Imaginary Wor(l)ds: A Creative Methodology to Explore Future Imaginaries of Climate Change-Induced (Im)mobilities[1]

Imaginary wor(l)ds: una metodología creativa para explorar imaginarios futuros de (in)movilidades inducidas por el cambiamento climático

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Abstract

In recent decades, migration and climate change have emerged as two of the most urgent moral and political challenges confronting the twenty-first century. Predominantly portrayed in mainstream media and political discourse within the Global North as exceptional and extra-ordinary phenomena, the intersection of migration and climate change is increasingly framed through securitization narratives. This article critically examines the social imaginaries surrounding climate change-induced (im)mobilities, with particular attention to the extent to which these narratives are articulated in terms of justice.

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1 Data Access Statement: This study's data is deposited in ZENODO and can be retrieved from: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15861928.
Full citation: Giacomelli, E. (2025). Fictional stories and the "Imaginary wor(l)ds" method [Data set]. Zenodo. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15861928

Empirically, the study draws on a corpus of 78 fictional stories produced by academics, media professionals, and activists, collected via the "Imaginary wor(l)ds" method during participatory seminars. This creative, practice-led methodology invited participants to collaboratively imagine and narrate future scenarios of climate (im)mobilities, aiming to bridge academic research with public engagement and foster new imaginaries through collective storytelling. The approach is grounded in the recognition that creative writing can disrupt dominant knowledge systems and open discursive space for alternative interpretations. The aim was to reflect on whether an effective collaboration between science, media, and activism might generate counter-narratives for climate (im)mobilities.

The stories were analyzed using a typology of frames—victims, security threats, adaptive agents, and political subjects—to identify recurring patterns and the extent to which justice-oriented perspectives emerge. By integrating insights from mobility justice and climate justice frameworks, the study opens a path on how creative, participatory methodologies can reframe public and policy discourses on climate migration, foregrounding justice-oriented approaches over securitized paradigms. The article concludes by underscoring the importance of decolonial and intersectional perspectives in shaping future imaginaries and informing equitable policy responses to global climate (im)mobilities.

En las últimas décadas, la migración y el cambio climático se han consolidado como dos de los desafíos morales y políticos más apremiantes del siglo XXI. Frecuentemente representados en los medios de comunicación y en el discurso político del Norte Global como fenómenos excepcionales y extraordinarios, su intersección es enmarcada, cada vez más, en narrativas de securitización. Este artículo ofrece un examen crítico de los imaginarios sociales que rodean las (in)movilidades inducidas por el cambio climático, con especial atención al modo en que dichas narrativas se articulan desde una perspectiva de justicia.

Desde un enfoque empírico, el estudio se basa en un corpus de 78 relatos ficticios elaborados por académicos, profesionales de los medios y activistas, recopilados mediante el método "Imaginary wor(l)ds" en el contexto de seminarios participativos. Esta metodología creativa y orientada a la práctica invitó a los participantes a imaginar y narrar de forma colaborativa futuros escenarios de (in)movilidad climática, con el objetivo de tender puentes entre la investigación académica y la participación pública, al tiempo que fomentaba nuevos imaginarios a través de la narración colectiva. El enfoque parte del reconocimiento de que la escritura creativa posee la capacidad de subvertir los sistemas de conocimiento dominantes y abrir espacios discursivos para interpretaciones alternativas.

El propósito fue reflexionar sobre el potencial de una colaboración efectiva entre la ciencia, los medios de comunicación y el activismo para generar contranarrativas en torno a las (in)movilidades climáticas. Los relatos fueron analizados mediante una tipología de marcos —víctimas, amenazas a la seguridad, agentes adaptativos y sujetos políticos— con el fin de identificar patrones recurrentes y evaluar el grado en que emergen perspectivas orientadas hacia la justicia.

Al integrar marcos teóricos de justicia de la movilidad y justicia climática, el estudio traza un camino sobre cómo las metodologías creativas y participativas pueden contribuir a reconfigurar los discursos públicos y políticos sobre la migración climática, priorizando enfoques centrados en la justicia por encima de los paradigmas securitarios. El artículo concluye destacando la relevancia de las perspectivas decoloniales e interseccionales como claves para modelar los imagina-

rios futuros y fundamentar respuestas políticas equitativas frente a las (in)movilidades climáticas globales.

1. Introduction

In recent decades, the domains of climate justice and mobility justice have arisen as essential frameworks for comprehending and tackling the interconnected crises of environmental degradation, social inequality, and the politics of movement. Climate justice, emerging from legal, activist, and academic roots, critiques the systemic inequalities driving climate change —corporate power, fossil fuel dependency, and colonial capitalism. Over time, the concept has been expanded to include multiple dimensions—distributive, procedural, recognitional, restorative, and intergenerational justice (Sultana, 2022)—and has become central to both academic debates and popular mobilizations.

In parallel, mobility justice examines the rights and capacities of individuals to move or to stay rooted within frameworks dictated by power and privilege. Developed by sociologist Mimi Sheller (2018), it addresses how power and inequality shape the governance and control of movement across multiple scales—from the body and city to the nation and planet. In Sheller's analysis, mobility justice involves multi-scalar entanglements: bodies with unequal mobility (sexed, raced, gendered, classed, abled, aged, etc.); transport systems (automobility, cycling, transit, micromobility, aeromobility); urban infrastructures. (streets, energy, communication, water, food system); transnational mobility (border regimes, migration, asylum, deportation); and planetary mobility (pollution, waste, CO_2, emissions, climate loss & damage). Emerging from both academic research and activist efforts, mobility justice critiques uneven access to mobility and calls for equitable freedom of movement for all, and especially for marginalized communities affected by systemic violence and exclusion.

Yet within mainstream discourse, the language of justice has also been systematically co-opted, diluted, or depoliticized (Sheller, 2023; Sultana, 2024). This is especially evident in how media, political rhetoric, and public policy portray climate change and migration. The prevailing narratives in public discourse and policy frequently strip these issues of their political dimensions, presenting climate-induced migration merely as a technical or humanitarian concern, thereby masking the underlying structural causes that are entrenched in global inequalities and persistent colonial legacies (Sultana, 2024).

