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# Neoliberalism, Climate Change, and Displaced and Homeless Populations: Exploring Interactions Through Case Studies

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## Abstract

There is a growing attention to neoliberal policies and practices as they relate to climate change and housing within academic literature. However, the combined effects of neoliberal political and economic decisions on the interaction between climate change and displaced and homeless populations have not been substantially explored. In this paper, we identify and focus on three key re-emerging themes prevalent within neoliberal discourses: economic considerations, individualization, and short-termism. To examine the intersecting influence of climate change and these themes on vulnerable populations, the following case studies are discussed: displaced populations in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, refugees in Kenya, and tiny homes

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programs in the U.S. and Canada. The diversified contexts and levels of analysis allow for more nuanced understanding of the variety of ways in which neoliberal influences and climate-induced events impact the most vulnerable populations. We argue for the need to change the framing of these issues, which are often presented in neoliberal terms and are driven by neoliberal logic. We then present potential avenues for resolving the identified issues, such as through systemic changes, development of long-term solutions, and focusing on community-based adaptation (CBA) programs.

**Keywords**
climate change, neoliberalism, homelessness, displaced populations, migration, refugees

## Personal Reflexive Statement

All members of this collaboration have been involved in work related to marginalized and vulnerable communities. Although diverging in specific areas of focus, there is a uniting factor: understanding that negative impacts of various kinds, such as climatic events and neoliberal policies, tend to have more pronounced effects on the vulnerable populations. Thus, it is important to bring attention to the vulnerable communities, understand the influences of contemporary contexts, and propose ways to address the existing issues. Inherently, vulnerable communities lack resources, which brings us to the topic of political and economic structures and, therefore, to neoliberalism. At the same time, the impacts of the changing natural environment are increasingly dangerous due to climate change. Thus, at the intersection of neoliberalism and climate change, we find communities that are experiencing the worst consequences of failing policies and of the changing climate.

## Introduction

Climate change is a global issue that impacts "natural and human systems on all continents and across the oceans" (Pachauri and Meyer 2014:47). The consequences for human populations are significant and diverse, including changing weather conditions, physical and mental health risks, and an array of health determinants implications. These consequences are more pronounced for vulnerable populations, especially for those facing intersecting forms of discrimination and marginalization, such as women, children, and Indigenous populations. Homelessness and extreme poverty are the key factors for climate change-induced displacement as well. Preparing to and recovering from climatic events requires resources that these populations lack access to (Bezgrebelna et al. 2021; Kidd, Greco, and McKenzie 2020). Further, those living in extreme poverty may not have the financial means to relocate, thus exacerbating the consequences experienced by trapped populations. These problems are fundamentally

linked to environmental injustice, whereby disadvantaged groups are also more susceptible when exposed to climatic events (Schlosberg and Collins 2014).

The increasing impacts of climate change are exacerbated by the sociopolitical decisions guided by neoliberal logic. In neoliberal discussions, there is a tendency to ignore the differential influence exerted on the most vulnerable populations who suffer the most from the changing climate (Parr 2015). Neoliberalism, in line with capitalism, is characterized by prioritizing the generation of profit. What differentiates neoliberalism is the increasing participation and influence of corporations in political and economic spheres, with a focus on privatization, deregulation, and marketization of public services (Cahill et al. 2018). Thus, in the economic sphere, the interests of corporations and businesses are prioritized as they are seen as drivers of the economy, and, correspondingly, in the political sphere, the state regulations are portrayed as unnecessarily impeding economic prosperity (Harvey 2005). Consequently, political structures enable corporations to produce more greenhouse gases (e.g., methane and carbon dioxide), which significantly contributes to climate change. Further, the neoliberal logic leads to financialization of daily life, whereby decision-making in various spheres of life should be informed by financial interests (Martin 2002). Finally, under neoliberalism, there is a tendency to hold individuals responsible for all aspects of their lives irrespective of the larger social and political issues outside of their control (Sugarman 2015).

In order to explore the outcomes experienced by the most vulnerable populations, especially displaced populations and those experiencing homelessness, the impacts of climate change and of neoliberal policies and practices need to be considered in conjunction. First, one of the consequences of the degrading environmental conditions due to climate change is displacement, which contributes to increasing numbers of refugees. Far from taking responsibility for the changing climate and for the devastating effects it has brought to the most vulnerable populations, the neoliberal state scapegoats climate refugees as national security threats to be warded off (Farber and Schlegel 2017). There is indication of a strong relationship between endorsing neoliberal views and reduced support for asylum-seekers (Dutt and Kofeldt 2019). However, it should be noted that it is not only the interaction between neoliberalism and climate change that leads to increasing numbers of refugees, but also concurrent neoliberal influences on the socioeconomic and political conditions that lead to increased vulnerability (Baldwin 2014). Another portrayal that is common within neoliberal discourses is the emphasis on individual choice. Proponents argue that climate-induced migration is undertaken by those wishing to improve their living conditions and it is a sign of their resilience, rather than a forced action aimed at escaping from a degraded environment or a natural disaster (Farber and Schlegel 2017; Felli and Castree 2012; Methmann and Oels 2015). Thus, neoliberal logic presents a set of beliefs that displace the responsibility onto climate change migrants themselves.

