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When the land leaves: place, displacement, and climate mobilities in an era of climate change

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Reframing the notions of climate migration and climate-induced displacement as one type of involuntary climate mobility and human displacement, this conceptual review explores how disruptions to the relational and cultural coherence of person/place-attachments erode people's ability to remain where they are. Offering a framework for complementing and refining technocratic adaptation and resilience strategies to redress such involuntary climate mobilities, it articulates a notion of *stationary displacement* to show how existential attachments to land, identity, and meaning can sustain local continuities when kept intact and how fraying those attachments contributes to a felt need to involuntarily move, especially in still largely land-based, traditional, and Indigenous societies. The aim of this review is not to replace existing efforts to mitigate or prevent involuntary climate mobilities but to strengthen and further ground them in people's lived experiences of place so that staying becomes not only more possible but also more meaningful.

KEYWORDS

climate change, climate migration, climate mobilities, climate-induced displacement, indigenous cultures, stationary displacement

1 Introduction

This conceptual review examines how people's altered sense of place due to climate change can increasingly lead them to perceive a need to move involuntarily away. Its purpose is to reframe how this problem is understood so that solutions focused on preventing such involuntary mobility before it occurs can empower people to remain voluntarily in place if they choose. While terms like *climate migration* and *climate-induced displacement* are commonly used to document the complex economic, humanitarian, and political consequences of these phenomena (Albro, 2023; Askland et al., 2022; Draper, 2023; Piguet, 2022), Boas (2025) has recently outlined a critical alternative: *climate mobilities*. Her framing better captures the granularity of the phenomenon, particularly as a counterweight to efforts aimed at bordering and containing international movement (Boas et al., 2024; Boas et al., 2021). It also opens up space for incorporating the existential and experiential dimensions of displacement as involuntary human movement that form the core of this review. As such, the review often moves indirectly but in parallel with themes framed by climate (im)mobilities (Boas et al., 2022).

It also shares junctures and disjunctures with research for community resilience and adaptation to displacement, not only in the context of climate change but also disaster recovery, rural suburbanization and urbanization, and public health emergencies (Abrash Walton et al., 2021; Conduah and Ofoe, 2025; Elkady et al., 2024; James, 2019; Karunarathne, 2024; Kuethe et al., 2011; Miraftab, 2016; Olcese et al., 2024; Salamon, 2007). These literatures highlight

strategies already in use to mitigate or prevent involuntary mobility, including place-based, culturally competent adaptation, cultural cohesion and preservation, psychosocial and infrastructural support, and meaning-making through the arts (Bailey and Wheeler, 2024; Franconi et al., 2024; Heard et al., 2023; Orazani et al., 2023).

Across these various junctures and disjunctures with other research, this conceptual review offers a *reframing of the problem of displacement*. Given that how a problem is technically framed or defined shapes the kinds of solutions that are synthetically developed to address it (Rittel and Webber, 1973; Waddock et al., 2015), this review's reframing of displacement accordingly shifts *how* and *what kinds* of solutions come into view. However, it intends links, not ruptures, with existing technocratic solutions for adaptation and resilience in a context of climate mobilities – links that are rooted in a shared vision: that if people are empowered with the resources, knowledge, safety, and existentially meaningful experiences needed to thrive where they are, then they will be less likely to feel forced involuntarily to give up their place for other international, urban, or simply different destinations (Boas et al., 2022; Nabong et al., 2023).

Nonetheless, discourse within the globally industrialized present makes any straightforward account of climate mobilities displacement impossible without additional historical context (Leps, 1992), especially when considering still largely land-based, traditional, and Indigenous societies. Accordingly, this review first distinguishes *space, place*, and *displacement* to then characterize crucial differences in experiences of displacement between *precarity* and *scarcity* societies. These terms reflect the historical shift to fossil-fuel-based energy regimes and their accompanying cultural logics around notions of sufficiency, uncertainty, and social continuity (Hensley and Steer, 2019). Building on this conceptual groundwork, the review explores displacement as a breakdown of person/place-attachments—particularly through the experiences of uprootedness and isolation, mobility and anonymity, and alienation and mechanization. It is precisely such breakdowns within precarity societies that most call for adaptation and resilience strategies grounded both in technical feasibility and cultural identity, memory, and continuity. Reframing the problem of displacement in this way complements existing solutions to better serve and empower such communities, ultimately achieving more effective project outcomes.

2 Space, place, and displacement

2.1 Background

While a surge of concern around people's displacement due to climate change occurred roughly a decade ago (Bettini, 2013), as early as 1998, the Environmental Justice Foundation could claim that "climate refugees now outnumber refugees fleeing persecution and violence by more than three to one" (Environmental Justice Foundation, 1998, p. 2); this was, both then and now, never unambiguously the case, as distinguishing and tallying such refugees' exact numbers remains difficult. Similarly, the concept of "climate refugees" itself was already legally contentious at the time (Cooper, 1997; Hugo, 1996), and these debates as well remain still largely unsettled (Askland et al., 2022; Hiraide, 2022; White, 2019).

Though much studied (Ghosh and Orchiston, 2022; Hoffmann et al., 2021; Marotzke et al., 2020), significant scholarly debate remains about the extent to which climate change itself can be disentangled from or is implicated in other structural drivers of migration, including economic precarity, governance failures, and historical dispossession (Kaenzig and Piguet, 2021; Piguet, 2021). Work by Boas and colleagues (Boas, 2025; Boas et al., 2024; Boas et al., 2021; Boas et al., 2022) even more radically reframes these problems as aspects of human mobility generally – a redefinition of the problem of "climate migration" or "climate-induced displacement" illustrative of this conceptual review's offered reconceptualization of displacement. This matters not only for how displacement is defined but also for the kinds of policy responses that are then prioritized to address that problem, whether technical adaptation, migration facilitation, or structural transformation (Olcese et al., 2024; Orazani et al., 2023).