The public imagination is filled with apocalyptic images—starving polar bears, floods, and warnings of mass migration framed as "invasion" by so-called climate refugees. These narratives obscure the historical responsibilities tied to colonialism, extractive capitalism, and the structural violence of border regimes, which disproportionately impact the Global South. Andrew Baldwin (2022) argues that dominant discourse around climate migration is shaped by

racialized affect—what he terms "white affect"—rooted in racial neoliberalism and biopolitical control. Similarly, "Panicocene" narratives (Giacomelli, 2023; Giacomelli & Cappi, 2025) blend climate catastrophe with migration fears, amplifying anxiety and reinforcing exclusionary attitudes.

What goes missing are the visual and conceptual links between these outcomes and the exploitative forces of industrial development, fossil capitalism, and global hierarchies rooted in anthropocentric individualism. This representational imbalance reinforces a deeply uneven geography of visibility and voice, where the causes of the crisis are obscured, and the people most affected are either rendered invisible or framed as threats. While the diverse concepts around climate and mobility justice can cause confusion, they also highlight a contested political space where language and data must be reclaimed and repoliticized to overcome fear, paralysis, and alienation from alarmist narratives.

This article critically examines how climate and mobility justice are interconnected and mutually shape each other, arguing that their integration is key for imagining transformative responses to the intertwined crises of climate change and human (im)mobilities. More specifically, this study explores how dominant social imaginaries shape understandings of climate-induced (im)mobilities (Boas et al., 2022), a concept that captures a spectrum of movements—including displacement, voluntary mobility, and immobility—rooted in historical, material, and political contexts (Baldwin, 2022; Cundill et al., 2021). Crucially, it recognizes that climate impacts affect both those who move and those who stay, voluntary or not.

Focusing on how social imaginaries—collective frameworks of meaning and expectation (Castoriadis, 1998; Taylor, 2004; Lennon, 2015)—influence how people envision themselves, others, and the future, the article explores the results of a creative methodology that we named "Imaginary wor(l)ds." This consists of creative writing techniques to elicit emerging perspectives and imaginaries around envisioned climate migration scenarios, developed as part of the European projects Panicocene[2] and Rethink the Challenge.[3] As part of these efforts, the authors co-facilitated a seminar series titled "Beyond panic? Re-envisioning climate mobilities."[4] Designed as a combination of workshops and seminars, this initiative sought to analyze the complex interplay between mobility and climate change while fostering collaborative approaches among journalists, researchers, and activists. The objective was to generate counter-narratives that challenge prevailing alarmist discourses through a collection of fictional creative writings. This innovative methodology aims to contribute to the critical debate about climate change-induced (im)mobilities by imagining futures, both desired and undesired, within a society marked by inequalities. By examining a corpus of short fictional stories

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2   The project's website can be accessed here: https://reimaginingmobilities.org/panicocene/ (accessed 11 July 2025).

3   The project's website can be accessed here: https://reimaginingmobilities.org/en/re-think-the-challenge/ (accessed 11 July 2025)

4   Here, the full list of the seminars and workshops: 1. Beyond Panic. The Others of the Climate Crisis - 13 February 2024 (for academics); 2. Beyond Panic. Journalism and Climate Mobilities: Who owns the narratives? - 6 March 2024 (for media workers); 3. Beyond Panic. Bridging activism on mobilities justice and activism on climate justice - 24 April 2024 (for activists); 4. Beyond Panic. Academia, Activism, Arts and Journalism re-envisioning climate mobilities - 29 May 2024 (collaborative). Full information available at: https://reimaginingmobilities.org/beyond-panic-re-envisioning-climate-mobilities/ (accessed 11 July 2025).

collected from key stakeholder groups—academics, media professionals, activists—the article investigates how imaginaries of climate (im)mobilities influence emotional responses, ethical engagement, and visions of the future, whether dystopian or hopeful. In so doing, it highlights how these imaginaries can drive political transformation or reinforce inertia, enabling certain responses while rendering others unthinkable.

The methodology integrates elements of the creative approach "Memory Work" (Onyx & Small, 2001), a conceptual tool for understanding how individuals make sense of the world (Crawford, 1992; Haug, 1999; Kuhn, 2000), with speculative practices such as "future writings." By employing what the author called "future memories," participants were encouraged to liberate their storytelling starting points and articulate diverse perspectives on fears, dreams, and pathways toward more desirable futures. As Chahine (2024) notes, this speculative practice enables individuals to manifest their visions of the future—what they hope for, fear, or dream about—while consciously deciding what should be preserved or left behind.

Finally, by integrating theoretical insights from mobility and climate justice, this research advances a nuanced understanding of how creative methodologies can reframe discourses on climate migration to foreground justice-oriented approaches rather than securitized paradigms. The article concludes by emphasizing the critical role of decolonial and intersectional perspectives in shaping future imaginaries and informing equitable policy responses to global climate (im)mobilities.

2. Creative writings to capture new imaginaries

As Harvey (2017) observes, "We are all, every one of us, tellers and consumers of stories" (p. 1). This recognition underpins the research process developed in this study, which integrates ontological, epistemological, and axiological dimensions to foster the creation of shared knowledge. Central to this approach is a critical interrogation of dominant knowledge systems (Gormley, 2005). The "Imaginary wor(l)ds" method aims to popularize research and promote social change through collaboration with other community sectors, recognizing the public value of social research (Burawoy, 2021). Research values the transformative power of imagination, which embraces what is ambiguous or contradictory (Foster, 2016, p. 8). This imaginative approach has political and practical implications for knowledge production (Williamson, 2016), enabling new ways to understand complex phenomena. Drawing on Foucault (1980, p. 305), it encourages "an acute sense of the real which, however, never becomes fixed; a readiness to find our surroundings strange and singular; a certain relentlessness in ridding ourselves of our familiarities and looking at things otherwise; a passion for seizing what is happening now and what is passing away." This framework disrupts dominant narratives and opens space for alternative interpretations, co-producing critical and situated knowledge around climate mobilities (Boas et al., 2022; Sim-Sarka, 2025). Analyzing individual perspectives in collective settings revealed diverse, potentially transformative narrative frameworks (Tàbara et al., 2018).