Second, it has been well-established that climate change and homelessness are socially produced crises (Beck and Twiss 2018; Tierney 2019). Just as climate change is a result of economic and political processes that prioritize extraction, exploitation, and

profit over the environment and public health, homelessness is also a product of social, economic, and political policies that effectively make communities vulnerable. For example, in the US, gentrification is one of the most prominent drivers of homelessness, disproportionately affecting minority groups (Brynn 2019). Neoliberalism is a common thread connecting these intersecting crises. Discourse reflecting neoliberal ideology justifies climate change and homelessness as necessary outcomes of 'development' and 'progress' by both centering the health of the market over the well-being of individuals and communities and compartmentalizing homelessness as being the result of individual actions. These framings, particularly in the case of homelessness, not only distract from addressing the actual root causes of such precarity but also justify its existence.

Finally, it should be noted that climate change and neoliberalism are not the only drivers of displacement, with another prominent cause being, for example, violent conflicts (Krause and Segadlo 2021). While this phenomenon is complex, there is arguably value in bringing a focus upon climate change and neoliberalism as two important systemic considerations. Thus, in this paper, we concentrate on the influence of neoliberalism on the intersection between vulnerability (explored via the two key themes of displacement and homelessness) and climate change. The guiding research question is: What are the combined effects of neoliberal policies on the interaction between climate change and vulnerable populations globally? We proceed by presenting the framework that was developed to guide the analysis of the case studies. In the following sections, the framework is applied to our case studies. Through contextually diverse case studies, we illustrate the exacerbated consequences of neoliberal policies and practices for the vulnerable populations, who tend to be the least protected and who require support. Our case studies contribute to the understanding of the link between neoliberalism and vulnerability and climate change by exploring and highlighting how this link functions in different contexts and across different vulnerable populations around the world. We conclude by synthesizing and drawing overarching conclusions based on the case studies and presenting directions for alternative approaches.

## Framework

Following Hartley (2004), "researchers may enter the case study organization with clear propositions to examine" (p. 324). Thus, the present framework was developed as a theoretical guide that can help to identify and examine prevalent issues that arise specifically as a result of neoliberal policies. We would like to emphasize that we do not argue that neoliberalism is the sole causal factor that underpins climate change. Rather, in this paper, we focus specifically on the relationship between neoliberal ideologies and their influence on climate change and the combined effects on marginalized populations globally.

The influence of neoliberalism on climate change (Ciplet and Roberts 2017; Fremstad and Paul 2022; Lin 2020; Shrubsole 2015) and on vulnerable populations

(including the homeless (Clarke and Parsell 2020; Johnstone, Lee, and Connelly 2017; Klodawsky, Aubry, and Farrell 2006) and migrants (Davison and Shire 2015; Kóczé 2018; Popke 2011) has been extensively discussed in the literature. However, to our knowledge, the combined effects of neoliberalism and the climate change have not been substantially explored. We identified three key overarching and interrelated themes: generation of profit, individualization, and short-termism. Despite prevention and mitigation efforts being the most economically sound approaches both in addressing climate change (Shrubsole 2015) and homelessness issues (Evans, Sullivan, and Wallskog 2016), the neoliberal themes of individualization and short-termism interfere with the development and implementation of prevention-oriented programs.

First, individualization leads to responsibility lying with the individual. In terms of climate change, this is evidenced by the emphasis on the efforts of each person (Andrew, Kaidonis, and Andrew 2010). As to homelessness, extreme poverty, and migration, there is a tendency to believe that people get what they deserve with no regard to the systemic issues (Benatar, Upshur, and Gill 2018). Second, under neoliberalism, there is a need to show results as quickly as possible, diverging the focus to short-term solutions. As can be seen with climate change, there are several long-term goals, such as reaching nearly emission-free economy by the end of the century, that must be met in order for climate change prevention efforts to work (Hasselmann et al. 2003). However, setting long-term goals and meeting them may encompass economic costs that appear more substantial than the costs associated with short-term programs, including implementing low-cost mitigation technologies such as energy efficiency in industry or public sectors (Hasselmann et al. 2003), resulting in preferences being given to short-term responses. When it comes to homelessness-related issues, for example, short-termism means a spur of pilot projects that aim to resolve the issue immediately on the streets, mostly without any attempts to address the circumstances that lead to homelessness in the first place (Johnstone et al. 2017).