Similarly, although little to no consensus exists about what displacement is (Askland et al., 2022), it is not coincidental that the term evokes a sense of dis*place*ment rather than merely a movement in *space*. Displacement is not simply spatial dislocation; it is a rupture in the lived, felt continuity of identity, belonging, and embeddedness within a particular world. The notion of "uprootedness" captures this vividly—not merely physical removal but an existential unmooring (c.f., Massey, 2005; Appadurai, 1990; Bachelard, 1954; Lefebvre, 1991; Tuan, 1977).

Space, conventionally, is abstract and quantitative: a neutral grid of coordinates, volumes, latitudes, and longitudes, an empty, undifferentiated expanse or *terra nullius* to be traversed, occupied, or measured (Linquist and Rosenberg, 2007; Williams, 2006). *Place*, by contrast, is saturated with meaning. It encompasses not only the measurable features of a space but also the sedimented layers of living, perceiving, and relating in that space that give it presence and texture. Even negative connotations, such as *knowing one's place* or *being put in one's place* (Cresswell, 1992; Gupta and Ferguson, 1997), suggest the presence of normative structures, expectations, and familiar life ways that define being *in place* (Tuan, 1974). The common point of reference between these welcome or unwelcome experiences of place is that its lifeways are *familiar*.

Displacement—as a loss of place—is not simply removal from a location but can also connote the entire loss of a world, depending on how far one is displaced (Boas et al., 2024; Chung et al., 2022). It marks the disruption of an otherwise familiar orientation, of no longer knowing how to live, how to relate, or how to make a living (Akesson and Badawi, 2020; Qushua, 2020). When this involves an *involuntary* loss of such familiarity, the experience of displacement becomes especially negative (Bello-Bravo, 2023a). This is in contrast to *voluntary* movement (e.g., vacation, migration) and the grey zone of forced-but-framed-as-voluntary decisions to relocate (Akesson and Badawi, 2020; Gabor and Rosenquest, 2006; Harris, 1993). A notable exception that proves the rule is the "self-imposed political exile" of the "consumer refugee" from Castro's Cuba, whose displacement was reframed through U. S. policy as an opportunity rather than a rupture (O'Gara, 2000).

Whether someone is forcefully displaced into official "refugee" status by an invading army or feels forced to "voluntarily" displace themselves because the economic, consumer, or environmental prospects of remaining in place seem no longer viable, the sense of *unasked-for suffering* is palpable. In every case, one would have preferred to stay in a familiar place rather than now be dreaming of return in someplace unfamiliar (Chang, 1996; Qushua, 2020). In this

review, the *unasked-for loss of place-familiarity* represents a central aspect of displacement.

2.1.1 Stationary displacement

In its international context, climate mobilities typically involve refuge-seeking and life-rebuilding outside of migrants' home countries (Ghosh and Orchiston, 2022; Nabong et al., 2023). However, displacement also unfolds intra-nationally, as near or distant movements within national boundaries (Cash et al., 2020; Mustak, 2022). In fact, Boas et al. (2021) note that the predominance of climate mobility is indeed intra-national. In these instances, the disorientation of displacement may be less severe if in-country cultural norms, behavioral expectations, and especially language remain relatively familiar, even as rural/urban differences can exacerbate these effects (Chung et al., 2022).

However, there are also "paradoxical" cases where people experience displacement without moving—as if the land or the place, rather than its people, leaves. Such "stationary" displacement—less often discussed in those terms in existing literature (Askland et al., 2022; Boas et al., 2022; Ryder and Mikulewicz, 2023)—helpfully reframes the economic, humanitarian, and political problem of involuntary climate mobilities and opens the possibility of alternative policy-crafting of solutions to address that problem. For example, a significant challenge for the broader humanitarian effort to address climate change (IEP, 2020) involves how to accommodate an estimated 1 billion climate refugees by 2050, not just logistically but also in the face of xenophobic reactions to climate migrants (Methmann and Oels, 2015). Without intending to conjure up an apocalyptic numerical scenario (Bettini, 2013; Boas et al., 2021), this 1 billion brings to mind the other ~8.7 billion people in 2050 who, though not predicted as formally displaced by climate change, will nonetheless be affected by it (Askland et al., 2022; UN, 2023).

This reframing of the problem of displacement subsequently changes how adaptation and resilience efforts are framed as well. An initiative that helps people "modernize" or "restore" their place using climate-smart technologies may align with resilience goals—but if people cannot see how this enables them to continue living meaningfully as they have in that place, its appeal diminishes. Conveniently accessible, culturally competent, locally translated educational content can overcome people's impressions of a solution's irrelevance (Bello-Bravo et al., 2023). However, solutions that resonate with people's local understanding of problems—including feelings of uprootedness despite not having moved—are more likely to be adapted as solutions to those local issues (Bello-Bravo et al., 2020). Anchoring adaptation strategies in people's lived and perceived realities strengthens their legitimacy and long-term sustainability (Bello-Bravo, 2023b; Rodríguez-Domenech et al., 2019).

2.2 Historical shifts in the experience of displacement

Loss of place is always experienced through the present's cultural and historical interpretation, which shapes how loss, disruption, and adaptation look and feel (Williams, 1977). Building on the previous section's discussion of place and displacement, this one highlights historical shifts in how societies have related to land, change, and continuity—especially during the transitional rupture from land-based stewardship to industrial extraction. This historical survey is not a detour but critically reframes our present understanding of displacement and why some present-day interventions to mitigate it can succeed or falter, particularly in societies that are still largely land-based.

