What motivates people to move? And where should they be able to go? What does it mean to be from a place? Doyle’s talk on global migration focused mostly on the ways we can reform the harder and more definite aspects of legal systems and policy around the changing, softer questions of identity and belonging, especially as our perception of borders shift with globalization. As someone who spends a significant amount of time on asylum-related work, I’ve long questioned the parameters for legitimate migration—race, religion, nationality, social group, and political opinion—that leave few channels for people escaping violence, whether outbreaks of crises or longstanding structural violence.

Thus, I am interested in the ways that a new convention on mobility can open doors for people for purely humanitarian reasons. But I also find it interesting how migration plays into mindsets about the global distribution of responsibility, resources, and wealth. Parts of Doyle’s talk touched upon the gross inequality in bearing responsibility when it comes to providing refuge alone (let alone forced migration), point out how often the countries tasked with doing the most are developing countries themselves, whose institutions and markets can be fragile to begin with. In particular, he mentioned how while roughly 80% of refugees are housed in developing countries, 80% of the money spent upon refugees are spent in developed countries. A system based upon proximity can lock entire regions into conflict—take, for example, the proliferation of militia groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, many of which originated with the wars and factions of neighboring countries. This is clearly neither a) scalable, which means that it’s difficult for migration flows to widen in the present, nor b) sustainable, which has implications for the future of both migrants and host countries. Doyle suggested a Paris-Agreement-style naming and shaming mechanism with a neutral, internally agreed-upon scorekeeper that would allocate migration/refugee quotas to countries and push them towards fulfilling that quota.

However, even if that were successful and a formed mechanism in and of itself, I also questioned the idea in other ways. First, while norms change is an important part of the process in behavioral change, I also think incentives play a large role. Unfortunately, the incentives for accepting migration fall to inconsistencies of time and space: politicians often want to fulfill short-sighted objectives for people within their boundaries, rather than long-term goals for the good of the globe. If we do not somehow change the incentive structure, I question how much naming and shaming can really work in terms of making it feasible for rich nations to take up their share of the load. Second, especially in cases of structural violence and economic opportunity—a widespread reason for migration is often simply seeking a better life—I’m afraid that even adjustments in migratory acceptance do not compensate for many of the fundamental reasons why people want to leave home countries, often involving cycles of economic exploitation from abroad. Doyle spoke about provisions for labor migration that can turn undocumented workers into long-run documented ones, and while on a human, individual level, I believe that anyone should be able to go anywhere in search of opportunity, on a macro level, I wonder about the populations who do not get to move, and how to move capital towards labor rather than vice versa to improve standards of living and provide opportunity within people’s home countries. I also wonder if, although these new forms of status can confer protections upon people and prevent them from being exploited, we’ll really be normalizing new (and old) forms of second-class citizenship.

I say this partly too, because one question that I’ve wondered continuously about all year is the malleability of identity over time—for both in-groups and out-groups within countries. As a Chinese American, i.e. hailing from a minority group where even fourth-generation Americans may never truly “fit in,” I’ve wondered about the softer barriers to acceptance of migrants, about whether we can truly ever reach this vision of not just global citizenship, but global identity, which in some sense underlies the responsibility-sharing and open mobility of Doyle’s framework. How can we make sure that any shifts in legal change are accompanied by shifts in the value system that can allow migrants to be seen as fully human? How can we provide pathways of opportunity for people that also allow them to maintain their heritage, their culture, and the less tangibly appreciable aspects of identity that one often may not perceive until after its lost? How do we defend against placelessness in the quest for mobility? I think these are harder questions to answer but ought to be considered with at least some depth in the process of creating new frameworks for interpersonal/inter-people relationships.