To explore the intersecting influence of neoliberalism on climate change and on vulnerable populations, we present case studies examining this intersection on different levels: migration at regional level by focusing on the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, subpopulation level by discussing refugee situation in Kenya as well as a local program level by examining the tiny homes program in the U.S. and Canada. These case studies illustrate the compounded effects of the neoliberal approaches experienced by vulnerable populations and highlight the importance of understanding the interplay between neoliberalism, climate change, and vulnerability as it is manifested in different contexts globally.

## Situating the Case Studies

It is important to emphasize that this paper does not follow the conventional format of illustrative or comparative case studies. We relied on diverse purposive case selection as a method for including diverse perspectives on the chosen subject (Seawright and Gerring 2008). In diverse case selection, two or more cases are chosen with the aim of

highlighting the full range of variation in the manifestation of the phenomenon explored (Gerring 2008). Diverse case selection is thus purposive by definition. Our targeted case selection includes cases chosen for their potential to provide valuable insights and determined through our collective judgment and experience.

Further, the diversity produced by the differences in the scale, nature, and context of the three locations being examined allows for a more nuanced perspective on how neoliberal influences manifest, creating opportunities for a more in-depth critique. As Bruff (2021) argues, juxtaposing issues produced by capitalist practices can provide alternate perspectives on the cases being studied as well as extend beyond them. The selection of these three dissimilar but informative case studies in the frame of juxtaposition draws from the fields of ethnography and anthropology (Caldeira 2017). The differences between our case studies are utilized to create a diverse range of examples that demonstrate how people experience and live under neoliberalism. We acknowledge and embrace Caldeira's (2017) emphasis on the importance of context and diversity in understanding complex social phenomena. In doing so, we recognize the potential risks of oversimplifying or minimizing the intricate realities of the three distinct cases that we are exploring. Thus, instead of attempting to reduce these empirical complexities and nuances, we aim to delve deeply into the lived experiences and political implications of neoliberalism in each case study. Finally, by relying on causal narrative approach, frequently used as in informal technique in comparative historical analysis, we contextualize specific events within each case study to establish the underlying patterns (Mahoney 2014).

## Case Study: Displaced Populations in the MENA Region with a Focus on Employment Considerations

As well as being the largest source of refugees worldwide, the MENA region is host to the world's fastest growing population of displaced peoples. The region accounts for 6 percent of the global population but contributes 25 percent of those defined by the UN Refugee Agency as 'populations of concern', which includes refugees, internally displaced persons, asylum seekers and stateless persons (McNatt 2020). It is likely to be a hotspot of future climate migration due to its composition of socioeconomic, political, demographic, and environmental conditions (Sofuoğlu and Ay 2020). Issues specific to the region, such as, heavy water stress and continued conflict and political instability, may further exacerbate climate risks (Richardson et al. 2021). Worsening water stress and food security were also considered to be contributing factors towards the triggering of the Arab Spring (Gleick 2014). Therefore, climate-related pressures exacerbate the existing displacement and migration trends. Strong population growth and high rates of rural-to-urban migration in parts of the region will also lead to additional challenges for housing security.

Due to its vast oil and gas reserves, many countries in the MENA region have historically subsidized food, energy, and medical services for their citizens, allowing little room for the private sector to thrive (McKee et al. 2017). However, this has

resulted in a lack of diversification of economies and high reliance on imported goods and services. As Government benefits reduce in a post-fossil fuel future, those countries that pursue a neoliberal approach to employment practices will therefore put greater pressures on the individual for self-sufficiency in a region where skills shortages and youth unemployment are already high. This will lead to greater employment precarity and increase existing health inequalities in countries without a welfare state and sufficient social support. As temperatures continue to rise and rainfall reduce (Ntoumos et al. 2020) in the region, rural livelihoods may become increasingly difficult, leading to greater urbanization and demand for housing. It is projected that 70 percent of the MENA population will be living in cities by 2050 (Diab, El Shaarawy, and Yousry 2021). Climate change will act as a threat multiplier to the main drivers of urbanization such as economic migrants, rural-to-urban migration, and displacement due to conflict (Serageldin, Vigier, and Larsen 2014). Countries in the Gulf region are already heavily urbanized and illustrate the dangers of high rates of urbanization not being matched by availability of services and affordable housing.

Neoliberalism also works to heighten socio-economic inequalities amongst local populations. Daher (2013) presents a case study of urban development in the city of Amman, Jordan. As a result of neoliberalism-based policies, the country is gradually reducing state responsibility for fragile sectors such as social housing, health care, and education, and is instead favoring joint enterprises with multinational corporations as part of a wider program of privatization measures. One consequence for Amman is the advancement of low-income housing projects which work to relocate the poorest peoples to the outskirts of the city, such as to Jizza and Sahab, which lack adequate infrastructure and are often remote from amenities and essential services.