2.2.1 The roots of displacement

If the problem of displacement is understood as *a disorienting and involuntary loss of familiar ways of living*, then solutions to that problem must redress that defamiliarizing sense of loss. To do so, however, requires first establishing a clear conceptual distinction between the radically different forms that displacement-induced loss takes in what we provisionally refer to as agrarian (land-based) and industrialized (fossil-fuels-based) societies. Empirically, while one can see vividly the effects of displacement from documents witnessing England's wholesale reorganization of its land-based social life and identity on a revolutionarily industrialized base from the eighteenth century onward (Hensley and Steer, 2019; Williams, 1950), those rural/urban effects are no less detectable today in, for example, the experiences of rural Syrians displaced by war to refugee centers in urban Jordan (Qushua, 2020) or suburbanization and urbanization in rural U. S. spaces (Kuethe et al., 2011; Miraftab, 2016; Salamon, 2007).

The challenge for the present (and for this review) is that although the Industrial Revolution(s) profoundly reshaped then-prevailing land-based notions of place, time, and identity (Hobsbawm, 1968; Stiglitz, 2002; Thompson, 1963), these changes were accompanied by a discourse that cast those earlier ways of life—including Indigenous ones—as primitive and morally inferior (Deloria, 1969; Neugebauer, 1990; Smith, 1999; Williams, 1950, 1961, 1977). This interpretive libel came to define what "industrialized" and "agrarian" now mean, mirroring the broader European Enlightenment distinction between "civilization" and "nature" (Geisler, 2012; Rowland, 2007). This distinction also reframed the world's gifts not as essential goods but as commodities subject to unrestricted exploitation. Uncoincidentally, the spread of industrialized civilization was supported by emergent practices of settler-colonialism, human trafficking, and the enclosure of women that treated people deemed "primitive" and "morally inert" as resources to be controlled and exploited as commodities (Ellis, 1989; Jackson, 2024). This stands in stark contrast to land-based societies, which often treat nonhuman life forms and Mother Nature not as inert resources but as relatives, teachers, or living presences to be honored and sustained (Kimmerer, 2012; Mangena, 2013).

This instrumentalizing and stigmatizing discourse has long since constructed the misleading array of valorized and deprecated social values characteristically associated with "industrialized" and "agrarian" ways of life. These apply both to its pure and mixed social spaces; that is, not just the factory and the field, but also the electrified village and urban farm, the virtual farm sim and industrialized agriculture, and the myriad binary comparisons that contrast them as progressive or backward, superstitious or enlightened, developed or developing, savage or civilized, lazy or industrious, human or animal, global South/North, or First World versus a non-industrialized, pre-industrial, pre-agrarian, or pre-modern Third World with its baggage of "heritage" (Bendix, 2000).

This now-fixed sense of the agrarian's place within the discourse of industrialized life represents the main barrier to distinguishing our present era from earlier ones. As an elaboration and extension of the Enlightenment's antecedent feudal patron/client social orders,

the role of the agrarian was molded after the subordinate role of a serf, with no independent existence beyond their disadvantageously "valued" instrumental utility. This emplacement of the agrarian represents simply one more expression of industrialized societies' disciplinary social ordering (Foucault, 1977; Leps, 1992)—the same impulse that produced and placed "criminal" bodies behind bars, that ensured "enslaved" bodies did not escape from their plantations, segregated neighborhoods, or ghettos (Roediger, 2019), and that tied "women's" bodies to the apron strings of domestic kitchens (Ellis, 1989). For all of these bodies, it becomes essential that they know their place and remain there. Ridiculously metaphorical or strange as this may sound, equally strange and ridiculous zoning laws reflexively bar agrarian practices in urban spaces, further suggesting the aptness of the metaphor (Meenar et al., 2017; Voigt, 2011).

The "logic" of this fixing—as with other cases of fixing (Foucault, 1986)—is to ensure food production for an industrialized society otherwise preoccupied with more predominating non-food activities. With this disadvantageous fixity entrenched by the mid-nineteenth century (Bernal, 1987), later dichotomies would less unfavorably contrast the differences between country life and city life, the rural/urban divide, the Village and the Metropolis, or even the wilds and the hearth, where the entirely contemporary practices of a "timeless" and "traditional" indigenous knowledge occur (Bello-Bravo, 2019a, 2023c; Pahl, 1966; Pateman, 2011; Rezvani et al., 2021; Waller and Reo, 2018; Williams, 1973; Zimmermann, 2020).

Understanding how the "agrarian" stands in relation to the "industrialized" is essential for making sense of displacement, especially in societies that are still largely land-based, traditional, and Indigenous. This is not simply to avoid the trap of monolithically reifying historical or present-day cultures, which are always particular and resist straightforward generalization (Curran, 2011), nor to uncritically accept the current era's framing of that distinction (Leps, 1992), particularly when it tends to ignore Indigenous ways of life altogether (McKay and Veltmeyer, 2021) or treat them as problems to be solved (Trosper, 2007; Waller and Reo, 2018). It also illuminates how "agrarian" modernization can prove more harmful than traditional farming (Martínez-Alier et al., 2010; Mather et al., 1999; Rudel and Horowitz, 1993; Schneider et al., 2010); thus, Corntassel (2008) notes, "Unfortunately, what is considered sustainable practice by states comes at a high price for Indigenous communities, often leading to the further degradation of their homelands and natural resources" (p. 108). And why the international commodification of traditional products like cocoa, banana, shea nuts, or alpaca wool bracket out or denigrate their traditional modes of production (Bello-Bravo et al., 2022a; Bello-Bravo et al., 2022b; Lutomia and Bello-Bravo, 2017). At stake here is a fundamental distinction between a relational orientation to a land and its gifts versus an extractive and instrumental approach that treats both the land and its people as resources to be exploited.

