

# **Resilience and race, or climate change and the uninsurable migrant: towards a topological racism<sup>1</sup>**

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**Abstract:** Migration is now often conceived as a legitimate adaptive response to climate change. Numerous critiques have been made of this so-called ‘migration-as-adaptation’ discourse, arguing that the discourse is consistent with the political rationality of neoliberalism. This paper argues that by neglecting to account for ‘race’, these critiques obscure the imbrications of race found in Michel Foucault’s original characterisation of biopower. One effect of this neglect is that the biopolitical critique of migration-as-adaptation distances the entire debate about climate change and migration from any meaningful consideration of its racial underpinnings. The paper offers a different perspective, arguing that within the migration-as-adaptation discourse a new racial vocabulary is beginning to take shape, one that distinguishes would-be on the basis of their adaptive and maladaptive capacities. This logic is based in insurantal reasoning in which the raced body and the uninsurable body are often made to overlap. The paper suggests that this new racial vocabulary might be understood as ‘topological’ as opposed to dialectical racism.

**Keywords:** race, resilience, migration, climate change, insurance

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## **Resilience and race, or climate change and the uninsurable migrant: towards an anthroporacial reading of ‘race’**

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*This future involves the formation of Pre-Black populations who are pre-known as risk failures*  
Katharyne Mitchell (2009: 244)

*So what becomes the surest guarantee of smooth entry (i.e. to flow without friction or resistance) is the capability to evidence compliance in advance of the proposed journey.*  
Brad Evans, *Liberal Terror* (2013, p.152)

### **Introduction**

Racisms persist by naturalising social hierarchies. But the ever-shifting imaginaries of ‘race’ and racisms become all the more elusive when, as Fredric Jamison (1991) once put it, “nature is gone for good.” Such is the condition of the Anthropocene. While the Anthropocene might designate yet another moment in the blurring of nature and the human, so, too, it inaugurates another episode in the historicity, politics and ethics of race, what David Theo Goldberg (2015) has coined ‘the anthroporacial.’ The anthroporacial is a particular postracial expression in which ‘race’ is made invisible while at the same time as it receives heightened political significance amidst the uncertainties brought about by the fusing of nature, culture and technology. In the condition of anthroporaciality ‘race’ becomes newly scripted in an effort “to fix these uncertainties by forcing categorization into and onto the unclassifiable.”

What better place for tracing the biopolitics of anthroporaciality than contemporary discourses around human migration and climate change.

The language used to describe the relationship between climate change and human migration has undergone something of sea change since the late 2000s. Whereas hitherto the so-called ‘climate refugee’ was figured in the vocabulary of fear, insecurity or violence, nowadays we find the same figure recharacterised in far more progressive language, especially in recent institutional descriptions (Laczko and Aghazarm 2009, UK Foresight 2011). This shift in vocabulary takes numerous forms. As Felli (2012) argues, the concept of the ‘climate refugee’ has been displaced in recent years by that of the ‘climate migrant’, reflecting what he identifies as a wider shift towards the neoliberalisation of climate change adaptation. It has also been observed that migration is now increasingly characterised as a legitimate adaptive response to climate change rather than as a failure to adapt (Baldwin 2014). And more and more this latter formulation defines adaptive migration in relation to the category of resilience (Bettini 2014, Methmann and Oels 2015).

In many respects, this shift in descriptive tone should be welcomed. For in a world-context in which migrants, asylum seekers and refugees regularly figure as exceptional, this unfolding ‘migration-as-adaptation’ thesis offers modest respite. Those championing the thesis regularly insist that migration stands to make a positive contribution to climate change adaptation and planetary well-being, a formulation in stark contrast to xenophobic narratives that depict migrants as usurpers and threats to public life. Yet as the migration-as-adaptation thesis gains purchase, it is imperative that we not lose sight of the multiple ways in which the thesis functions in relation to regimes of power. The thesis may provide an important corrective to the insalubrious discourse of threat, violence and victimhood. But this should not blind us to its own hidden violences. Indeed, many have already begun to expose how the thesis functions politically (Felli 2012, Felli and Castree 2012, Baldwin 2014, Baldwin 2014).

And as might be expected, there is already a mounting critique that rightly repositions the thesis as an instance of biopower (Bettini 2014, Methmann and Oels 2015), an effort to choreograph the movements of surplus life on a global scale in the interest of life and economy. Together this body of critical work serves as an important reminder that when migration is conceived as a legitimate adaptive response to climate change, it nevertheless expresses a form of power, one that seeks to organise the immanent flows of people specific to the Anthropocene.