Further, intraregional inequalities also appear to be increasing; the Persian Gulf countries are some of the richest in the world and attract skilled workers from other parts of the region, leading to a brain drain that can impede economic development in source countries (Althani 2012). However, employment in the host countries can also be precarious since non-nationals do not have the same rights as nationals. A neoliberal logic that emphasizes such short-term employment practices with relatively little pan-regional coordination on economic policies and public health has led to health inequalities across the region that heighten vulnerability to climate impacts (Negev et al. 2021). Migrant workers in such countries tend to live in informal settlements, often without basic amenities such as running water. This can increase urban health inequalities; migrants who are homeless or have housing precarity may have limited access to health and social services (Kaur et al. 2021). Construction workers and other laborers in Gulf countries are particularly vulnerable to occupational heat stress as they are often required to work in extreme heat conditions without access to air-conditioned environments or other health protection measures (Pradhan et al. 2019). Although thermal safety limits may exist in workplaces, migrants of low socio-economic status and in precarious employment may be willing to drive themselves beyond safe limits, often without the protection of local labor laws due to the way that migrant workers are sponsored (Lucas, Epstein, and Kjellstrom 2014). Many countries in the MENA region

have undergone enormous socio-economic, demographic, cultural, and political changes since the era of decolonization in the middle of the last century and the rise of neoliberal capitalism in recent decades. This model of development has led to a widening of socio-economic inequalities which are being further exacerbated by the climate crisis. Neoliberal policies have further enriched the ruling classes (Joya 2013) and are described by some as being responsible for the Arab Spring (Da'na 2019).

In this multifaceted landscape, the imperative to confront the intertwined issues of climate change, urbanization, and labor migration gains even greater urgency. The plight of migrant workers, exposed to the brunt of housing instability and urban health disparities, serves as a stark reminder of the profound repercussions of unfettered neoliberal policies, rooted in individualism, driven by short-term gains, and prioritizing profit generation.

## Case Study: Refugees in Kenya

With over 540,000 registered refugees and asylum-seekers (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 2021), Kenya remains one of the largest refugee host countries in Africa. Most refugees are of Somalian origin (53 percent), followed by Sudanese (25 percent) and Congolese (9 percent). While most refugees live in the Dadaab and Kakuma camps, some (16 percent) live in urban areas, mainly in Nairobi or, more precisely, on the outskirts of the city in the Kibera slum – the largest informal settlement in Africa (Scott et al. 2017). Most refugees face issues with housing, overcrowding, food insecurity, and access to health care. Somali refugees, however, are also facing increased violence due to securitization policies adopted by the government of Kenya. Specifically, in 2016, the Dadaab camp (mostly hosting Somali refugees) was said to be demolished due to increasing terrorist-related activities. As a result, many of the refugees are facing discrimination and refoulement (Mwangi 2019). Further, across Kenya, climate change-related crises lead to increased levels of heat, drought, flooding, scarcity of food, and climate-related health diseases. Diminishing levels of water supplies, diminishing agricultural yields, health risks in urban centers and cities, erosion, and rise in sea-level in coastal regions are some of the greatest concerns. Disproportionate flash rains, flood, and drought has led to insufficient food supply and vulnerability to infectious diseases (Ramin and Svoboda 2009). Consequently, the diverse climatic events have a more devastating impact on refugees due to the vulnerable housing conditions and more limited access to resources.

Some of the key influences on policy development in Kenya are directly resulting from the structural adjustment programs (SAPs), introduced in the 1980s and 1990s. SAPs meant that international funding depended on the willingness of the government to undergo macroeconomic changes (Rono 2002). These changes, mostly guided by neoliberal economic model, resulted in exacerbation of inequality as well as increased vulnerability and poverty through reduction of the welfare programs, displacement of local products with imported goods, and limited wage increases and government subsidies. Considering the worsening economic situation, funding for refugees, as non-

citizens, was one of the first to be affected (Bhagat 2020). Currently, as it relates to the refugees, neoliberal influences in Kenya are most evidenced in the themes of generation of profit and individual responsibility. For example, as Bhagat (2020) indicates, refugees are permitted to get business licenses, for which they pay to the government of Kenya. They are able to do so through grants and, increasingly, microfinancing. For many, microfinancing leads to unrepayable debts if businesses fail (Bhagat 2020). To address this issue, some refugees have to take voluntary repatriation, which is accompanied by a small grant. Thus, microfinancing ensures that refugees can generate profit both for the government of Kenya and for private companies investing in microfinancing.