The "Imaginary wor(l)d" method, developed in this process, exemplifies this direction. A key strength of this practice-led research (Leavy, 2014) is its capacity to bridge the gap with the public by enhancing the accessibility of scientific knowledge. Creative writing becomes a tool for "decontextualization and recontextualization, working in tandem with critical reflection and analysis, [which] can produce original insights that may remain overlooked or undiscovered by more conventional research methodologies" (Crewe, 2021, p. 30).

The interaction between imaginaries, narratives, framing, and stories is a layered process shaping how social realities, like climate migration, are constructed. Imaginaries offer collective cognitive and affective frameworks—shared cultural visions and values—that inform how societies interpret phenomena (Taylor, 2004; Feola et al., 2023).

Narratives articulate these imaginaries by organizing events, actors, and meanings into a coherent sequence (Maignant, 2021). Framing guides interpretation within narrative by emphasizing specific causes, moral judgments, and solutions (Entman, 1993; Bollman, 2022). Frames thus shape the narrative's focus and tone, influencing public perception and policy discourse. Stories embody narrative structures and frames in specific contexts, making abstract imaginaries emotionally resonant, that become lived experiences and shared cultural scenarios that can influence social attitudes and actions (Arendt, cited in Loseke, 2013). Together, these elements enable the construction, dissemination, and contestation of meaning in public discourse, particularly around complex issues like climate (im)mobilities, where justice-oriented or securitized discourses compete for dominance.

3. The "Imaginary Wor(l)ds" methodology

Between February and May 2024, the authors conducted four seminars titled "Beyond panic? Re-envisioning climate mobilities" involving 78 participants—9 activists, 43 academics, and 26 media professionals. The aim was to explore whether collaboration among science, media, and activism could generate counternarratives around climate (im)mobilities.

Participants were recruited through snowball sampling, word-of-mouth referrals, community networks, and targeted outreach via newsletter, social media, and mailing lists. Scholars were contacted through networks like the Environmental and Climate Mobilities Network[5] newsletter; media workers through a workshop co-designed with the Emilia-Romagna Regional Order of Journalists; and activists through direct outreach and informal networks.

Participants were selected to ensure consistency of professional relevance and diversity in gender, age, and nationality, thereby enriching the breadth and depth of perspectives within each seminar. Although the research team is based in Italy, the seminars are held online in English, allowing international participation from across 10 EU countries (primarily Italy, Germany, and France) and from 24 non-EU countries, including Nigeria, Ethiopia, Bangladesh, the USA, Canada, and India.

Each seminar was tailored to a distinct professional group—academics, media professionals, and activists—with the aim of fostering a collaborative environment for critical reflection on participants' professional identities. Prior to the seminar, participants submitted an imaginative story on climate (im)mobilities. Working within a 30-minute time frame, they were asked to imagine scenarios set five years into the future, and to develop a story in response to the following prompt: "Due to the effects of climate change, a single person, family, or community experiences displacement. Create a story incorporating your experiences, imagination, knowledge, fantasy, and ideas. Include details such as identity (who they are), context (where

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5   For more information regarding this academic network on climate and environmental mobilities: https://www.climatemobilities.network/ (accessed 14 July 2025).

they are and what happened), journey (where they are going, by which routes and means), and destination (where they settle and what happens after five years)."

During the seminar, participants read the stories, shared emotional reflections, and engaged in small group discussions. The workshop aimed to develop a shared understanding of climate (im)mobilities, facilitating collective imagination and alternative narratives.

In line with existing literature—which highlights that different channels of communication, such as academic publications, media outputs, and activist campaigns, each possess their own distinct languages, frameworks, and interpretative scenarios for addressing issues like climate change, (im)mobilities, and their nexus (e.g., Nerlich et al., 2010; Doyle, 2011; Garcés-Mascareñas & Pastore, 2025; Boas, 2025)—the workshops sought to foster shared imaginaries within and across professional domain, acknowledging that participants are often shaped by the specific discursive practices and epistemological assumptions of their respective professional fields.

To stimulate group discussion, each session began with a guiding question tailored to each group. For academics, "What does the ethics of care look like in a world of a changing climate?"; for media workers: "How do you choose which stories to tell about climate migration? What effects do these stories have on the public? What should be the goal of telling these stories? How can we get people interested in climate mobility?" Finally, for activists: What does it mean to be an activist in the era of climate change and migration? Is it possible to build a bridge between activism for climate justice and activism for mobility justice? How?"

A final collective seminar brought together all participants to encourage reflection beyond professional "bubbles" and co-construct more inclusive and multifaceted imaginaries around the nexus of climate change and (im)mobilities. The guiding question was: "How to bridge knowledge from academia, journalism, and activism within the climate (im)mobilities field?"

By promoting storytelling approaches, the research method explores climate (im)mobilities narratives, understands perspectives on future scenarios in an era of climate change, and consequently challenges dominant alarmist discourses. Through collective sharing of individual writings, it facilitated emotional engagement on concepts such as (in)justices. It provided space for proposals and ideas aimed at reframing narratives to support an ethics of collective and interdependent care. Participants acted as co-producers of knowledge, challenging dominant frames and narratives surrounding climate (im)mobilities, and redefining who constitutes a climate migrant.

A total of 78 original written contributions were collected (43 academics, 26 media workers, 9 activists). Content analysis revealed recurring elements: countries such as Morocco, Italy, and Nigeria frequently appeared. Most stories were narrated in the third person; only 11 were written in the first person. Notably, 6 stories presented perspectives from non-human points of view: 3 from animals and 3 from parts of the Earth's crust affected by climate change, such as low-lying islands. Internal mobility was most represented (31 stories), contrasting with dominant narratives focused on international migration. Themes of adaptation, resilience, and collective activism emerged strongly.

The following analysis focuses on the most representative contributions[6] —those that reflect the issue's complexity and emphasize social justice.

As such, the imaginaries and reflections emerging from these discussions reflect a multiplicity of global perspectives. This method not only revitalizes the research process itself but also reaffirms one of its cultural functions: enabling academic inquiry, when thoughtfully disseminated, to contribute substantially to transformations in social perspectives and imaginaries.