But important though it is, without exception this body of critical work obscures the imbrications of race that we find in Michel Foucault's original characterisation of biopower (Stoler 1995, McWhorter 2004, Macey 2009, McWhorter 2009, Rasmussen 2011). In effect, this mounting biopolitical critique distances the entire debate about the Anthropocene, climate change and migration from any meaningful consideration of its racial underpinnings, and, in doing so, remains complicit in the very racial distancing that partly accounts for the thesis' broad appeal. Indeed, among the many reasons that the thesis is now so widely accepted in various institutional and academic settings is that it distances its proponents from more explicit forms of racial reasoning found for example in narratives of threat and victimhood (Baldwin 2013). In contrast, the migration-as-adaptation thesis appears more anodyne, less racial. Yet when we examine the migration-as-adaptation thesis as an instance of biopower *without* accounting for race, the political nuance that Foucault sought to capture with his original formulation of biopower is lost. It is true that across the trajectory of his thought, Foucault scarcely dealt with race (Young 1995), his treatment of it limited mainly to the *History of Sexuality volume 1* and the College de France lectures from 1974-75 (*Abnormal*) and 1975-1976 (*Society must be defended*). But even a cursory reading of biopower reveals the primacy Foucault placed on race and racism. When we forget this, we risk overlooking much of what was at stake in Foucault's concept. We also risk overlooking

what is truly at stake in regimes of population management specific to climate change.

In what follows, I therefore reconsider the interrelationships between adaptive migration and resilience in the context of climate change and the Anthropocene by attending more closely to the forgotten category of race. But more than simply a corrective of biopolitical readings of adaptive migration, this paper should also be read within the expanding critique of resilience (Cannon and Mueller-Mahn 2010, Walker and Cooper 2011, Reid and Evans 2014). For in much the same way that biopolitical analyses tend to overlook the racial dimensions of biopower (Saldanha 2013), biopolitical critiques of resilience have shown a similar tendency. Much has been made, for example, of the way that resilience as a “technology of governance” curtails politics (Reid and Evans 2014, p.90). But hardly a peep has been made of the way that resilience implies non-resilience, or of the fact that some people come to be understood as resilient whereas others do not. With a little help from Foucault, we can, however, recuperate the racialism implied in such anthroporacial claims.

When the migrant’s adaptive capacity is celebrated for its contribution to resilience, a series of questions immediately arises. What forms of migration are said to be adaptive and resilient? What qualifies as a non-resilient or maladaptive migrant? How is the distinction between adaptive and maladaptive migrants drawn? Who draws this distinction and why? Posing these questions in turn raises an even more troubling set of questions. What kinds of bodies are thought best suited to adapt to the coming disruption of climate change? Who is adaptable to climate change? And who is not? Who can live? And who by virtue of the threat they are said to pose to the living must die? These questions are all deeply troubling for at their core is a longstanding set of anxieties about the politics of human survival, life and death. If the migration-as-adaptation thesis celebrates the adaptive migrant as an agent of human survival in the context of climate change, what does it say about the maladaptive migrant? Does the maladaptive migrant undermine the conditions of human survival? What

kind of problem does the maladaptive migrant pose? For whom is it a problem? And how must it be dealt with? Must it be targeted and corrected to ensure that it complies with the model of adaptive, resilient migration? Or is it simply left to fend for itself, as Foucault's (2003) original formulation of biopower - 'making live and letting die' (p. 247) - would suggest?

My wager is that within the emerging logics of population management now being developed in the context of the Anthropocene, logics found increasingly in institutionalised discourses such as in the now widely cited UK Foresight Report on *Migration and Global Environmental Change* (discussed below in more detail), a unique form of racial differentiation is coming into view, one that racializes bodies on the basis of their adaptive/maladaptive or resilient/non-resilient *capacities*. But what happens when we pose the adaptive migrant as a racial subjectivity in relation to neoliberal political economy? As will become more evident later, we find that the measure of adaptive migration is indexed to capital and insurability. Insurability is an important category in this respect because it designates what a body is capable of, a body's potential. It is also a condition of low risk and, importantly, one that is purportedly read off the body in advance of the event. In this sense, insurability designates a body's future-conditional status. An insurable body is one with the demonstrable capacity to avoid or absorb harm in the event of its arrival. But equally important insurability and its correlate, *uninsurability*, are also both understood to be core racial features of the welfare state and its successor, the neoliberal security state (Duffield 2007, Goldberg 2009, Goldberg 2014). Insurability, in this sense I use it here, however, is not a racial trope that maps neatly onto other more conventional forms of racial differentiation like White/Black or various ethnoracial identities. Rather, insurability inaugurates a form of racial difference akin to the biopolitical racism that Michel Foucault (2003) identified through his analysis of the figure of abnormality (see also McWhorter 2009).