Further, the neoliberal theme of individual responsibility is most evident in self-reliance rhetoric prevalent in dealing with the poor in general and with refugees in particular. Since refugees do not have a legal status that would allow them to work in Kenya, their access to housing is limited. Housing microfinance is increasingly marketed as a way out of poverty for Kenya, again making the poor a source of profit rather than introducing structural supports through welfare programs (Bhagat 2021). However, for refugees, even this resource is mostly unavailable due to their lack of citizenship, which would allow to legally own the housing. Increasingly, the non-governmental organizations and the government of Kenya are subscribing to the neoliberal logic, whereby refugees should not be helped through grants, but instead should become independent and self-reliant. As refugees are unable to achieve self-reliance through work, the only recourse they have is to become entrepreneurs, for which they can receive micro-loans upon meeting certain conditions (e.g., going through business training and outlining their business plan).

Similarly, the individualization is seen to be the primary neoliberal narrative when it comes to climate change-related issues. Specifically, under neoliberalism, climate migration is often viewed as an adaptation strategy implemented by individuals to enhance their living conditions, rather than the forced displacement experienced by the most marginalized groups (Faber and Schlegel 2017). Furthermore, instead of addressing the need for protection from climatic events at the structural level, the responsibility for being resilient to climate change is shifted towards individuals (Mikulewicz and Taylor 2020). At the same time, the poorest populations do not have access to the necessary resources to be independent and resilient when facing climatic events. In Kenya, as refugees have the lowest status and least protections, their ability to withstand climate-induced hazards is limited, resulting in poor physical and mental health outcomes (Lindvall et al. 2020).

Coupled with the unprecedented political crisis currently underway in Kenya, fostered by SAPs, climate change impact will exacerbate economic inequality and substantial poverty already experienced today (Ndiritu and Muricho 2021). These issues will be magnified for refugees as one of the most vulnerable groups in Kenya. As climatic events will happen more frequently and more severely, forced migration will increase and will lead to negative health and mental health outcomes (Shultz et al. 2019). Further, putting the pressure on refugees for accessing the shelter and other

necessities of life (e.g., health care) via self-reliance within the neoliberal system is convenient for the local government in the short-term. It allows to redirect resources to other needs. In the long-term, however, SAPs, rolled out under neoliberalism, widen the inequality gap, and microfinancing programs, aimed at enhancing self-reliance of the refugees, indebt them (Bhagat 2021). Thus, the neoliberal idea of providing credit to the refugees, instead of secure housing and access to work, displaces the responsibility for refugee welfare on the refugees themselves.

There are exceptionally large numbers of refugees in Kenya who are not only struggling for food, shelter, and clothing but are also struggling with the devastating impacts of climate change. Climate change compounds existing challenges forrefugees at a time when they seek to re-establish a home, identity, and juggling the tasks of daily living in a foreign land. This contributes to their post-migration trauma contributing to their poor socioeconomic conditions and mental health. Some of the socioeconomic challenges include, but are not limited to, deplorable housing with many living in make-shift tents, lack of employment and education options due to lack of citizenship, communication barriers due to mixed-cultures, abandonment of cultural languages, values, traditions, and heritage as many refugees remain in Kenya's camps for generations (Jaji 2012). Additively, these challenges are compounded by escalating threats of climate change in Kenya (Bryan et al. 2013), and the neoliberal turn in the government policies ensures that refugees are increasingly held responsible for their own well-being.

## Case Study: Big Questions About Climate Change, Vulnerability, and Tiny Homes for People Experiencing Homelessness

The unique perspectives on issues of homelessness, housing precarity, and climate change presented here are largely derived from disaster vulnerability research. Homelessness and disaster vulnerability are approached through critical, political economic lenses which illuminate how vulnerability to disaster is socially produced and reproduced (Blaikie et al. 1994; Thomas, Jang, and Scandlyn 2020). Such a perspective demands exploring how perhaps well-meaning 'solutions' to homelessness may increase vulnerability and further marginalize people who are already disproportionately burdened by the effects of the housing and climate crises. Some 'solutions' to homelessness, as others have argued, are temporary and insufficient policy responses – noting that what is really needed is safe, affordable, and stable housing (Beck and Twiss 2018; Vale et al. 2014). Governments and corporate interests continue to advance neoliberal 'solutions' to these problems despite the fact that neoliberal ideology is largely to blame for exacerbating our current climate and housing crisis, especially evident in climate inaction (Fremstad and Paul 2022) and failures of fair housing initiatives (Silverman and Patterson 2012). In recent years, tiny homes have emerged as a novel solution to homelessness in the United States and Canada (Alexander 2020; Evans 2020; 2021; Johnson 2018; Seaquist, Bramhandkar, and Santana-Frosen 2016;

Wong et al. 2020). Tiny home villages are perceived to have advantages over traditional homeless shelters because they are smaller and can be quickly constructed (Johnson 2018). Additionally, tiny home villages may have lower upfront and operational costs, and tiny homes can potentially be relocated according to need (Culhane 1992). On a more human-level, tiny homes may provide people experiencing homeless with more privacy and autonomy than traditional forms of congregate sheltering (Johnson 2018). However, tiny homes are a clear example of neoliberalism within the homeless service provision landscape that may increase climate risk and disaster vulnerability among people experiencing homelessness. In this case study, it is explored how tiny homes represent myopic neoliberal policy responses and the questions about the implementation of tiny home programs for the homeless and examine the long-term safety of tiny homes in relation to climate change.