Bearing in mind this distinction affords reframing displacement to better align with and complement problem-solving for adaptive capacity research by connecting how individual agency and community cohesion are deepened not only by material resources but also by perceived self-efficacy, cultural identity, and cultural capital (Grothmann and Patt, 2005; Smit and Wandel, 2006). This will not only more effectively address and advocate for culturally viable solutions to the unasked-for problem of climate displacement generally but also take an indispensable step toward genuine harm reduction itself (Marlatt and Witkiewitz, 2010).

2.2.2 Precarity and scarcity societies

Building on the distinctions drawn in the previous section, further differentiating the cultural logics by which societies relate to uncertainty, sufficiency, and social continuity helps explain why some adaptation strategies fail to take root and why some communities resist displacement even when relocation appears materially "rational." Accordingly, this section introduces a broad distinction between *precarity* and *scarcity* societies. These are not fixed, essentialist, or monolithic categories, nor are they developmental stages, but contrasting orientations to lived experience shaped by underlying energy regimes. They are not synonyms for agrarian and industrialized societies, respectively, but aim to reflect the perspectives and social values of each in their own terms, particularly those of precarity societies, without the stigmatization imposed by dominant industrialized discourse.

Scarcity societies—typically powered by fossil fuels and premised on industrialized accumulation—frame well-being in terms of securing and insulating oneself from lack. For scarcity societies, there can never be enough. In contrast, precarity societies—traditionally reliant on renewable, ecologically cycling energy—navigate instability through relational and redistributive practices such as gift-giving, hospitality, and mutual aid that assume abundance, not lack, to sustain social cohesion even amid uncertainty (Diamond, 2013; Mauss, 1954; Sahlins, 1972; Scott, 2009). In general, precarity societies comprise Indigenous, settled agricultural, pastoralist, and transhumant social orders, united not by their economic configuration but by a cultural logic of sufficiency grounded in reciprocity, adaptability, and shared continuity. In precarity societies, there's not always not enough.

These divergent orientations not only shape how communities respond to disruption but also what kinds of interventions feel viable, meaningful, or worth pursuing in the first place. Both scarcity and precarity societies exist facing the characteristic uncertainties and anxieties that can threaten any human habitation with the possibility of being unable to secure the necessities essential for social reproduction. But the distinction also recognizes contrasting responses to those threats, e.g., traditions of individual hoarding and wealth accumulation in scarcity societies (Dones et al., 2023; Illich, 1973; Williams, 1961) and traditions of jubilee, potlatching, gift-giving, and hospitality in precarity ones (Diamond, 2013; Mauss, 1954; Sahlins, 1972; Scott, 2009). This also includes a differential use of Nature as "resources" to be extracted for short-term, immediate gratification and "gifts" to be stewarded and accepted with longer-term time horizons in mind (Kimmerer, 2013).

These responses are not exclusive to either type of society, though it has been argued and observed that precarity societies' use of goods and opportunities—even amid instability—tend to be more sustainable and offer broader access to the "good life" for current and future members alike compared to scarcity societies (Sahlins, 1972, 2013; Stiglitz, 2012). In whatever way one settles that question (Diamond, 2013; Sahlins, 2013), our options as a species are now limited by the fact that the fossil-fuel dependency and framing of social life and personhood in scarcity societies are the primary global drivers of climate change (Anshelm and Hultman, 2014).

However, this distinction between precarity and scarcity societies is also necessary for understanding how it informs what counts as a

viable, resonant, or sustainable adaptation, resilience, and social cohesion strategy in more land-based, traditional, and Indigenous societies. Without this lens, policy risks imposing scarcity-society logics—such as accumulation, insulation, and technocratic control—on precarity communities whose coherence rests more on relational and redistributive responses to instability. If the cultural logics shaping how societies approach sufficiency, risk, and continuity are not accounted for, then attempts to mitigate or prevent involuntary climate mobilities become liable to failure not just technically but existentially.

2.3 Experiences of climate mobilities displacement

Putting the distinction between precarity and scarcity societies to work reveals how displacement disrupts forms of relationality that are not just social but also ecological, spiritual, and existential. This disruption is especially acute for members of precarity societies, whose ways of life are often rooted in place-specific knowledge, intergenerational relationships, and land-based practices (Faniyi and Omotoso, 2022; Hughes, 2019; Robinson et al., 2019). For such societies, displacement severs embodied orientations to land, kin, and continuity. In contrast, scarcity societies generally deprecate these types of relational attachments as backward or inefficient (Datta, 2018; Kimmerer, 2017), viewing them negatively through their past lens of historical experiences of dislocation, anonymity, and deracinated mobility (Cook and Cuervo, 2020; Hobsbawm, 1968).

The following three sections unpack experiences of displacement from the standpoint of precarity societies, where the losses involved are not merely logistical or economic but strike at the core of person/place-attachment. The following three interrelated pairs—uprootedness and isolation, mobility and anonymity, and alienation and mechanization — help diagnose the kinds of losses at stake and clarify why some interventions can resonate or fail, especially in more precarity-based societies. As reframed problems, these losses also point toward alternative framings of what resilience, social coherence, and continuity might look like.

2.3.1 Uprootedness and isolation

Uprootedness is one of the most characteristic experiences of displacement for precarity societies. The image of being uprooted vividly realizes the violence of being torn from a familiar and nurturing place and subsequent attempts to grow and adapt in an unfamiliar and perhaps unsuitable landscape. It also no less vividly suggests the concrete problem for rural people—whose primary skills and livelihoods are often grounded in agriculture, aquaculture, pastoralism, or working a place's land generally—must then adapt to urban spaces and tap or cultivate new or secondary skills to thrive (Boas et al., 2022; Qushua, 2020).