Let me clarify my use of the category ‘race.’ Whereas ‘race’ is a term most commonly associated with skin colour or ethnicity, and *racism* a form of oppression that discriminates against people of colour in multiple ways, my use of the terms race and racism are slightly different, borrowing from Foucault’s account of biopolitical racism (Foucault 1978, Foucault 2003, Foucault 2003). Foucault’s racial body is irreducible to people of colour, even while people of colour fall very much within its scope. Rather, Foucault’s racial body is foremost the *abnormal* body. This most certainly includes the way Black bodies are made visible through white “habits of perception” (Dyer 1997, p.12). But it also includes those understood to be queer, sexually deviant, mentally ill, disabled, aging and diseased. In this way, Foucault understood racism less as a system of oppression perpetrated by irrational, hate-filled white supremacists against people of colour so much as a form of power that seeks to purify and thus strengthen a population by removing from it those bodies deemed to be abnormal. In his words, this is a racism “whose function is not so much the prejudice or defense of one group against another as the detection of all those within a group who *may be* the carriers of a danger to it” (Foucault 2003, p.317; *my emphasis*). Nor is this a dialectical racism whose ontology is that of ‘us’ and ‘them’. It is rather a topological or immanent racism enacted on potentiality, enacted on those who Foucault tells us are *within* a population and deemed to threaten its survival. My argument hinges on the idea that the maladaptive, non-resilient migrant, a body defined by its apparent lack of adaptive capacity, is akin to the abnormal body, one whose abnormality is said to threaten the wider social order within which it acquires its status as such. In this sense, the maladaptive migrant is imagined to threaten population survival.

All of this will be further clarified as the argument develops. But for now, the claim I wish to advance here is that if insurability is an index of adaptability, and thus a key trait of a valued life under changing climatic conditions, then insurability must also be understood to

imply its opposite, uninsurability, where uninsurability signifies unvalued or devalued life. If a body cannot be insured, then it falls outside the definition of a valued life and thus becomes exposed to all manner of humiliations. Key to all of this, of course, is the market.

### **Migration as an adaptive response to climate change: the back story**

In resituating ‘human’ experience within geologic time, the Anthropocene concept is significant inasmuch as it calls attention to the provisional status of *Homo sapiens* (Yusoff 2013). The human as *Homo sapiens* is an artefact of its ancestral adaptive migration, a point that features centrally within various nineteenth century racial determinisms according to which deep time human survival was made possible by adaptive migration, giving rise to various ‘races’. As a modality of human survival, adaptive migration resurfaces in the context of the Anthropocene, most notably in the discourse of climate change.

Migration is a long-standing theme in climate change politics and policy. However, it only first appeared in international climate change law in a provision of the Cancun Adaptation Framework agreed by the UNFCCC in 2010 which calls for improved and enhanced understanding of the migration and displacement effects of climate change (Warner 2012). Migration is now subsumed within the UNFCCC Warsaw International Mechanism on Loss and Damage, a body set up to consider the insurance dimensions of climate change. Migration also features within the Nansen Principles which were developed in 2011 to guide the development of humanitarian policy in the context of climate change and forced migration (Norwegian Refugee Council 2011). And it has been central to the Nansen Initiative, an international consultative process launched in 2012 by the Governments of Norway and Switzerland aimed at developing a protection agenda for transboundary migrants forced to relocate due to natural disasters, including climate change (The Nansen Initiative 2012). Alongside these important recent policy developments, the migration-climate change nexus has also been the subject of a proliferation of popular media, academic research, policy



reports, NGO statements, political rhetoric, and artistic and cinematic representations, all attesting to sustained and current interest among myriad publics in the relationship between migration and climate change.

From at least the mid-1990s policy experts and scientists have regularly warned that migration in the context of climate change either threatens national and international security or else poses a pending humanitarian crisis (Myers and Kent 1995, Myers 2002, Kolmannskog 2008). In such accounts, the so-called ‘climate migrant’ is represented as either a threat to established forms of political order or as a victim of climate change. Until very recently this was the received view. It holds that the migration effects of environmental change or climate change would catalyse political violence. Such reasoning continues to organise conventional security discourse, finding clear expression, for example, in the US Pentagon report on the national security implications of climate change (Schwartz and Randall 2003) and in various UN reports from the mid-2000s. It also assumes that migration in the context of climate change ought to be construed as an issue of state sovereignty inasmuch as the state would be called upon to make a decision about which migrants are to enjoy state protections and which should be regarded as its adversaries. However, by the late 2000s, this kind of sovereign imaginary had become subject to increasing criticism, owing largely to its weak empirical foundation. Consequently, a growing coalition of scholars and policy experts began reframing the relationship between climate change and migration in a way that would challenge the conventional assumption that migration in the context of climate change will inevitably result in conflict or strife.