Simply stated, tiny homes are an example of neoliberalism because they are a temporary solution that fails to address the root causes of homelessness which in North America are commodified housing and income inequality (O'Regan, Gould Ellen, and House 2021). Additionally, because tiny homes are meant to house one person at a time, they represent a further individualization of service delivery. This may provide those housed in tiny homes more privacy and autonomy compared to traditional congregate shelters. However, atomized approaches to service delivery further obscure the social origins of the housing crisis. Indeed, the paradox of homeless services is the focus on providing individual assistance to a systemic problem. While the provision of services catering to individual needs is beneficial, larger issues must also be addressed. For example, Wong et al. (2020) found that, to be beneficial, tiny homes villages must address a diverse set of problems in addition to housing, such as ensure public support, acquire adequate funding with few restrictions, and be able to build a strong sense of community. However, not many tiny homes programs succeed in addressing these problems. Tiny homes also do not contribute to the fundamental issues leading to the homelessness crisis in the first place. In addition to being temporary and individualized solutions, tiny home villages divert public money to private interests within the growing Tiny Home Industry. For example, in the US the average tiny home village for people experiencing homelessness has 35 units, each unit is roughly 205 $ft^2$ (Evans 2020). On average, the typical tiny home costs $21,160 to construct, however prices ranged from $1,200 to $190,632 (Evans 2020). Therefore, tiny home villages for the homeless link social services to industry profits in the initial sale of units, transportation and/or construction of units, and ongoing maintenance and replacement. Additionally, tiny home villages for people experiencing homelessness may provide free advertising for tiny home developers. It is true that traditional congregate housing also diverts public money to private interests. However, private citizens are rarely in the position to build congregate housing whereas tiny homes are a burgeoning consumer industry.

Tiny homes may provide more safety than sleeping on the streets or in encampments and villages may be more appealing than traditional forms of congregate sheltering. However, tiny homes, like traditional shelters, may not solve existing service delivery challenges. To date, Evans (2020) provides the only systemic inventory of tiny homes

in the United States. As of July 2019, there were at least 115 tiny home villages in various stages of development for people experiencing homelessness in the United States (Evans 2020). Among these, only 34 were operational, 57 were in development, 12 had been abandoned, and 12 projects had an unknown status (Evans 2020). As with traditional congregate sheltering, who qualifies for shelter in tiny home villages must be interrogated. Historically, shelters have excluded individuals who use alcohol or other drugs, transgender, gender-expansive and lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer people, and individuals with conviction histories – just to name a few examples (Tsemberis, Gulcur, and Nakae 2004). Evans (2020) suggests that many villages in the US accept individuals with criminal histories. However, many of these communities are reserved for special populations like veterans or individuals with disabilities (Evans 2020). Past research has demonstrated that shelter policies around substance use, 'lights out', and faith-based interventions may prevent people experiencing homelessness from considering shelters for service for various reasons (e.g., those working night shifts, those with pets, those with mental health conditions that may be exacerbated in congregate settings) (Sznajder-Murray and Slesnick 2011; Thompson et al. 2006; Settembrino 2017). Therefore, it is plausible that village policies may also discourage individuals from accessing these services. Evans (2020) documents that a small proportion of villages are faith-based but does not provide information on village policies.

Beyond examining who is welcome, it must also be considered how long individuals are allowed to stay in tiny home communities. According to Evans (2020) most tiny home villages in the US are based on a temporary housing model which supports arguments made here about neoliberalization of services for those experiencing housing precarity. However, it is possible that such communities are used as a bridge until long-term housing solutions are identified. In temporary communities, it should be asked, what are the conditions to remain housed in a particular village? What happens to people who no longer meet those conditions? Furthermore, who develops and enforces these conditions? Ultimately, excluding someone from housing because of perceived moral failings is not much different from denying shelter to those who cannot pay for it. Therefore, tiny home communities should be led by and for people experiencing homelessness rather than extending the existing processes of institutionalized homeless services into new arenas. Aside from questions about service delivery, both tiny homes and traditional congregate shelters face significant challenges related to climate change.