Moreover, since every place posits various social norms, behavioral expectations, and bases of identity, this deep sense of place-attachment in precarity societies has been linked indissolubly—both productively and problematically—to definitions of indigeneity generally (Bello-Bravo, 2019b, 2023a; Corntassel, 2010; Martinez-Cobo, 1982). The impacts of displacement and threats to cultural continuity that arise from severing Indigenous people's ties to their land have non-Indigenous analogs as well—for example, the role of women in sustaining cultural continuity during both in-place adaptation and displaced relocation, as documented in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in 2005 (Harville et al., 2010; Laditka et al., 2010; Lee et al., 2009).

This connects precarity's experiences of uprootedness to its paired phenomenon: *isolation*, as a loss of interactional possibility. Despite the global spread of scarcity societies' modes of social life and identity (Desai, 2017; Radhakrishnan, 2000), examples still abound where relationships, personhood, and social life can be constitutively intersubjective and not transactional only (Shahzad, 2017; Stewart-Ambo and Yang, 2021) and reflect a broad recognition of interactions with human and nonhuman others, living and dead (Lutomia et al., 2018; Mangena, 2013; Waller and Reo, 2018). Two vivid examples of this include the continuity of traditional pastoralism between Peruvian herders and members of their alpaca herds (Dransart, 2003; Hutchinson, 1996; Rebanks, 2015) and how "transnational" immigrants can now reduce their sense of uprootedness and isolation after migrating by using social media and other digital means to remain in contact with families and friends back home (Tshiswaka and Ibe-Lamberts, 2014). This illustrates how supporting precarity-based experiences of rootedness and connection can mitigate displacement generally.

Remnants of this relational orientation to nonhuman others can still be discerned in scarcity society's attitude toward pets and things in collections (Shumway, 1999; Thoburn, 2014). But precarity societies can extend interactive possibilities to anything, especially places. On the precarity view, a place can be a teacher, a library of collective memory, or a collaborator and a relative, if not the very basis and generous foundation of all of life's gifts and human possibility in the first place, as a first being (Bello-Bravo, 2020b; Flynn et al., 2014; Kimmerer, 2013; Martínez, 2012; Moore et al., 2023; Steeves, 2023; Waller and Reo, 2018).

Severing the relational sense of person/place-attachments can generate intense isolation. Even in scarcity societies, the famously nostalgic homesickness expressed in twentieth-century Russian émigré literature (Tihanov, 2011), the extreme loneliness of immigrant farmworkers displaced from their land (Qushua, 2020; Smith-Appelson et al., 2021), people nationally displaced by the redrawing of political borders (Flynn, 2011; Flynn, 2008; Flynn et al., 2014), and the crushing loss of community that can accompany a loss of faith (Barbour, 1994; Muir, 2000) all familiarly bear witness to a sense of terrible isolation.

2.3.2 Mobility and anonymity

Another characteristic experience of precarity-society displacement involves mobility and anonymity, with displacement from rural to urban areas as a dominant trope. Although the Industrial Revolution(s)' disruption of rural English life was experienced as an unwelcome loss by its earliest generations (Williams, 1973), later generations of urban industrialites rationalized those losses as gains – sometimes as Providence's "fortunate fall" from humanity's childish and Edenic preexistence, sometimes as History's necessary and enlightened liberation from "primitive" and "inferior" origins, but always as part of a movement toward the attainment of something like a utopia in heaven or on Earth (Dermody et al., 2020; Lopez, 1998; Neugebauer, 1990). These "gains" were then exported globally as "civilization" to "primitive" precarity societies through colonization,

enslavement, and imperialism (Jackson, 2024), with the person/place-attachments of precarity societies being recast in negative terms.

Specifically, this negative recasting continues to inform how the experiences of displacement in precarity societies can be framed. For example, scarcity societies deprecate those who remain rooted in place as psychologically stuck or regressed, while celebrating generational and technological mobility as progress—a matrix of social values made possible only through historically unprecedented levels of movement and dislocation (Germani, 2018). This psychological stuckness is linked ideologically to personality defects; "at a personal level, [a] refusal to move can mean failure to self-realize, manifest in conditions such as prolonged emotional dependency upon family" (Cairns, 2014, qtd. and critiqued in Cook and Cuervo, 2020, p. 7). On this view, precarity's attachments become nothing more than *ad hoc* fictions (Chen, 2018; Gustafson, 2014) or "fruitless" longings for connection at best only semi-realized through online "communities" (Yuan, 2013). This negative recasting of place attachment as an "emotional dependency upon family" has its first roots in the attempt to dislodge rural English farmers from their villages into factories (Hobsbawm, 1968), but those first roots have long since grown into other domains, especially in present-day Human Resources practices (Chen, 2022).

The experiences of precarity communities, often characterized as places where "everyone knows everyone" (Allen and Dillman, 1994), can become overburdened with an unbearable proliferation of social obligations, particularly around women's and children's marital and filial duties (Ellis, 1989; Lerner, 1986; Tompkins, 1932). Rather than an isolation that precludes interaction with others and makes displacement lonely and painful (Smith-Appelson et al., 2021), scarcity societies (especially in cities) can hold out the promise of freedom from those excessive social demands and an accompanying possibility of transactional *anonymity* in day-to-day living with others. In this way, the virtue of "hustling" in the "dog-eat-dog" world of the Metropolis can scorn the friendliness and hospitality of the Village (Chuma, 2025), positioning them as liabilities and its practitioners as suckers.

These ideological shifts—from an understanding of rootedness as social coherence to a negative recasting of it as a liability and character deficiency—shape present-day policies and attitudes. For example, individuals' hypermobility and detachment are valorized as the mark of a flexible, "resilient" employee (Chen, 2022). Adaptation efforts that fail to recognize scarcity societies' baked-in assumption risk pathologizing place-attached (non-mobile) communities rather than building on the strength of this trait as a strength (Farnell, 1994).