In the initial workshops held separately for each professional group, discussions supported a shared understanding of the complex meanings behind the language and categories linked to the topic. Particular attention was given to mobility and social justice, which emerged as key to critically engaging with the issue of climate migration. In the fourth workshop, interdisciplinary collaboration proved essential: academics contributed analytical frameworks and empirical data; media professionals ensured dissemination and informational accuracy; activists brought emotional resonance and narrative complexity. Together, they fostered deeper engagement with the multifaceted nature of climate (im)mobilities.

The analysis adopts a qualitative, interpretive methodology suitable for understanding broad macro cultural frameworks (Reese, 2010), utilizing both content and frame analysis to examine social imaginaries (Celermajer et al., 2024). Content analysis, as defined by Babbie (2010), involves the systematic study of the form, content, and purpose of messages, allowing exploration of meanings embedded in the collected stories. This method was used to analyze how participants articulated their perspectives on climate change-induced (im)mobilities through narrative structures and themes.

Complementing this, frame analysis investigated how discourses shaped individual perceptions and public opinion. Drawing on Goffman's (1974) definition of frames as "the principles of organization which govern events—at least social ones—and our subjective involvement in them" (p. 21), it examined the "schemata of interpretation" that help individuals "locate, perceive, identify, and label" events. Frame analysis enabled the identification of linguistic strategies, metaphors, and abstractions used to construct interpretations of climate-induced (im)mobilities and future scenarios. Together, these methods provided insights into the cultural and political meanings emerging from the narratives.

There are, of course, a few limitations to the present study. The online format and English-language requirement, while enabling international participation, may have inadvertently excluded participants lacking digital access or English proficiency. Nevertheless, we aimed for diversity in age, nationality, and backgrounds, including people from the so-called "Global South." Snowball sampling and network-based recruitment approach, though common in participatory research, may have introduced bias toward participants within existing professional and academic networks. Finally, the relatively small sample size, though suitable for qualitative research, limits the generalizability of findings.

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4. Analysis of future-present imaginaries

The collected stories reflect future-present imaginaries of climate (im)mobilities, analyzed starting from the typology of frames—sense-making filters—proposed by Ransan-Cooper et al. (2015), which categorize climate migrants as victims, security threats, adaptive agents, and political subjects. This framework serves as a starting point for unpacking how key groups (academia, media, activists, and artivists) interpret and respond to climate (im)mobilities. Through discourse analysis, the study shows how these actors shape the boundaries and broader perceptions of the phenomena, expanding and enriching the original frames.

While discussions on climate migration are increasingly dynamic across academic research, media coverage, activism, and art-based practices, there remains significant ambiguity regarding what constitutes a climate migrant story and what should be advocated for in the context of climate migration. Climate (im)mobilities research draws from and moves beyond environmental science, migration and displacement studies, while simultaneously transcending these disciplinary boundaries. This developing paradigm acknowledges that climate (im)mobilities represent an emergent phenomenon, rather than a mere aggregation of climate change impacts and patterns of (im)mobility. Adhering to the principle of non-additive complexity (where the combination of factors produces a novel ontological category rather than a simple sum), climate (im)mobilities must be conceptualized as a distinct socio-ecological phenomenon (Boas, 2025). This phenomenon is characterized by unique causal mechanisms, feedback loops, and governance challenges that resist reduction to their individual components. This recent theoretical shift (Boas et al., 2019) necessitates corresponding innovations in justice-oriented narrative frameworks. Despite increasing scholarly, journalistic, and activist attention to climate (im)mobilities, persistent conceptual ambiguities continue to complicate discourse surrounding narrative construction and justice advocacy within this field.

The four imaginaries identified are often hybridized and inconsistently applied by different actors. Nevertheless, they highlight distinct political, ideological, and practical dimensions tied to specific interests and normative assumptions. Each frame can also evoke utopian or dystopian visions of future worlds. These imaginaries are generative in nature, fostering new or rediscovered forms of life and relational assumptions about humans, other earth beings, and time itself (Varvarousis, 2019). Crises are thus framed as opportunities for transformation.

The research addresses the central question driving this study: What are social imaginaries concerning the futures of climate-induced (im)mobilities? Could they be considered alternatives to conventional narratives? The identified imaginaries reflect attempts to navigate a broader understanding of climate (im)mobilities and are analyzed through key elements such as narrative structure, geographical location, temporality, and the roles assigned to protagonists. The imaginaries include climate migrants, more-than-human approaches, and the "victimhood" paradigm; security narratives that problematize the current mobility regime rather than migrants themselves; adaptive agents capable of resilience in both their places of origin and destinations; and political subjects advocating for agency within climate migration contexts. These framings illuminate how imaginaries shape understandings of climate (im)mobilities while offering pathways for rethinking their implications in global crises.

4.1. Frame 1. Climate migrants, more-than-human approaches, and the "victimhood" paradigm

The first frame seeks to unpack narratives connected to the concept of "victimhood," a central moral and political condition of contemporary life (Chouliaraki, 2024). In the context of climate change, victimhood raises critical questions: Who is considered a victim in a world of changing climates?

Critical scholarship (Baldwin, 2013; Bettini, 2013; Durand-Delacre et al., 2021) has shown that separating climate migrants from others is empirically flawed (Boas et al., 2019). Migration rarely results from climate change alone; instead, it unfolds as a complex, ongoing process shaped by multiple, interwoven factors (Kelman, 2020).

Despite substantial evidence highlighting the multifaceted and complex nature of (im)mobilities, and the systemic injustices frequently experienced by climate migrants from the so-called Global South—including restrictive migration policies, insufficient legal protections, and exploitative labor conditions—the prevailing discourse on climate migration in the Global North often constructs a narrative in which people in the Global North are positioned as victims threatened by an imminent influx of "climate migrants" from the Global South (Boas et al., 2019).

Media representations in Global North contexts tend to disproportionately foreground potential security threats, thereby obscuring the underlying structural inequities that drive patterns of (im)mobilities. Through an analysis of the role of victimizing language in contemporary society, Chouliaraki (2024) argues that the figure of the victim functions not as an ontological identity but as a performative speech act that constitutes the vulnerable subject at the moment suffering is articulated. This framing legitimizes heightened border controls and securitization, with resources allocated to border enforcement far exceeding those directed toward climate mitigation. Chouliaraki (2024) highlights how victimhood is not an inherent identity but rather a rhetorical act through which individuals or groups construct themselves, or others, as vulnerable by claiming harm. She critiques this dynamic, emphasizing that the proliferation of victimhood claims often amplifies the voices of the powerful while marginalizing those of the underprivileged. As she notes, "the proliferation of claims to victimhood produces its own victims by obfuscating truth-that is, by populating public discourse with too many voices of pain while selectively amplifying the voices of the already powerful over those of the underprivileged" (p. 6).