As small, and often portable structures, tiny homes may be extremely vulnerable to the effects of climate change and severe weather. Evans' (2020) inventories documented operational villages in Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Michigan, Missouri, Nevada, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, South Carolina, Texas, and Washington. Each of these states has a unique hazard risk profile that must be critically examined when developing tiny home communities for people experiencing homelessness. For example, the Resilient Design Institute has developed tiny homes specifically for colder climates (Wilson 2018). However, tiny homes may face extreme risk to hurricanes, tornadoes, flash flooding, and wildfires. These hazards require that

villages must include hardened and/or elevated facilities to keep residents safe during spontaneous events like tornadoes or flooding. Moreover, villages will also need comprehensive communication and evacuation plans that include transportation, shelter, and provision of food, clothing, and medical care during major events such as wildfires or hurricanes. To be clear, this is an issue for both traditional congregate shelters and tiny home villages. However, existing research suggests that many homeless servicing organizations lack the comprehensive disaster plans described above and often have limited engagement with local emergency managers (Gin et al. 2016; Gin et al. 2021; Vickery 2019). Without such plans, tiny home villages may be unprepared to meet resident needs during disasters. Worse yet, they may inadvertently place residents at extreme risk to injury or death. Even with hardened facilities and plans in place, villages may experience catastrophic damage to both personal and community property during extreme events. Additionally, such events may result in long-term displacement of residents who may not qualify for federal disaster assistance or have renters' or homeowners' insurance policies to fall back on. This 'solution' counters narratives that call for individuals and communities to be resilient so as to not be reliant on the state for help. However, by creating potentially vulnerable structures, the likelihood of the need for state intervention following disasters and extreme events is therefore increased. Ultimately, without comprehensive disaster planning, tiny homes may be inappropriate long-term housing solutions in locations at risk to fires, flooding, tornadoes, or hurricanes all of which will be more frequent and severe due to climate change.

To summarize, tiny homes for people experiencing homelessness represent further neoliberalization of homeless services because they are temporary solutions that further atomize service delivery, divert public money to private interests, and ultimately fail to address the root causes of homelessness. Furthermore, the long-term safety and sustainability of tiny home villages are challenged as the climate crisis intensifies. Both homelessness and climate change represent evolving crises which require immediate action as well as long-term planning. All humans deserve the dignity of safe and secure housing, and temporary housing is often the only immediate option available. Considering that many people experiencing homelessness may 'go it alone' in isolated campsites, which are equally vulnerable to a range of climate hazards, tiny home villages may prove to be a better option (Dee Southard 1997; Settembrino 2017; Tory 2021). Especially if those villages provide access to transportation, as well as social, medical, and mental health services (Evans 2020).

## Discussion

The neoliberal influence is implicated in the deterioration of environmental conditions and in the reduced social and economic supports available for vulnerable populations. Although in different parts of the world these consequences may result in different problems, as is seen through the case studies presented, there are three prominent common factors between them. First, prioritizing generation of profit without

consideration of the implications for the vulnerable populations effected and, frequently, presenting such economic schemes as beneficial for the populations involved. Second, individualization, especially in the form of the displacement of responsibility to the most vulnerable and least protected populations. Third, short-termism, whereby practices that can produce quick results are preferred to more permanent solutions that would require long-term planning and investment. In the MENA region, this means unprecedented numbers of displaced populations, diminished employment opportunities, and growing inequalities. In Kenya, the entrepreneurial turn for the refugees to lift themselves out of their conditions, while generating profit for those claiming to provide help. In the U.S., it is seen in the tiny homes program, where the neoliberal response strategy masks the problem rather than addressing the root causes and attempting to find long-term solutions to homelessness.

Climate change, thus, induces increased migration and exacerbates homelessness among local populations and among the refugees and worsens the state of poverty and inequality (Bezgrebelna et al. 2021; Kaczan and Orgill-Meyer 2019). The projected effect of climate change, and especially the natural disasters, will have serious ramification on the efforts made in the past decades to support migrants, to lift refugees out of poverty, and to address homelessness (Balsari, Dresser, and Leaning 2020). It is therefore prudent to understand the root of economic inequality, exacerbated by neoliberal policies, among the vulnerable populations in the context of climate change. Further, the large-scale displacements and increases in homelessness will have a direct impact on over-exploitation of rural natural resources due to poverty, over-population, non-existence of legal right policies and property rights in some parts of the world, and inapt management.

However, as more people are displaced by violent conflict, economic conditions, rising tides, fires, and hurricanes, it is imperative to develop long-term strategies to address migration, homelessness, and housing precarity as part of a comprehensive climate plan (Weitzel et al. 2019). Ultimately, the climate crisis will only exacerbate the existing inequity of market-based housing. If we do not develop long-term solutions now, the existing social safety nets we have in place, weakened as they are, will not be able to accommodate increasing demand. Importantly, these solutions must be community-led and equitable in terms of idea formation, implementation, and assessment. Rather than defaulting to neoliberal approaches that maintain or exacerbate inequality and vulnerability, we must acknowledge and meaningfully incorporate the perspectives of those with lived experience into any planning concerning displaced and homeless communities (Kaplan et al. 2020).