These issues, however, have implications that extend well beyond an individual or family-based frame of analysis. As experiences of marginalization and severed place-attachments persist intergenerationally, the dynamics of place-disintegration and stationary displacement can fuel broader political realignments, particularly where feelings of abandonment, cultural erasure, or dispossession are experienced (Centner and Nogueira, 2024; Mehan and Rossi, 2019). While such analysis exceeds the scope of this review, the connections between lived displacement and intergenerational identity formation suggest a provocative avenue for future study.

2.3.3 Alienation and mechanization

While scarcity societies have long made a virtue of uprootedness, anonymity, and mobility, two characteristic experiences of scarcity displacement—alienation and mechanization—are relevant for understanding climate mobilities displacement. These forces demonstrate that urban and technologically saturated settings can be vulnerable to disruptions to lingering remnants of place-based identity, community, and continuity. Residents of scarcity societies can experience a form of ambient and creeping stationary displacement, especially when everyday life becomes so fragmented, mechanized, or virtualized that the potential for meaningful experiences of place evaporates (Sennett, 1977).

Historically, despite the thronging sociability of the City generally (Mumford, 1961), by the twentieth century, it had also become a place of strangers, estranged not just from others but themselves (Camus, 1942; Sennett, 1977). Thus, the celebrated benefit of anonymity in a scarcity society begins to shade into *alienation*, accompanied by a loneliness and meaninglessness in urban, suburban, and cosmopolitan life that seems psycho-sociologically integral (Hawkley and Cacioppo, 2010; Putnam, 2000). Similarly, the celebrated advantages of mobility become the looming threat of an ungrounded, "unbearable lightness of being" that pervades not just social life but one's sense of identity (Dostoevsky, 1968; Kundera, 1984; Riesman et al., 1950; Sennett, 1977). To this alienation is added a "felt loss of a future" (Eagleton, 2015, p. i), born of increasingly uncertain prospects around securing the necessities for making a life in an ever-shifting landscape (Harvey, 1990; Sennett, 1998; Soffia et al., 2021). This can generate the unsettling intuition that "landscape" is more akin to a "seascape," with no solid ground to stand on, leaving one forever treading water (Petersen, 2020).

Pairing with alienation in scarcity societies is the experience of mechanization. At the start of the twentieth century, the electrified Metropolis symbolized and celebrated technological modernity (Heydorn, 2024; Simmel, 2023; Williams, 1989) but also carried the threat that one might become nothing more than a "cog in the machine," one of Čapek's robots, or—more recently—a "brain in a vat" (Čapek, 1920; Helton, 2023; Miller, 1965). The metaphorical shift from understanding the mind as hardware to software (Olazaran, 1993) extends the *mechanical* threat of cog-hood into the *virtual* one of being nothing but a program or simulation (Šokičić, 2023).

This virtualization of experience—where even "in-person" or "face-to-face" interactions are increasingly mediated through digital interfaces—recalls Augé's (2020) concept of *non-places*. These are spaces of transience and anonymity, where individual presence is ephemeralized, and interactions with unknown others rely more on immediate, imaginative projection than on grounded, relational person-attachment. Non-places—such as airports, shopping centers, and hotel lobbies—do not forbid sociability outright but tacitly structure it as instrumental. We enter them strictly for ourselves (and anyone we have brought with us) under a social contract of mutual disregard governed by the property rights of the non-place's owner.

In this sense, they are the opposite of the Commons—a place (not a space) legally owned by no one—and emblematic of the property regimes that have accompanied the spread of scarcity societies (Hardt and Negri, 2000). This is not to deny that profound and affecting experiences can occur in non-places—one might fall in love in a shopping center, share a charming exchange with someone on a moving walkway never to be seen again, or experience heartbreak in a waiting room—because even non-places never completely suppress every aspect of place (Augé, 2020). Instead, it is that non-places are not designed to cultivate the continuity, relation, or shared

accountability characteristic of precarity society but instead foster a simultaneity of presence without recognition, co-occupation without community, and visibility without attachment. Certainly, one can find comfort and pleasure in such transience when it lifts the pressures of social norms and obligations or offers temporary relief from existential loneliness (Hawkley and Cacioppo, 2010; Holt-Lunstad et al., 2015). However, this merely highlights the experiential differences when navigating *non-places* versus completely non-owned *spaces* and the places of the Commons (Kimmerer, 2013).

Our presence within non-places extends the logics of scarcity society's creeping virtualization: we function instrumentally—like software programs—within the operations of the non-place itself, whether as consumers, travelers, or guests. Whatever we intend to extract or gain from non-places, they treat us instrumentally in return—since in non-places, "markers of one's identity serve to prove one's instrumental identity, not social identity" (Air Travel Design, 2025, p. 1; Sharma, 2009). The prevalence of such non-places in scarcity societies makes recognizing and resisting their effects essential, while setting goals to deliberately and consciously restore and support relational person/place-attachments, especially for adaptation and resilience efforts in still largely land-based, traditional, and Indigenous settings.

2.4 Taking stationary displacement personally

This conceptual review does not offer a testable model or predictive framework. Instead, it provides a reorientation grounded in historically and phenomenologically informed interpretation. Taken together, the historically differentiated experiences of displacement described above—around uprootedness and isolation, mobility and anonymity, and alienation and mechanization/virtualization – clarify what is experientially at stake in displacement beyond any material loss or relocation in space. These experiences underscore displacement's threat not only to livelihoods but also the relational, embodied, and intersubjective dimensions of life – especially for precarity societies, whose strengths of identity and resilience are more co-implicated with specific person/place-attachments and collective continuities of practices.

By bringing into historical contrast the ways that scarcity societies tend to prioritize mobility (rootlessness), transactional anonymity (isolation), and individuals' ability to "slot in" to any part of the economic machine (fungibility), this review contributes a reorientation and new ground for conversations around why and how to frame the problems of climate mobilities' involuntary movements and displacements and to imagine adaptive and resilient solutions for them. In particular, the analysis highlights the advantages of drawing on the strengths of precarity society's attachments, continuities, and collective forms of life, rather than overwriting or deprecating them.