Developed largely from the perspective of human security and from socio-ecological systems theory, this new narrative holds that migration ought to be considered a legitimate adaptive response to climate change rather than a failure to adapt (McLeman and Smit 2006, Black, Adger et al. 2011, Black, Bennett et al. 2011, Gemenne 2011). Importantly within this

narrative, adaptive migration acquires its non-threatening status insofar as it can be said to cultivate desirable forms of resilience. Migration, according to the migration-as-adaptation thesis, will improve the capacity of individuals, households and communities to adapt to climate change-induced shocks - sea-level rise, cyclonic activity, drought, and so forth - inasmuch as it enables income diversification, thus making them less dependent on single income streams. For example, in a recent *Nature* article, the argument was made that remittance economies will contribute to societal resilience through the circulation of capital, knowledge and technology. A similar argument is also found in the recent Fifth Assessment Review of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2014), seen by many as the authoritative word on climate science, and increasingly social science: “This emerging literature shows that migration can be promoted to reduce risk successfully, not least through remittance flows between sending and destination areas” (p.771). As such, we can say that the migration-as-adaptation thesis is ostensibly a liberal risk management strategy in which economically productive forms of migration are said to be adaptive inasmuch as they contribute to the resilience of whatever system they happen to be embedded within.

In many ways, then, the migration-as-adaptation thesis is welcome respite from anti-immigrant discourses. It conceives of migration as a normal part of contemporary political economy to be marshalled for adaptive purposes rather than refused and, in this sense, it provides us a narrative we cannot do without. Yet, in spite of its promise, the thesis has come under recent criticism. Felli (2012), for example, argues that the thesis is ideologically consistent with neoliberal capitalism and thus foremost a mechanism for capital accumulation. So too, Felli and Castree (2012) reach a similar conclusion through their analysis of the *UK Foresight Report*. These are, of course, credible observations inasmuch as they draw important, much-needed connections between climate change, migration and neoliberal political economy. Common to both is the assumption that the thesis is an

undifferentiated and universal discourse driven by a narrow set of institutional interests and, consequently, interpret the migration-as-adaptation thesis as part of a wider project of imposing coercive market forces as a condition of climate change adaption. Bettini (2014) reaches similar conclusions about the thesis' relation to neoliberalism and, like others (Felli 2012, Methmann and Oels 2015), has suggested that the wider discourse on climate change and migration provides an example of post-political depoliticisation (2013).

### **Migration-as-adaptation: a form of liberal government**

But more than simply the reframing of migration to suit the needs to shifting labour markets under conditions of climate change, we should conceptualise the migration-as-adaptation thesis foremost as a form of liberal security. It offers a means of governing the crisis of human mobility in the context of climate change in a way that preserves the dignity of those who would migrate. It is, in this sense, a form of human security, as opposed to national security, inasmuch as it subordinates national interests to those of the individual. And unlike sovereign power, which characterises migrants in exceptional terms, the thesis refuses the assumption that migration is inherently problematic and thus something to be minimised. Instead it naturalises migration as an essential attribute of human life and economy and planetary well-being more generally. Here then the migration-as-adaptation thesis, like all liberalisms, and indeed like the universalism of climate change itself, is ordered by a geographical imaginary that is planetary in scope (Evans 2013, although see Hulme for an account of the multiplicity of climate change). This is a political imaginary that subordinates territorial sovereignty in order to bring about a peaceable, universal humanity. Moreover, and relatedly, it is also one that promotes managed migration precisely in order to annul the risk of a chaotic, disordered and violent migration, a point elaborated in more detail below.

We can further develop our understanding of the migration-as-adaptation thesis as a form of liberal security by reading both its unique epistemology and ontology alongside

neoliberal political reasoning. Epistemologically, proponents of the thesis universally agree that it is impossible to isolate environmental change from all the other variables (i.e., war, economic opportunity, political inequality) that account for why people migrate. The result is that the thesis widely refuses the idea that climate change *causes* migration and argues, in turn, that identifying someone in the present as a climate change-induced migrant is impossible. This is almost without exception. Take, for example, the IPCC (2014): “the dynamics of the interaction of mobility with climate change are multifaceted and direct causation is difficult to establish.” (p.767) Or Jane McAdam (2012), a leading legal scholar on climate change, mobility and human rights law: “the complexity of migration decisions and the interconnectedness of environmental, economic, social and political factors make it virtually impossible to provide an accurate estimate of people who move ‘because of’ climate change” (p.5) In both, causality is refused, or at least downplayed, although we should note that both appear optimistic that causality is still possible to establish. The IPCC tells us that causality is ‘difficult to establish’, and McAdam claims it to be ‘virtually impossible’, phrasings that imply direct causality is possible but never straightforward. But this nuance notwithstanding, the consensus view amongst researchers is that causality remains elusive, which means that the climate change migrant (or climate refugee) is defined at least in part by its undecidability. There is, in this sense, no amount of information that can be used to identify someone as a climate change migrant. Thus, the migration-as-adaptation thesis is at odds with the idea that so called climate migrants or climate refugees can be governed, since it is impossible to govern that which cannot be known. The migration-as-adaptation thesis is not, however, inherently sceptical of any relation between climate change and migration. On the contrary, it is founded upon the very plausible assumption that climate change will have some effect on human migration *in the future*. We should, therefore, understand the

migration-as-adaptation thesis normatively as a principle designed to govern an anticipated array of *future* migrations.