This victimhood narrative intersects with broader postcolonial and racialized imaginaries surrounding climate migration. Scholars have identified how representations of climate migrants as both victims and threats reproduce colonial tropes and geographical imaginaries that frame the Global South as a source of danger and instability (Giuliani, 2021). These narratives often position displaced populations as catastrophic threats to affluent regions in the Global North, reinforcing racialized undercurrents that inform securitization efforts (Boas, 2025). Such framings obscure the agency and political subjectivity of affected communities while perpetuating uneven geographies of representation (Sultana, 2022).

In contrast to these human-centered narratives, some stories shifted their focus to more-than-human protagonists, such as ecosystems, animals, or natural elements, challenging anthropocentric assumptions about victimhood (Verlie & Neimanis, 2023). These approaches align

with Indigenous perspectives that view nature as interconnected and intelligent, resisting simplistic portrayals of environmental fragility (Richards & Jürgens, 2021).

Victimhood narratives also shape policy discourses in ways that prioritize security over justice. These narratives are sustained by policy actors involved in defense and the militarization of humanitarianism. According to Chouliaraki (2024), militarization of humanitarianism refers to the process by which humanitarian discourse and aid become intertwined with military objectives and interventions, often justifying military actions under the guise of humanitarian protection or security. This fusion leads to the use of military means to manage humanitarian crises, which can obscure political violence and transform affected populations from rights-bearing agents into passive recipients of charity, thereby depoliticizing conflicts and reinforcing security priorities over justice. Victimhood narratives are instrumentalized within this militarized framework to prioritize security concerns over justice, sustaining policy discourses that legitimize defense-oriented approaches and the militarization of humanitarian efforts, often at the expense of addressing root causes or pursuing equitable justice.

By framing climate migration as a security risk—often exaggerated through alarmist rhetoric—they justify militarized responses that delay meaningful climate action while undermining human rights and dignity. Such narratives risk dehumanizing displaced populations and reinforcing systemic inequalities.

Ultimately, this frame raises critical ethical and political questions about how victimhood is constructed and mobilized in climate migration discourses. Moving beyond victimhood requires reframing imaginaries to recognize shared vulnerabilities across human and non-human entities while fostering solidarity and justice-based approaches to climate-induced mobilities. This shift is essential for addressing not only the immediate impacts of climate change but also its deeper structural injustices, as we can see from the story proposed below:

> I am an island, crafted over eons by the tireless collaboration of the wind and the sea, a masterpiece formed from their graceful dance. [...] My existence has been a tale of tranquility and harmony with the elements, a timeless presence amidst the ever-changing tides. But now, the world around me is shifting, and I feel the tremors of a changing climate. [...] The sea that once lapped at my shores with a tender touch now tore at my very foundations, carrying away the essence of what made me whole. It began with whispers—tales from the mainland, where humans roamed. They spoke of rising temperatures, melting ice, and shifting weather patterns. I, an island, could only listen, unable to fully comprehend the magnitude of their words. But as the years passed, those whispers became roars of urgency. The climate was changing, and I could feel it in my very core. The seasons no longer danced in harmony [...].

The author speaks from her position as a researcher originally from Paraguay, based in the UK, and working on environmental change in Indigenous communities in Latin America. In this story, the island emerges as an agential, speaking subject capable of articulating emotions, feelings, and desires. This framing aligns with posthumanist perspectives that critique anthropocentric notions of human exceptionalism, instead emphasizing entanglement within relational assemblages that bind human and more-than-human worlds (Clark, 2023). Such narratives destabilize the Western modernist dichotomy between "nature" and "culture," reconceptualizing agency as distributed across interconnected ecological and social systems. For Bruno Latour (1993), modern epistemology is characterized by a fundamental division, structured in discourse, between nature and society. Similarly, Jason W. Moore (2015) argues that

the separation of nature and society forms a foundational myth of capitalist world-ecology, enabling extractivist and colonial practices by framing nature as external to human history—an inert backdrop rather than a co-constitutive actor. This nature-culture dichotomy is not only characteristic of dominant Anglo-European epistemologies but is also deeply embedded within the Anthropocene discourse itself, which often abstracts planetary crisis from its entangled colonial, racial, and economic genealogies. In contrast, alternative narratives of climate (im)mobilities challenge these dualisms and offer a relational understanding of agency—one that recognizes the co-production of ecological and social life within asymmetrical global systems. Some stories further situate the more-than-human world as a "simultaneity-of-stories-so-far," echoing feminist geographer Doreen Massey's (2005, p. 11) conceptualization of space as a dynamic multiplicity of trajectories. By centering non-human actors—rivers, forests, or landscapes—these narratives expose and interrogate dominant ideologies rooted in extractivism, colonialism, and capitalist exploitation. As Morizot (2020) argues, such storytelling practices enable us to imagine "other ways of being alive," fostering alternatives to the destructive logics of endless growth and resource extraction.

These narratives also provoke a radical reorientation of humanity's role within ecological systems. As Meschiari (2019) contends, they challenge the anthropocentric imaginary that positions humans as separate from or superior to nature, instead envisioning our species as one thread within a broader web of life. This shift carries ethical implications, urging recognition of reciprocal responsibilities to more-than-human entities and landscapes.

However, these stories also grapple with contradictions. For instance, one narrative juxtaposes the island's agency with its historical exploitation—a tension reflecting the dual reality of more-than-human entities as both co-creators of meaning and targets of systemic violence. Such complexity underscores the need to confront the material legacies of environmental degradation while reimagining relational ontologies. By situating non-human actors as protagonists, these stories not only critique extractive paradigms but also model speculative futures grounded in interdependence and care, a vital counterpoint to the "slow violence" (Nixon, 2013) of ecological collapse. The more-than-human narrative is also connected with its exploitation of nature, such as in this other story, written by a person speaking in her position as activist (and cultural worker):

> It was called "forest protection," the reason why we had to leave our home [...] We have to give up our home, our life, and our traditions. The once-thriving sounds of the forest were replaced by the silence of "conservation." We found ourselves displaced, here in the outskirts of the big city—not only from the land but from ourselves.