Understanding the problem of climate-related displacement in precarity societies as an *uninvited and disorienting rupture of familiar person/place-attachments* can reorient efforts not only to redress losses due to colonization, enslavement, and imperialism in the past but also prevent or mitigate further losses at their source in the present. Echoes of this solution are still audible in scarcity society's calls to rebuild a genuine sense of community, to return to the land or Nature broadly, or to reestablish a relationship with the land that is not exploitatively consumerist in nature (Eisler, 2007; Martínez-Alier et al., 2010; Prilleltensky, 2020; Putnam, 1995). It is not accidental—in this current historical moment—that "mattering" (in the sense of *having meaning*) and a resurgent "New Materialism" are stressing "matter" as a way to re-ground an otherwise virtualized, dematerialized, more-watery-than-solid life-experience in some places around the world (Jackson, 2024; Nag, 2023; Prilleltensky, 2020; Talbayev, 2023; Vervaeke et al., 2017).

Such calls for re-mattering also link to the themes of traumatic rupture, displacement, and dreams of a return home documented in diaspora and exile studies (Jones, 2022; Jones, 2018; Weaver, 2003), echoing scarcity society's traumatic origin in rupture itself. It is neither ironic nor strange then that those traumas—later reframed by urbanites as self-willed moves made for the sake of historical progress—could articulate the idea of the "consumer refugee" as a "self-imposed political exile" (Estevez, 2001; O'Gara, 2000). It is due to this traumatic reframing that otherwise reasonable-sounding calls for degrowth, ecological conservatism, and anti-consumerist modes of life sound like an anti-modernist—even Luddite—advocacy to return to a past already framed as "primitive" (Jackson, 2024). However, what matters most here for understanding displacement is not to conflate scarcity society's problematized relationship with its past and the experiences of present-day precarity societies still undergoing a post-contact, settler-colonial, or neoliberal erosion of a place they have yet to lose fully.

Instead, by recognizing an interpersonally mediated sense of person/place-attached relationship, this discloses a sense of betrayal or individual/collective wrongdoing that can arise when the land leaves. In this way, the sense of being abandoned or having somehow personally or collectively failed the land can manifest overtly—for example, as rising waters that flood an area and render it unusable. But this relational rupture can also appear more indirectly: in diminished yields despite having followed all of the methods and obligations required or through having tried something different; or despite praying for help from a god, spirit, or one's family, living and dead, without receiving any answer or relief; or despite worsening conditions caused by new diseases, genetic mutations, invasive species, harmful weather patterns, or sociopolitical changes at local, regional, and global scales; or simply from sheer exhaustion at having to work harder while still receiving smaller outcomes.

Traditionally, these relational ruptures—seen as wounded relationships with the land, analogous to ruptures between people—have motivated amends-making, usually in socio-psychologically collective forms that exhibit the qualities of aesthetic distancing, structured performativity, and social collaboration (Jones, 2018; Wojtkowiak, 2018). Experiencing the existential threat of climate-related helplessness and despair, the performance of these cooperative practices—as rituals, prayers, or rallies (Robinson et al., 2019)—aim to restore and re-place agency within an individual's/community's locus of control, thereby reducing individual and social stresses and drawing on resilience capacities to motivate proactive steps to address the threat (Sandler and Lakey, 1982).

2.5 Recommendations

The above analyses of historically differentiated experiences of displacement help reframe an understanding of involuntary climate

mobilities' displacement not simply as an external disruption or technical problem but as a breakdown in relationships between people, land, history, and meaning. Here, stationary displacement is not just about being physically stuck in place; it involves an experience of rupture from the land's ongoing, relational invitation to belong.

What becomes clear, then, is that strategies for climate adaptation cannot focus solely on physical safety and material continuity but also on the restoration of relational worlds. Understanding displacement through this lens is not merely about recognizing and supporting cultural practices—as rituals, narratives, and collective acts of care that people already use to metabolize loss and reorient toward meaning—but about understanding and supporting the reasons why those cultural practices exist. This especially means avoiding projections of scarcity society's historical response to its trauma onto precarity societies still actively undergoing erosion, as much to changes from climate as technocratic transformation itself (Bello-Bravo, 2020a). The challenge is neither to return to some lost golden age that likely never existed nor to "freeze" Indigenous practices in some immemorial past (Barcham, 2000; Bendix, 2000). Instead, it involves respecting and supporting person/place-embedded modes of continuity and meaning-making in places that are still present but politically and institutionally underrecognized or under threat of extinction.

In this way, we can complement and refine technocratic and infrastructural adaptation solutions to address stationary displacement, ensuring they resonate with people's lived experiences of place. Accordingly, the four items below provide an interpretive framework for grounding policy in actions that reflect the existential conditions people can face when the land is lost, especially in situations of precarity. Re-understanding resilience, continuity, well-being, and meaning-making through this lens articulates how adaptation strategies can align more deeply with the relational realities of the communities they aim to help.

2.5.1 Reframing infrastructure and community resilience: reframing resilience as relational integrity

Community resilience is often conceptualized in terms of technical capacity or infrastructure durability. This is a necessary physical base. However, for communities living with a sense of place grounded in stewardship rather than extraction, resilience is fundamentally relational—a matter of maintaining coherent, culturally meaningful ways of being in relationship with land, tradition, and others (including other species). Reframing adaptation in this light requires environmental and infrastructural interventions that are not simply "locally appropriate" but epistemologically resonant: they must preserve the lived grammar of a community's relationship with its place. When adaptation is interpreted as a continuation of identity—rather than its disruption—it becomes not merely tolerable but potentially empowering. This reframing also foregrounds interpretive legitimacy: interventions succeed not only because they function technically but also because they make sense within the worldview of those asked to live with them. They build on local knowledge, practice, and identity rather than supplant them (Bello-Bravo, 2020a; Bello-Bravo et al., 2024; Desai, 2017). This invites thinking not only about how infrastructural and resilience adaptations are locally feasible but also about how they are integrated into people's cultural lives.