Consider too its ontological form. The thesis does not rely upon binary reasoning - us/them, inside/outside - a form of decisionism common to sovereign power. It embraces instead a kind of topological reasoning. It says that migration is complex, non-linear and emergent, and that legitimate migration is adaptive inasmuch as it contributes to the resilience of whatever complex system it happens to be a part. Two important points follow from this topological reasoning. The first is geographical: the migration-as-adaptation thesis grants ontological primacy to the complex, topological system as its basic unit of evaluation as opposed to the state. Here, it presupposes that migration ought to be conceived not as a problem of state sovereignty, or state management, but foremost as an attribute of a complex adaptive system. Again, the state here is subordinated to the complex adaptive system. The second point is behavioural: like all complex systems, the thesis presupposes that migration in the context of climate change is fundamentally unpredictable. So in this sense, migration in the context of climate change can never be known in advance. It can only ever be known as a possibility, a phenomenon which *may* occur. Nor can the relationship between migration and climate change be defined by any set of measurable properties i.e., numbers, pathways, drivers, but only by its plasticity: migration will occur in myriad forms; all that is certain is that its morphology will change.

The anticipatory and topological logic of the migration-as-adaptation thesis bears a striking resemblance to some of the ideas foundational to neoliberal political economy. For example, a parallel can be drawn with the economic reasoning of Friedrich von Hayek, one of the principle architects of neoliberal economy theory (Walker and Cooper 2011). As Jeremy Walker and Melinda Cooper (2011) explain, Hayek flatly rejected the Keynesian presumption that economic systems tend towards equilibrium. Hayek, instead, held the opposing view

which was that economic systems were completely unamenable to predictive reasoning, which explains his rejection of State-led economic policy. If the Keynesian State sought to optimise supply and demand, minimise unemployment, or achieve virtuous growth through directly intervening in markets, Hayek refused this reasoning on the grounds that no amount of knowledge would enable the State to make the correct choices about how and where to intervene. The assumption that the state could possess this knowledge was, for Hayek, Keynesianism's fatal flaw. Markets were just too complex, too erratic in their behaviour to be left to centralised decision making. Thus for Hayek economic government was best left to the spontaneous, distributed decision making of the market, a claim tantamount to the forfeiture of state decisionism.

A similar rejection of state decisionism is also found in the migration-as-adaptation thesis. The thesis holds that migration is a complex relation, irreducible to climate change or any other observable variable. It says that the relationship between climate change and migration is fundamentally undecidable. In this sense the migration-as-adaptation thesis, not unlike Hayek's economic theory, appears to reject a role for the state in deciding who is a climate migrant and who is not. Indeed, as was mentioned above, the point is made repeatedly throughout the thesis that it is impossible to identify someone as a climate change migrant. So even if the state were in a position to make a decision, it would not be able to because there is simply no decision to make. The figure it might seek to name is ultimately undecidable. And yet because the relation between migration and climate change is understood as a pending problem (unless properly managed, it threatens security, humanitarian crises, etc...) a decision needs to be made; bodies need to be managed in order to avoid calamity. So, rather than deciding who is or is not a climate change migrant (an unanswerable question), the migration-as-adaptation thesis demands that a decision be made on the basis of someone's *predisposition* for migration. More specifically, a decision must be

made as to whether an individual or household is *likely* to migrate as an adaptive strategy or not. In other words, a decision must be made on the basis of one's exposure to risk, a risk that in turn would be managed through some sort of adaptive migration. So in effect what the thesis asks us to do is jettison the category 'climate migrant' in favour of the category 'adaptable migrant'. Doing so, bypasses the epistemological uncertainty surrounding the category 'climate migrant' (an undecidable), and instead reorients the entire discussion about climate change and migration away from the decisionist question and away, not inconsequentially, from the question of political sovereignty. The question is no longer: Who is a climate change migrant? How do we define this figure? How can it be identified and controlled? These are all unanswerable questions. In the migration-as-adaptation thesis, the urgent question becomes: Who and what is an adaptable migrant? How do people and households use migration to adapt to environmental change? How can adaptable migration be harnessed to the betterment of the world? And conversely, what is maladaptive migration? And how might it be contained?

