around climate change related human movement the issue of “climate refugees” is downplayed, and “climate refugees” become bare life while their claims to legal protection are delegitimised.

The analysis presents the argument that climate change is framed as a serious global issue with severe implications on human lives which is in part highlighted through the keyword “climate change” (coding category C) being by far the most used keyword throughout the analysed documents (see 4.1). However, the thesis continues to argue, climate change is to a large extent framed as a force of nature which is not necessarily related to specific human
actions. While the UN do not contradict the anthropogenic nature of climate change, the aspect is not highlighted and therefore remains an implicit feature.

The thesis argues that the above described discourse strengthens the UN’s discourse concerning climate action (coding category B, see 4.2). While it at times mentions the unequal share of contribution to climate change and experience of its effects, it largely frames climate action, as the analysis argues, as an equally shared responsibility locating the need for adaptation to climate change to protect potential “climate refugees” with their home nations. The thesis argues that this however fails to recognise the unequal distribution of cause and effect and climate change transcending borders resulting in a lack of international legal protection for “climate refugees”. As “climate refugees” are excluded from international protection regimes, they are produced as bare life that is subjected to international necropolitics as international institutions and legal frameworks govern forced climate-related movement through sovereign decisions over life and death (or else construction of and confinement to death-worlds).

Drawing on overlaps of coding categories A (“climate refugees” and human rights), C (climate change) and D (refugees), the thesis further argues that climate change is discursively constructed as a contributing factor rather than a main driver of forced human movement (see 4.3). Together with the employing of vague terms to refer to “climate refugees” – that is umbrella terms including every person moving in the context of climate change regardless of whether they chose to do so voluntarily or were forced to move, and regardless of whether they had a well-founded fear for their life and well-being – the thesis argues that a voluntarism to “climate refugees’” cross-border movement is implied. It is further argued, that while “climate refugees” under these vague umbrella terms are framed as vulnerable groups, their access to international protection frameworks is delegitimised as they are produced as a non-category and ultimately as bare life through their exclusion from the international polis.

This thesis does not seek to argue that no acknowledgement of people being forced to flee due to the effects of anthropogenic climate change and no will to protect “climate refugees” exists within the UN. After all, the UN do not categorically exclude the possibility of “pathways into the 1951 Refugee Convention” (HR Committee 2020 p.2, ll.23-27). It further acknowledges the complexity of the issue due to the interlinked nature of various factors including climate change that contribute to people being forced to or deciding to move internally or across borders, as well as due to difficulties to reconcile climate change as a driver of human movement with the Refugee Convention’s definition of “refugees”. However, it is the thesis’ argument that for the moment the UN’s discourse which links “climate refugees”
access to human rights (category A) to equally divided international climate action and climate action (category B) as national responsibility depoliticises the issue, and constitutes an obstacle to the empowerment of “climate refugees” and the amelioration of their situation.

The thesis argues that based on the findings presented in the analysis, “climate refugees” exist – for the time being – merely as an abstract and vague possibility of a category of people displaced in the context of climate change who are attempted to be included in and governed by frameworks of humanitarian protection by the UN. The category “climate refugees” remains non-existent and is marked by a discourse that delegitimizes and downplays the issue thus producing “climate refugees” as bare life, excluded from the international polis and its political and legal frameworks.

5. Conclusion

The thesis sought to investigate the research question How does the UN’s framing of “climate refugees” impact climate change related global humanitarian migration and refugee governance? Based on Schneider’s (2013b) toolbox a CDA was employed to analyse the issue from a poststructuralist perspective. The main argument of the thesis based on the analysis’ findings is that the issue of “climate refugees” is depoliticised and thereby their claim to access to international legal and political processes, and human rights is delegitimised and taken away constructing “climate refugees” as bare life.

As the method (section 3) was worked out, four coding categories where identified which focused on keywords related to “climate refugees” and human rights, climate change, climate action, and refugees and security and related keywords and discourse strands. The thesis contends that the UN’s discourse frames climate change as a global issue yet remains largely silent on human (political) responsibility and thus responsibility for climate action. The thesis argues that therefore the uneven distribution of cause and effects of climate change are reinforced and “climate refugees’’ claim to international protection is weakened. Through a vague terminology relating to “climate refugees”, the thesis argues, “climate refugees” are constructed as non-existent and thus ultimately as bare life.

This thesis acknowledges the complex circumstances connected to climate related human movement and does not argue that there is no willingness within the UN to ameliorate the situation of people forced to move in the context of climate change. Instead, the argument is that the current discourse reflected in the analysed documents which remains vague on the
distinctions between different groups of people moving in relation to climate change and
delegitimises those people’s claims to access to legal and political processes, and human rights.

The author contends that while the Refugee Convention including its definition of
“refugees” presents an important achievement to secure human rights for those persecuted and
forced into situations of increased vulnerability, yet was set up 69 years ago, not long after the
Second World War, in a context vastly different from the present situation. With the transition
into the era of the Anthropocene in which, as the UN recognises, one of the biggest challenges
is climate change (UNHCR 2017a p.1, ll.1-3) which has doubled the risk for people to be forced
to leave their homes due to environmental factors compared to just 40 years ago (Advisory
Group 2015 p.11.1, UN General Assembly 2019 ll.26-27), the Refugee Convention is to a large
extent unable to protect those forced to flee across borders due to the effects of climate change.

While the UN emphasise the possibility of “pathways into the 1951 Refugee Convention”
(HR Committee 2020:2 ll.23-27), the author argues that their current overall discourse relating
to the issue produces “climate refugees” merely as an abstract discursive category of people
displaced in the context of climate change. As the issue is downplayed and delegitimised
through the framing of “climate refugees” as displaced persons or even people migrating
voluntarily as an adaptive strategy, “climate refugees” remain a political and legal non-category
which excludes them as bare life from global migration governance and humanitarian
frameworks and thus from the obtaining of legal protection and rights.

As outlined in the methodology part of this thesis, CDA’s are at times argued to result in
biased and unreliable results due to its interpretivist characteristics. The author of this thesis
recognises that she “is part of the process whereby meaning is constructed” (Halperin & Heath
2017:357) which can influence the research results. However, structured and transparent
coding processes have been used and outlined to ensure reliability and repeatability.

The thesis has sought to contribute to the debate around “climate refugees” including
debates on policy and governance decisions and connected debates on the inclusion of “climate
refugees” as legal category by offering a perspective on the issue of how the UN’s framing of
those people conceptualised by this thesis as “climate refugees” impacts their position in
climate related global humanitarian management and governance. As such, especially since the
researcher is part of discursive processes, future research can use this thesis as data (Halperin
& Heath 2017:356), as well as expand on the subject.
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