By understanding the interconnections between neoliberalism, climate change, and vulnerable populations, we can identify pathways that challenge neoliberal strategies. Considering the differences in experiences and needs of the vulnerable populations in different regions around the world, the responses developed cannot follow a standardized, pre-defined path. One approach can be based on developing further and ensuring recognition for environmental human rights (Wright et al. 2022). Another approach that has had successful adaptations focuses on communities and on enhancing

the existing local adaptive practices, such as through community-based adaptation (CBA) programs. It should be noted that there are numerous challenges that can be associated with CBA. Taylor Aiken et al. (2017), for instance, identify some issues, starting with general difficulties in defining what a community is as well as critiques specific to the contemporary neoliberal context. For instance, CBA can also be seen as displacement of government responsibility for addressing such large-scale issues as climate change onto the communities themselves. Additionally, there are inherent imbalances within a system based on competition for funding between community-led groups.

Nonetheless, research suggests that CBA can be useful in different contexts, including in the developing countries, especially within the poor and vulnerable communities (Forsyth 2013). Successful CBA programs tend to ensure that financing and resource availability have direct links to specific members (households) of the community and also address the issues identified by the communities themselves. For instance, CBA programs in Kenya that worked well were considerate of the local context, were aimed at both providing knowledge regarding climate change and adaptation techniques as well as were listening to the needs identified by community members and were ready to address these needs (Corner-Dolloff 2012). It should be noted that CBA can be considered not only as an adaptation strategy, but also as that of prevention. As seen in our case studies on the MENA region and Kenya, displacement is a growing issue due to climate change. If local communities have the resources and the capacity that they need to make necessary adaptations to preserve their livelihoods and to withstand the challenges posed by climate change, it will significantly reduce climate migration and the risks associated with it. Further, as noted in the MENA region case study, women can play a central role in challenging the current situation. Some case studies in CBA suggest, for example, that targeting specific approaches to the needs of women can simultaneously address the gender inequality and enhance the future adaptation capacities of children as women tend to be the primary caregivers (Wright and Chandani 2014).

## Conclusions

The case studies presented here aim to demonstrate the varying ways in which neoliberal influence appears at the intersection of climate change and the most vulnerable communities in various contexts. The three key themes guiding our analysis – generation of profit, individualization, and short-termism – also need to be considered in conjunction with one another. For instance, one of the concepts prominent in contemporary literature on climate change and on approaches to dealing with migrants and homeless populations is that of resilience. However, the neoliberal ideology presents resilience as an ability of individual (individualization) to become self-reliant (generation of profit) and to be able to do so within a span of a few months (short-termism). Thus, the solution to the problematic situation is to be found and enacted by individuals that find themselves in these situations. The concept of resilience, as it is currently

presented, tends to overlook the structural inequalities and issues that are beyond the control of the individuals (Mikulewicz 2019). Thus, there needs to be an understanding that neoliberal approaches, while purporting to be solving the issues, in fact inflict more damage on the most vulnerable populations and on climate conditions.

One of the important changes to consider, therefore, is to shift the framing of the issue: from considerations of how to manage the vulnerable populations and how to make them more resilient, there needs to be a shift of consideration of what local, national, and global changes are needed in order to enable vulnerable people to, first of all, have a choice whether to stay or to move. Either choice should not lead to further impoverishment. The adaptation techniques need to be more concentrated on climate justice approaches. Although there have been some concerns that such approaches are not fully developed to be translated into practice (Mikulewicz 2019), this is perhaps overstated as climate justice-centered approaches need to be contextualized (unlike the neoliberal practices). Therefore, experiences elsewhere may be informative, but they tend not to be easily translated into a step-by-step guide for a different context. At the same time, this is not necessarily a weakness of such an approach. Being able to develop context-relevant responses to climate change and vulnerability may be more beneficial than trying to enforce a one-size-fits-all strategy as it allows for data-driven responses as well (Hackenbruch et al. 2017).

Future research thus should focus on the local context as well as on the structural issues when developing and evaluating responses to climate change. For homelessness specifically, community-led organizations are best placed to identify those most in need and to direct necessary resources, the funding for which needs to be provided by governments (Kidd et al. 2023). For instance, local organizations catering to the needs of homeless populations need to be supported and resourced, as well as involved in the disaster planning, as they frequently are known by homeless populations and have established connections (Morris 2020). Further, CBA approaches appear to be particularly useful in the context of vulnerable and poor communities in developing countries. However, researchers should pay attention to the neoliberal influences under which community members operate, as they are manifested in varying ways. Community members also need to be the ones identifying the goals set by the community. Critical evaluation approaches that take into consideration various factors are essential in implementing projects that will address the concerns of the community members.

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