### **Climate change, migration and insurability**

Giovanni Bettini (2014) is notable for using biopolitical analysis to come to terms with the migration-as-adaptation thesis. His argument is that the migration-as-adaptation thesis functions as a form of biopolitical rule, one that promotes managed migration as a form of beneficial development practice (see also Duffield and Evans). As a form of biopolitical rule, it differentiates 'good' and 'bad' forms of migration and goes about promoting the good and policing the bad. For Bettini, adaptive or resilient migrants are said to acquire their designation as 'good' forms of circulation inasmuch they are able to access international labour markets and accommodate themselves to a kind mobile entrepreneurialism. But as Bettini also points out, one's capacity to access international labour markets is not the sole criterion for evaluating adaptive migration. So, too, insurability is another such criterion. For

example, the Asian Development Bank (2012) has made the case that catastrophe risk finance, such as weather derivatives and catastrophe bonds, offer promising means to fund liabilities associated with climate-induced migration. As the ADB puts it, “insurance pricing can act as an incentive for people to migrate to safer areas before disaster strikes. Insurance can provide resources needed to migrate to a new home after a dwelling is destroyed or otherwise rendered uninhabitable by a disaster.” (ADB 2012 as quoted in Bettini 2014).

Here we find insurantal reasoning at the heart of the migration-as-adaptation thesis. Although the ADB report is vague about how insurance might apply here, we can speculate that it might take two distinct forms: a state-level catastrophe insurance that funds the contingent liabilities of the state (e.g., policing, humanitarian assistance and so forth), not unlike that used in the Caribbean (Grove 2012), and/or a micro-level insurance that potential migrants might use to meet mobility costs or access a temporary residence. A practical example of the latter could be crop insurance, a form of parametric insurance that pays out when climatic conditions exceed the parameters specified in the insurance contract. (For more on the geographies of parametric insurance see Grove 2012, Johnson 2012, Johnson 2014, Grove 2015) For Bettini (2014), all of this reveals that “markets and capital are meant to [steer] the subject envisioned in the register [of migration-as-adaptation] not only through labour but also via the direct financialization of the risks the concerned are exposed to” (p.190). Here, the migration-as-adaptation thesis provides the armature by which the risk of displacement, mobility or migration can be financialised. Or in slightly different terms, the ADB report reveals a rather unlikely logic at the heart of the migration-as-adaptation thesis: insurability as the index of adaptive migration. Later we will see how insurability is also indexed to race.

But before turning to that argument, what kind of logic is at stake when insurability is indexed to adaptive migration? Perhaps, not surprisingly, it echoes the wider reasoning of



neoliberalism. Michael Dillon (2008) argues that neoliberalism is a form of political rule that exposes populations to contingency. Remove the welfare state and people become subject to fluctuating markets. Under such circumstances, Dillon argues, risk becomes an important political technology inasmuch as it allows people to quantify their exposure to contingency. “Risk,” as he puts it, “is simply the commodification of exposure to contingency calculated through the generalized measure of probability.” (2008p.320) Enter insurance. Insurance is here promoted as among the many market devices by which neoliberal subjects are able to manage their exposure to contingency. With appropriate insurance, people are equipped to live through whatever disruptions they might encounter in living out their daily lives. Whereas the welfare state once provided a basic allowance to assist those unable to fund their own liabilities (e.g., unemployment insurance), neoliberal reason is such that people are expected to fund these liabilities themselves. Thus, for example, neoliberalism encourages people to meet their own unemployment liabilities, either through the purchase of private insurance or through savings for those who can afford it, or else by accessing one’s wider social networks e.g., extended family, or religious or charitable organisations, for those who cannot.

When insurantal reasoning is applied to adaptive migration, what becomes clear is that adaptive migration is to be understood as a risk management practice, albeit not one available to just anyone. This is a risk management technique available to those with access to labour markets or, more abstractly to those with sufficient ‘capital’ to acquire insurance to offset the costs of migration or displacement. But, and this is crucial, where insurability becomes the measure of adaptive migration we need to ask how this measure is made and by whom. And, of course, the answer here is that insurance providers become the arbiters of adaptive migration. So whereas the ‘climate change migrant’ is an undecidable figure, impossible to define and thus not an identity at all, the adaptive migrant comes to be

understood on the basis of his/her risk profile. This is the figure of potential. The adaptive migrant is therefore not an identity so much as a figure conceived in relation to contingency, a figure whose insurability is a measure of adaptive capacity, a capacity to live through and with chance. Dillon sums up this reasoning rather nicely: “Such underwriting security does not differentiate inside from outside in a discursively organized play of friend/enemy or self/other. It therefore does not immediately inscribe a social or political identity – populations and risk pools do not constitute a people in the usual political and cultural uses of that expression. Its domain of production is not that of identity but contingency.”