2.5.2 Cultural programs and continuity: reframing adaptive capacity as cultural continuity

Climate displacement is often framed as a logistical challenge to be managed through relocation or behavioral change. This view overlooks the fact that social forms—such as communal traditions, shared narratives, and intergenerational roles—are themselves forms of knowledge and that cultural continuity is not a luxury but a fundamental mechanism of adaptation. In this sense, resilience is not only a matter of surviving change but also of knowing how to remain recognizable to oneself and one's community during times of change. Cultural practices are not "preserved" in a museum sense (Bendix, 2000) but are sustained through living participation. The disintegration of cultural cohesion is not a side-effect of displacement; it is displacement in a socially experienced form. Recognizing social continuity as the primary medium of sustainability, rather than a dependent variable, reframes what interventions should aim to protect.

2.5.3 Mental health and social support systems: centering interdependence in mental health and wellbeing frameworks

Technocratic approaches to psychosocial support often assume atomized individuals and frame wellness as the outcome of private intervention. However, the experience of stationary displacement disrupts not just individual psychology but also the shared field of meaning in which individuals locate their identity and agency. Restoring well-being, then, cannot be separated from restoring community.

This conceptual reframing positions mental health not only as an internal state but also as an interrelational capacity—the ability to remain in a co-regulating connection with others and with the world. Traditional forms of social support are not merely cultural artifacts; they are ontological infrastructures that enable individuals to be a person in a particular place. Rather than importing models of care, this reframing suggests attending first to how care is already understood, practiced, and valued in a community's own terms, even if they run contrary to a sense of evidence-based treatment (Horwitz et al., 2017).

2.5.4 Arts and meaning-making in adaptation: understanding aesthetic practices as existential technologies

Artistic expression can sometimes be treated as ancillary or optional in terms of achieving adaptation—as an expressive flourish to be brought in once the more "foundational" or "basic" work of technical adjustment has occurred. While an emphasis on people's physical ground of being is indispensable, we should also recall that the Sustainable Development Goals to eliminate poverty and hunger, and ensure good health, safe drinking water, clean air, access to energy, bodily safety, and gender autonomy all rest on a mandate to ensure the most basic and foundational need for human dignity (United Nations, 2016); achieving that goal is ultimately why people must also be fed, housed, clothed, in good health, and safe.

The adage tells us that *people do not live by bread alone*; indeed, they must also experience a meaningful existence (Frankl, 1946). In this regard, art-making, aesthetic practices, and storytelling are among our species' oldest world-making and sense-making technologies (Dissanayake, 2015; Zics, 2011). Such practices render places meaningful, relationships visible, and suffering bearable. In communities threatened by the land leaving, the arts function not merely as representations of culture but as ritual enactments of

belonging, dramatizing what it means to stay and why staying matters. Nik (2022) explicitly highlights the social responsibility of the artist and the critical function of art in confronting environmental displacement, as seen during Hurricane Katrina.

The question "why do we willingly remain here?" is not answered solely by the locally physical means of support but also—if not more fundamentally—by material and immaterial stories, dances, images, songs, and other aesthetically meaningful experiences that orient people existentially in the places where they live. Recognizing aesthetic practices as a primary mode of emplacement—a way of attaching or re-attaching to self, place, and others—recasts art as a central, not supplemental, dimension of adaptation. This sense-making need not be classically formal, exquisitely executed, or an intellectually sophisticated engagement with the terms of one's world (Suttner, 2005): a child's scribble, a witnessing photograph, or a line of graffiti poetry on a ruined wall all can draw on art's existentially orientation meaning-making as communities face threats of displacement. Dissanayake (2003) notes that "humans sometimes are not content to leave ordinary reality alone" (p. 10), linking this impulse to a species-defining trait—one practiced by our ancestors who first marked their bodies by changing their hair, tattooing their skin, or changed their environment by outlining their Paleolithic handprints on cave walls. The evolutionary depth of this gesture also explains why people can feel displaced without moving when their sources of meaning are eroded or destroyed, compelling them, if they can, to depart and seek someplace else where meaning is felt again.

3 Conclusion

Addressing climate mobilities in light of involuntary stationary displacement offers a paradigm shift from (sometimes politically reactive or xenophobic) relocation policies in places where climate refugees would arrive to proactive, resilience-building strategies that empower communities not to feel compelled to migrate in place. Recognizing that people form strong attachments to land, identity, and community, this review calls for culturally congruent policies that place the social pillar of sustainability on an equal footing with the economic and environmental pillars, especially when people face climate change. Reframing displacement as not only a physical but also a relational breakage, this complements and refines existing efforts and agendas to support communities through (1) localized, adaptable interventions, (2) cultural preservation and continuity, (3) community well-being initiatives aligned with community values and practices, and (4) the existential meaning-making capacity of the Arts to counter the despair and existential threat of involuntary climate mobility. This conceptual reframing can serve as a bridge between human-centered understandings of place and the technocratic frameworks that currently predominate in resilience planning, offering a shared language for genuinely integrated adaptation strategies.

Ultimately, these recommendations require continuity, resilience, and the enhancement of local communities, cultures, and agency. Providing accessible support for community-led adaptation, sustaining place-based traditions, and recognizing stationary displacement as a distinct category within climate policy can help mitigate the destabilizing effects of environmental change. By empowering communities to maintain their continuities and identities, policymakers and organizations can foster sustainable, long-term solutions that honor the continuities that make people's lives livable and worth remaining where they are.

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