This story explores how Indigenous communities are challenging and reconceptualizing colonial "conservation" paradigms through climate (im)mobilities storytelling. Decolonial analytical frameworks prove critical for recentering Indigenous rights to self-determination, particularly given how historical land dispossession and extractive policies have exacerbated climate vulnerabilities (Yumagulova et al., 2023). The stories reveal how mainstream conservation models—often rooted in exclusionary Western notions of "pristine nature"—have systematically marginalized Indigenous stewardship practices while accelerating ecological degradation. Indigenous-led climate adaptation emerges as a transformative counter practice, blending traditional ecological knowledge with innovative strategies to address intersecting crises of colonialism and climate breakdown.

Crucially, these narratives expand conceptions of mobility justice to encompass more-than-human actors and temporalities. By framing landscapes as agential entities with their own migration patterns and rights (Clark, 2023), Indigenous stories disrupt anthropocentric climate discourses. These accounts underscore the imperative to replace colonial conservation's "fortress mentality" with Indigenous-led, rights-based approaches that recognize territories as living archives of biocultural heritage. Decolonized climate adaptation requires centering Indigenous ontologies where human and more-than-human mobilities coexist in dynamic equilibrium.

4.2. Frame 2. The security problem with climate migration isn't the migration

For decades, migration narratives and media portrayals have oscillated between humanitarian and securitarian discourses. The humanitarian discourse often relies on stereotypical portrayals of migrants, emphasizing charity and compassion while reinforcing power asymmetries (Musarò & Parmiggiani, 2022). In contrast, the securitarian discourse instrumentalizes migration narratives for other purposes, such as legitimizing the militarization of borders through discursive and visual distortions perpetuated by governments and institutions (Musarò, 2017). The "securitarian paradigm" (Fassin & Pandolfi, 2010) describes the generalization, at the international but also at the national level, of states of emergency and the institution of a military and humanitarian government as a mode of response to situations of disorder. At its core, the securitarian paradigm operates through a government that rests on a logic of security and a logic of protection, on a law external to and superior to law, rooted in the legitimacy of actions aimed at protecting life. The securitarian paradigm is characterized by several key features: it operates in a temporality of urgency, moving from crisis to crisis while applying standardized technical expertise ranging from military logistics to epidemiological management. This approach challenges national sovereignties and deploys economic powers, ultimately reducing people's histories and expectations to "bare lives to be rescued" (Fassin & Pandolfi, 2010). What was once considered exceptional has now become the rule of contemporary global politics, representing a shift where the logic of exception has been normalized as standard governance practice. This paradigm dehumanizes migrants, representing them as existential threats to security, values, identity, culture, and resources. This framing constructs boundaries within the social imaginary, reinforcing divisions between "us" and "them."

However, the stories analyzed in this research reverse the securitarian frame's logic: rather than portraying migration itself as the security threat, they emphasize the systemic injustices underlying climate (im)mobility. As one story written by a professor based in the US illustrates: "Rather than being scared of people moving because of climate change, it would be better for people in rich countries to stop causing climate change and help adapt and repair the world." This story critiques the disproportionate focus on border enforcement in the so-called Global North, through the process of border closure and externalization practices, while exposing the realities faced by those immobilized by the global migration regime.

Another collected story about Senegal, written by an activist and academic person working on these intertwining phenomena in the country, underscores how environmental migration is deeply entangled with global inequalities. It describes a fishing community near Dakar devastated by sea-level rise and droughts caused by greenhouse gas emissions from the Global North decades ago. With local livelihoods increasingly unsustainable and legal migration channels to

Europe restricted by EU policies, young people face stark choices: risking death by crossing the Atlantic or remaining trapped in socio-environmental precarity. As the story notes:

> Environmental migration? Or a manifestation of global inequalities? [...] The young man connects with migrant rights organizations to push for justice, to call for fishing agreements (which also damage biodiversity in Senegalese waters) to be overturned, to reduce global warming, and to enhance global mobility through legal channels for those who wish to move.

The author frames security as an injustice—a system that perpetuates inequality rather than addressing its root causes. These stories unpack global injustices while redefining what security means in a world shaped by climate change (Miller et al., 2021). They foreground concepts of climate and mobility justice by exposing how dominant Western Panicocene narratives—apocalyptic depictions intertwining climate change and migration—misrepresent realities on the ground. Instead of focusing on imagined mass migrations, these stories emphasize physical, psycho-social, and existential immobility resulting from systemic barriers within the global mobility regime.

The story about Senegal further highlights how borders function not only as physical barriers but also as mechanisms of exclusion rooted in colonial histories. As Mbembe (2019) observes: "Human bodies are increasingly divided between those that matter and those that do not; those who can move and those who cannot or should not—or should only move under very strict conditions" (p. 11). The interpretation conveyed by these imaginaries of security calls for decolonial and intersectional approaches to unmask injustices embedded in border governance systems. They advocate for rethinking global mobility frameworks to dismantle colonial legacies while ensuring equitable access to movement for all individuals—human and more-than-human alike. Through these stories, security is reimagined not as a tool for exclusion but as a principle grounded in justice, care, and interdependence.

4.3. Frame 3. Climate migrants as adaptive agents both in the place of origin and in the country of destination

Since the 2000s, the discourse surrounding climate migration has undergone significant evolution, shifting from a focus on the coercive and security-related aspects of environmental migration to recognizing migration as a proactive adaptation strategy requiring governance and support (Piguet, 2013). This reframing has introduced the concept of "migration as adaptation," which emphasizes migration as a means for individuals to acquire resources, such as financial capital, skills, social networks, and political influence, that can be reinvested in their home communities to facilitate broader resilience and adjustment (Durand-Delacre, 2023). However, despite its prominence in academic and policy discussions, evidence suggests that states have yet to widely adopt migration-as-adaptation policies (Scott, 2023). This gap underscores the need for more robust frameworks to operationalize migration as a viable tool for climate adaptation.