Mark Duffield (2007) gives an account of the way in which the non-insured can be understood to designate race. Glossing much of his account, Duffield is centrally concerned to show the recursive relation between development and security as a problem of liberal government, where development creates the conditions of its own insecurity through the production of surplus life - the poor, the dispossessed, all devalued lives deemed unnecessary for development itself. Here he distinguishes the global population, or species-life, into those considered to be insurable and those not, the uninsurable. His account trades broadly on a now largely outmoded geographical division between the insured North and non-insured South (if in fact such a division was ever tenable). Here the North designates the advanced liberal democracies of the North Atlantic, but, also, paradoxically, Australia and New Zealand that embraced the model of social insurance in the post-war period that came to be called the welfare state. This is a form of sovereign power exercised by the state in which citizens were to enjoy the insurance protections afforded by the welfare state while those excluded from citizenship (the internally dispossessed, the externalised other) were not. By contrast, the so-called ‘underdeveloped’ South, much of which remained subject to colonial rule by Europe, fell under a regime of development that largely sought to contain colonised, and soon-to-be decolonised, populations by encouraging practices of self-reliance (Duffield

2009:191). For Duffield (2009), the main challenge faced by insured populations was to safeguard them from the ‘spontaneous circulation of non-insured global surplus life’ (p.191). This challenge in turn became more acute for European liberal democracies during the period of decolonisation when more and more formerly decolonised subjects sought the social insurance protections of Northern welfare states. What emerged during this period across Europe and the West was a form of state racism in which those deemed unfit for life in the West were restricted access to insured life on the grounds of their purported difference.<sup>2</sup>

But whereas Duffield’s account of state racism adheres to a model of sovereign power (i.e., ‘racial sovereignty’ (Giroux in Goldberg 2014)) in which the state is authorised to distinguish between insurable and uninsurable bodies, the racism embodied in the migration-as-adaptation thesis is biopolitical. In the former, insurability is predicated on an us/them model of identity in which difference is the result of state decisionism. In the latter, by contract, insurability is predicated not on identity but contingency, on the basis of one’s risk profile or more specifically on the basis of one’s capacity to manage risk through adaptive migration. Inside/outside, us/them, and, thus, racial sovereignty, are of secondary importance to the biopolitical racism present in the migration-as-adaptation thesis. For the population to which the thesis applies is not ethnoracial but planetary in scope, a population irreducible to sovereignty, territorial integrity, or state citizenship. These conventional categories of political-juridical power are of continued relevance to the thesis inasmuch as adaptive migration might in some cases be transboundary; adaptive migration is after all a form of migration managed by the state or its appointed agents. But adaptive migration is foremost envisaged as a risk management strategy enabled either by direct forms of insurance, migration insurance or crop insurance, for example, or an indirect form of insurance in which households insure against future risk by exporting their labour in exchange for remittance

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<sup>2</sup> This pitted history elides the important development of the new racism or cultural racism in Europe that coincided with decolonisation.

income. Either way, adaptive migration is looked upon favourably as an emergent process that should be actively promoted and intervened upon. Conversely, uninsurability becomes a marker of maladaptive or non-resilient migration. Those who are said to be at risk of maladaptive migration - migrants unable to access remittance economies and who instead end up migrating to the rapidly expanding informal settlements found all across the megacities of the developing South – are understood to be risk failures. They are unable to manage the risks of climate change (and other forms of precariousness) and so end up putting themselves at greater risk by migrating to places where the risk of death, disease and extremism are greatest. These are the racial bodies of the migration-as-adaption thesis, bodies designated as risk failures because unable to access adaptive migration.

We can trace this reasoning in a major research initiative undertaken by UK Foresight on *Migration and Global Environmental Change* (2011; hereafter the *Foresight Report*), one of the most comprehensive accounts of migration and environmental change. One of the *Foresight Report's* main findings is that “many poor households engage in migration of some family members as part of an income diversification and insurance strategy, with remittances flowing in response to shocks.” (2011: 21) The claim is that “migration is often the most effective approach to enhancing livelihoods and thus securing resilience” (p.21), a claim based on “much evidence that migration is a key tool to build resilience, either through enhanced livelihoods, or as a type of insurance strategy, and putting people in better positions to withstand environmental change” (p.174-175). In this way, migration is said to be adaptive inasmuch as it insures households and individuals against contingency. Indeed, much of the report furnishes the policy debate on migration and global environmental change with a cost-benefit framework that prioritises policies that promote adaptive migration, including circular migration and incentivising migration from and to certain places, as a means for building resilience. These are policies aimed “to ensure that migration occurs in a way that *maximises*

*the benefits* to the individual and to both source and destination communities” (p.10; my emphasis). But equally the report acknowledges that while some can access adaptive migration, this mechanism is unavailable to all equally. Consequently, some end up trapped in, or else migrating into, conditions of vulnerability without means of escape. These so-called ‘trapped populations’ (p.14) fall outside the scope of adaptive migration and thus pose a challenge to state authorities that cannot be resolved through labour market policy. (For more on trapped populations see Adams 2015).