The collected stories reflect this discourse by portraying climate migrants as adaptive agents in both their countries of origin and destination. In the destination countries, stories emphasize resilience and contributions to local communities. For instance, the following story was written by a GIS Analyst based in Kenya:

> Amidst the rising tides and changing landscapes wrought by climate upheaval, the tale of Aria emerges—a resilient soul etched into the chronicles of environmental migration. Aria, a botanist from a coastal village, witnessed the encroaching sea swallow her community, forcing its inhabitants to seek new shores. With her family, Aria embarked on a harrowing journey, navigating turbulent waters aboard a makeshift raft fashioned from remnants of their former lives. [...] Five years hence, Aria and her family have become an integral part of this resilient community. They've nurtured a vibrant garden, fostering hope and adaptation amid the ever-evolving environmental challenges. Their journey, a testament to the human spirit's ability to adapt and thrive amidst adversity, echoes through the annals of climate-induced mobilities.

In contrast, this story, written by a climate change activist based in Ghana, set in the countries of origin focus on resilience through advocacy and rebuilding:

> In a small coastal village nestled between the azure sea and lush greenery lived the Tutu's family. [...] However, as the impacts of climate change intensified, the once tranquil village faced the wrath of nature. [...] The Tutu's family, resilient and determined, worked tirelessly to rebuild their lives. They found solace in a community of fellow migrants, each with their own stories of displacement and resilience. Five years later, the Tutu family had not only adapted to their new surroundings but had also become advocates for climate action. They worked with local organizations to raise awareness about the plight of coastal communities and the urgent need for sustainable solutions. Their journey, marked by loss and upheaval, had transformed into a beacon of hope and resilience, inspiring others to stand against the tide of climate change.

These stories highlight how migration can serve as both an individual strategy for survival and a collective mechanism for advocacy and systemic change. They challenge alarmist narratives that frame climate migrants solely as victims or threats (Methmann & Rothe, 2014), instead emphasizing their agency in navigating adversity.

These stories highlight how climate vulnerability intersects with economic inequality. Vulnerability is not merely a consequence of environmental change but is deeply rooted in socio-economic disparities, with so-called Global South countries disproportionally affected due to limited adaptation resources. Adaptation issues are tied to capitalism's extractive logic, not just resource access. Yet vulnerability coexists with agency, resilience, and hope for transformative futures. Utopian visions in these stories are vital for reframing global mobility by emphasizing justice-oriented approaches.

Framing migration as adaptation also invites broader reflections on governance structures. Current global mobility regimes often restrict movement rather than facilitate it, as described above. Ultimately, these narratives demonstrate that migration is not merely an outcome of climate change, but a dynamic process intertwined with broader systems of power and inequality. By reframing migrants as adaptive agents rather than victims or threats, they offer pathways for envisioning futures grounded in resilience, justice, and collective care - essential elements for addressing climate mobilities.

4.4. Frame 4. Climate migrants as a plurality of political subjects

A fourth frame dimension of the discourse on climate (im)mobilities expands the analytical scope by incorporating often overlooked forms of movement, including internal displacements and North-North mobilities, while critically engaging with the complexities of cross-border mobilities through the intersecting lenses of passport privilege and mobility justice. These narratives challenge the conventional perception that climate migration only affects the Global South, highlighting its rising impact in the Global North, including increasing European displacement due to global warming. Furthermore, they foreground the challenges of cross-border movements driven by climate factors, thereby inviting a nuanced interrogation of how border regimes and policies actively shape emergent climate futures.

Within this framework, the concept of grounded imaginaries becomes pivotal. These imaginaries are rooted in localized, embodied experiences and collective present-future memories that inform how communities envision climate (im)mobilities. Grounded imaginaries serve to contextualize mobility within specific socio-political and ecological settings, emphasizing situated knowledge and lived realities rather than abstract or universalized representations. By integrating emotional and affective dimensions—such as collective narratives of justice—this approach moves beyond the conventional politics of pain and its attendant affective responses, including suffering, empathy, and anger. Although currently marginalized, these grounded imaginaries have historically played a crucial role in catalyzing social change movements throughout the twentieth century (Chouliaraki, 2024), underscoring their potential to inform more just and inclusive responses to climate (im)mobilities.

For instance, as one of the authors, speaking from his position as a researcher based in the UK, reflects, "Because of climate change, I want to migrate away from England to live a more natural life, in a society that hasn't been created around carbon consumption, or consumption in general. Does such a place still exist? And would they have me there?" This sentiment underscores a growing disillusionment with industrialized societies and their unsustainable practices. Similarly, another story written by a journalist based in the Netherlands laments the consequences of insular attitudes toward migration: "They might have been better adapted to change instead of becoming vulnerable climate refugees. If they had only shown mercy on others seeking refuge in their country while it still existed, less busy with their own fears and safekeeping, they might have been less deprived in their own odyssey. The Dutch, who could still help them?" These reflections emphasize the ethical dimensions of mobility justice, suggesting that exclusionary policies may exacerbate vulnerabilities in the face of climate crises.

Another author, speaking from his position as a researcher from Italy based in Spain, brings the immediacy of climate impacts into focus: "It's Wednesday. I'm in Rome. It's 30 degrees at 8 pm. [...] The fire destroyed my apartment and my shoe store just around the corner. [...] After five years, my apartment and store are still destroyed as my insurance does not cover the impacts of climate change, and I can't afford renovation costs." Here, the protagonist's plight illustrates how even those in perceived "safe" regions are increasingly affected by climate disasters, challenging assumptions about the spatial distribution of climate vulnerability.

These narratives align with Sheller's (2018) concept of mobility (in)justice by revealing how borders and socio-political structures influence who can move and under what conditions. While the above-mentioned stories bring the so-called Global North into focus, highlighting its emerging climate vulnerabilities, they also intersect with socio-political injustices of cross-border climate mobilities from the so-called Global South. For example, as highlighted by an

activist and communication specialist writing the reality of Cedeño (Honduras), where rising sea levels have submerged 300 meters of land over the last decade: "The rhythm of life in the town of Cedeño [...] was dictated by the tides of the ocean. [...] Climate change induced more frequent storms and floods [...]. Most people chose to embark on the smugglers' route to the USA. [...] Unfortunately, under international law, fleeing from climate disaster is not recognized as a basis for seeking refugee status." This account demonstrates how international legal frameworks fail to address climate-induced displacement, perpetuating injustices for those forced to migrate.

Another story, written by a research journalist from the Netherlands, illustrates repeated displacement within national borders: "Five years ago, they left everything and moved; the 10 years before, they had to move also because of drought, flooding, and unlivable conditions, yet this was still within their own countries' borders. Five years ago, they had to give up their country. Today they have to move again [...]. There was nothing left there. A barren body of sand and salt water was left in their home territory." This cyclical displacement highlights how internal migration often precedes cross-border movements, complicating simplistic narratives about climate migration.

These stories collectively question the role of borders in shaping climate futures. They illustrate Chouliaraki's (2024) argument that anthropocentric narratives must transcend affective reactions such as empathy and anger by integrating collectivist visions of justice reminiscent of twentieth-century social movements. By framing mobility justice within broader discussions about borders and climate change, this perspective urges a reimagining of global solidarity that prioritizes equitable responses to shared vulnerabilities across diverse geographies.

5. Conclusions

This article contends that climate and mobility justice are not just interconnected but mutually constitutive. Integrating these frameworks is crucial for envisioning transformative responses to the overlapping crises of climate change and human (im)mobility. Though historically treated in parallel—climate justice addressing ecological harm and its distribution, and mobility justice focusing on movement and its inequities—their separation stems from siloed global governance and academic traditions rooted in nation-state logics. Bridging these fields allows us to challenge the structural inequalities, bordering practices, and exclusions that underpin both climate vulnerability and (im)mobility.

The creative methodology "Imaginary wor(l)ds" revealed how collaborative storytelling can generate new imaginaries that challenge dominant, securitized narratives of climate mobility. By foregrounding diverse voices, it highlights the need to move beyond binary categories and to reframe climate (im)mobility as a multidimensional, justice-oriented phenomenon rooted in collective care.

The limitations, highlighted in the methodological paragraph, point to opportunities for future research. In fact, although the limited sample, the online and English format, and the recruitment of participants, several theoretical and empirical perspectives for future research should be considered. In fact, the (imaginary) future is a key aspect in climate mobility research and policy making. Creative methodologies working with imaginaries and narratives can foster deeper engagement with "future" as an analytical concept. Offering new coordinates for mainstream narratives requires starting from perceptions—recognizing the "histo-

ry that unites us" as embodied beings—and rethinking systems of knowledge. As Mbembe (2021) argues, "planetary habitability" is inseparable from a politics of care, repair, and restitution. This call is for connecting conscious and unconscious levels, memories, and emotions, to enable collective re-signification of social phenomena. Kara (2015) emphasizes how this is increasingly possible in the social sciences through creative methodologies that open new research arenas.

The Panicocene is characterized by a perception of "us" as constantly under threat—from migrants or climate catastrophes. This siege mentality underscores the urgency of re-signifying "us" by expanding the imaginary to include a collective, intersectional, and global perspective. Such expansion means multiplying differences and perspectives rather than erasing them. The stories collected through "Imaginary wor(l)ds", reveal the need to move beyond classical categories of mobility and immobility, and to broaden our understanding of climate mobility, including more-than-human mobilities, such as North-North mobilities.

The category of climate mobilities illuminates the link between climate justice and mobility justice while challenging the nation-state-centered understanding of both. Climate justice highlights how climate change intersects with structural inequalities experienced as systemic violence. Fully realizing this framework requires incorporating mobility justice, which addresses the ontological definition of who counts as a person-historically excluding women, enslaved people, queers, differently abled individuals, and continues to exclude non-human entities central to many Indigenous ontologies (Scott, 2020; Sheller, 2018).

These imaginaries call for transdisciplinary approaches to (im)mobilities induced by climate change, not only spatially but also temporally, existentially (in terms of livelihoods), and psycho-socially. In the so-called Global North, this discussion is particularly significant in light of rising populist rhetoric characterizing the crisis of liberal democracies and harsh treatment of migrants, which has led to the individual and structural violence perpetuated and legitimized by dominant migration discourses. The choice of words in migration-related discourses is therefore critical; concepts surrounding migration are often laden with moral implications, necessitating a discourse on climate migration rooted in principles of justice. Effective narratives must consider both the right to stay and the right to move—acknowledging that immobility often results from systematic exclusions like visa policies and the militarization of borders. Grounded imaginaries anchored in specific places can balance losses tied to displacement with attachments to environments or communities.

Since climate (im)mobility is fundamentally about justice, it is essential to expose structural injustices and demand accountability through decolonial and intersectional lenses. Shifting perspectives reveals the need for global responses that reject binaries like "deserving" versus "undeserving" populations—a dichotomy often reinforced by asylum-seeking systems in the Global North (Paynter, 2022). Vulnerability should not negate agency; suffering must be understood as an injustice, not mere victimhood.

The ethical principles articulated by members of the Artists Circle[7]—a collaborative initiative that engages artists in critically reflecting on the ethics of storytelling such as "Why are we telling a story? Who is telling the story? Who benefits or loses from telling the story? Who

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7   The full reflection on ethical principle regarding narratives of climate displacement can be found in the following website: https://belonging.berkeley.edu/artist-circle/why-artists.html (accessed 11 July 2025).

has the right to a story? What are the dynamics of power in the distribution of a story? How does the story's form change how we understand the story? [...] Why are we telling the story of an individual forced to leave and not the story of the oil company or lobbyists who created the conditions for that displacement?"—serves to challenge dominant narratives by redirecting attention from individual experiences of suffering to the systemic forces underpinning displacement. These are justice-oriented approaches to climate migration narratives.

In conclusion, this analysis calls for imagination that transcends conventional oppositions between reality and fiction. We are taught to view reality as factual and imagination as unreal, but this limits both. A fuller sense of reality includes imagined possibilities—a world always in making. As Haraway (2016) suggests through speculative fabulation or Mbembe's (2021) reflections on planetary habitability, imagining alternative futures enables us to move beyond apocalyptic narratives toward collective hope grounded in justice-based action.

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