We stand to better appreciate how resilience and ‘race’ come together in this narrative by reading it through Michel Foucault’s (1978, 2003) account of biopower. Others have of course used biopower to interpret the migration-as-adaptation thesis (Bettini 2014, Reid 2014) (Methmann and Oels), so I am far from alone here. As mentioned earlier, Bettini (2014), for example, has emphasised that biopolitical security is partly achieved through sorting migrant populations into ‘good’ and ‘bad’ forms of circulation (see also Duffield 2007). And Methmann and Oels (2015) have rightly argued that the migration-as-adaptation thesis functions as a form of biopolitical security in which resilience is used to empower would-be adaptive migrants. And yet while both arguments reflect the primacy Foucault (2003) placed on population as biopower’s “field of application,” both, however, neglect to account for the racism that Foucault found present in biopower. Instead, both simply conclude that the migration-as-adaptation thesis is merely a depoliticising form of government. However, by restricting their critiques to a concern for depoliticisation, these authors overlook what I consider to be the more important, and far more worrying, aspect of the thesis – its racial logic.

Foucault is not normally considered a theorist of race and racism but of power. But his 1975-76 lectures at the College de France, now published as *Society must be defended* (SMD) contain important statements on race that are pertinent for conceptualising the

distinction between the adaptive and maladaptive migrant in racial terms. In *SMD*, Foucault asks: “What is racism? It is primarily a way of introducing a break in the domain of life that is under power’s control: the break between what must live and what must die” (p.254). Foucault’s account of racism is counter-intuitive to mainstream debates about race and racism (Goldberg 2014; McWhorter 2009). Whereas racism tends to be understood as a form of oppression with origins in nineteenth century scientific racism, Foucault says that racism is a form of power that distinguishes bodies as a prerogative of power itself, where power is understood not in repressive terms, but as generative of life. So when Foucault says of racism that “we are dealing with a mechanism that allows biopower to work”, he is referring to the break in life which makes biopower generative of life. What Foucault describes as ‘race war’ is therefore not simply one group of people warring against another. More so it describes efforts to purify a population as a condition of its survival; in order to survive, a population must ensure its longevity by promoting life and the living while at the same time eliminating anything that might be said to threaten its survival.

We can read the distinction between adaptive and maladaptive migration as an instance of biopower’s founding racism. If migration is a potentially positive adaptive response to climate change then according to the migration-as-adaptation thesis, this is so inasmuch as adaptive migration enables collective survival. As a model of insurance or risk management, adaptive migration is of course said to contribute to the resilience of whatever system it is implicated in, whether the household, community, national economy, production system and, ultimately, planetary life and economy. In this way we can think of the migration-as-adaptation thesis as a life-giving technology, one that promotes, manages and regularises global migration as a collective good. When climatic catastrophe is said to threaten life and economy through the chaos of unmanaged migration and displacement, adaptive migration promises the continuity of human reproduction, longevity and survival by

making human life resilient, a status conferred not through state decisionism, but as a measure of one's labour market value. But we also know that adaptive migration is a measure of adaptive capacity, a measure of wealth, social networks, class, ethnicity, agility, and access to labour markets, and so a measure confined to relatively small numbers of people. Instead, the vast majority of the world's migrants fall outside the parameters of adaptive migration and instead by implication fall into the category of maladaptive migration: rural-to-urban migrants crowding the informal settlements found throughout the world, so-called trapped populations, people seeking refuge in high-wage economies, slaves. All of these bodies, while resilient in their own right, capable of extraordinary feats of living in the face of death, disease, eviction, designate non-resilient migration, uninsurable bodies and thus bodies said to threaten planetary well-being. Importantly this global surplus population is said to threaten the resilient systems enabled by adaptive migrants.

### **Conclusion: towards an anthroporacial account of racism**

With the migration-as-adaptation thesis we find a new form of anthroporacial reasoning coming into view in the context of the Anthropocene. This is a form of racial reasoning in which adaptive migration is indexed to insurability and in which the maladaptive migrant is said to be uninsurable, designated 'racially' because it is said to threaten adaptive human survival. But whereas 'race' is ordinarily conceived as a binary form of difference forged in some kind of dialectical encounter between self and Other, identities that come into being in the moment of encounter, this anthroporacial account of race is here conceived as topological. That is, race is conceived as immanent to a population, in this case the global population. But additionally, this is not a fully actualised difference immanent to a population, not a form of internally excluded difference like, for example, the indigenous subject of settler colonial societies. It is rather a form of difference based not what a person is, but what that person might become should a specific set of conditions materialise. It is

rather, a form of anticipatory difference in which the rendering of difference is based on the body's potential, or its anticipated capacity to exceed normative expectations concerning adaptive migration. In this way, this is form of difference akin to maladaptation in which maladaptive migration is read off the body in advance of the journey. This is a difference in which the other is not one said to occupy a different position in time and place. It is rather a difference of intensity rather than of kind.

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