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What's at Stake in Securitising Climate Change? Towards a Differentiated Approach

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Abstract

Climate change has been successfully represented as a security concern at least to such an extent that it is firmly established on the political agenda, and that there is a widely accepted urgency attached to it, even though the implementation of concrete policies is disputed and has not taken place universally. In this paper, we question the monolithic orthodoxy of linking climate change to security, which often has concentrated too much on traditional security conceptions. We highlight the very different constructions of climate change as a security threat, as they bear different implications for the policy debate. Through a preliminary survey of the relevant debates and policy literature, we establish a systematic typology that allows us to distinguish six climate security discourses on the basis of two dimensions. Firstly, we suggest that a core difference consists of the levels on which the threatened referent objects are located. This leaves us with three levels, a territorial one with states or regions as referent object and a focus on the interrelation of climate change and violent conflict, an individual level in which human beings are the referent object and their vulnerabilities to climatic effects are at the centre of the analysis, and a planetary level in which the planet as such is the referent object. Secondly, we suggest differentiating between two securitisation logics, one that more closely corresponds to the original Copenhagen School security framework, and one where the threat is constructed in a much more diffuse way that is more in line with the invocation of risk. Accordingly, each of the three aforementioned levels can be found either in a security focused specification, proposing rather short-term adaptation measures to tackle the immediate threats, or in a more risk centred shape, with the focus on long term mitigation or precautionary measures to bring the risk to a tolerable level. We argue that we need to alter securitisation theory to allow for such a variation in securitisation, which permits us to better grasp the differences between securitising arguments, their political emergence and their political and ethical consequences.

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Security and Climate Change: An Empirical Puzzle and a Normative Challenge

"As climate change unfolds, one of its effects is a heightened risk of violent conflict"¹ - This statement taken from a 2007 International Alert report is characteristic for a new orthodoxy in linking climate change and security in many western policy circles. The idea that climate change leads to violent conflict either directly by creating water and resource shortages or indirectly by leading to increased migration pressure is shared by a variety of actors, such as governmental advisory bodies,² think tanks³ as well as NGOs⁴, and is present in UN Security Council Debates.⁵

Yet this orthodoxy has come under increasing pressure. The challenge is both empirical and normative. Empirically, a 2012 study conducted by the Marshall Institute concludes that: "the climate-security argument is dangerously overstated and designed to serve a domestic political purpose more than filling a void in strategic thinking".⁶ Normatively, the linkage between security and climate change may lend legitimisation to the expansion of military activities and budgets while not actually tackling the root causes of climate change, and may thus not be classified as "just".⁷

What are the alternatives to the climate security orthodoxy? How can we "speak climate security" without lending support to military actors? What is the politics and ethics of climate security? And to what extent can we find different ways of linking climate change and security in the existing debate? These are the questions that we will tackle in this paper. We will do so through the lens of securitisation theory, which has come to dominate the debate in security studies and which analyses the representation of a threat as a security issue. It is in this theoretical field that the questions pertaining to climate security have been discussed more broadly as well as with a specific focus on climate change.

Authors of the so-called Copenhagen School of Security Studies (CS) define securitisation as the discursive construction of an existential threat to a referent object legitimising extraordinary means.⁸ Intriguingly, when reviewing environmental security issues, they argue that the attempts to securitise climate change have not led to any emergency measures (consider the failure to expand and extend the Kyoto Protocol, or the non-binding resolutions of a series of conferences in the context of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, UNFCCC) and therefore must be seen as unsuccessful.⁹ In that sense, then, there would be no climate security orthodoxy. Yet others have pointed out that the fact that climate change is discussed at all at the international level is an effect of successful securitisation, and that there are measures taken, however small, by international actors on a variety of levels.¹⁰

We propose to solve this dispute within securitisation theory and at the same time contribute to the questioning of the policy orthodoxy through a reconceptualisation of what security and securitisation are taken to mean. As others¹¹ have suggested before, there may be not only one, but several competing securitisation frameworks. Yet the literature so far has developed the different discourses of securitising climate change in an ad-hoc and rather unsystematic fashion. We intend to overcome this by introducing a new framework for distinguishing between different securitisations. We therefore suggest two dimensions that allow us to more systematically distinguish between several securitisations of climate change. On the one hand, these take into account the different referent objects of security, and in particular the fact that they are located on different levels. We thus distinguish between *territorial*, *individual* and *planetary* articulations. On the other hand, we suggest differentiating between two securitisation logics, one that more closely corresponds to the original CS security framework, and one where the threat is constructed in a much more diffuse way that may be more in line with the invocation of risk.¹²

On this basis, we develop a six-fold typology, which should allow for more consistent and thorough analyses of climate change discourses. This typology will also allow us to address three interrelated normative questions that we think are pertinent: First, given the CS's preference for non-securitised discourses, is it preferable if climate change is expressed in terms of risk rather than security? Following Oels¹³ and others,¹⁴ we argue that this can also be a hugely problematic argument. Second, are certain types of articulating climate security preferable because of the policies they legitimate? Here, we concur with the prevailing view in the literature and argue that this is indeed the case, but we also follow up a third and somewhat ironic argument, shared by others¹⁵ but not yet linked back to the debate about securitisation, that it may be exactly because of a prevalent securitisation that emergency measures tackling the sources of climate change are not taken.

In the remainder of this paper, we will first introduce the idea of different discourses linking climate change with either security or risk conceptions. We will then develop our two-dimensional analytical scheme which will allow us to differentiate between six different discourses of climate security, before elaborating on each of these and on the policies they induce. In the following section, we discuss the implications for research on the nexus between climate change and security.

Two Dimensions of Climate Security Discourses

In the security studies literature from the 1980s onwards, the focus shifted away from the state as the only referent object of security and initiated the rise of new “sectors” of security. Thus, environmental and later on climate issues moved to the centre of the attention.¹⁶ In this debate, for the CS the main question was not what security actually is, but *how an issue becomes a security issue*. The authors thus introduced the concept of securitisation as the discursive process – understood as a series of speech acts ultimately accepted by the wider societal audience – through which an issue could be represented as an existential threat to a specific referent object legitimising extraordinary, “emergency” measures. In their core work the authors of the CS argue that environmental securitisation has not been successful, as there are no identifiable emergency measures taken in this field.¹⁷ Yet other authors such as Parsons,¹⁸ Trombetta,¹⁹ Brzoska²⁰ and Brauch²¹ clearly identify a securitisation of climate change.

Our claim in response to this debate that there are different ways of framing a security threat builds on similar arguments put forward by Stritzel,²² Guzzini,²³ Balzacq,²⁴ and Oels.²⁵ They all take issue with the reduction of security to a Schmittian emergency politics, and instead suggest the importance of contextualising security claims, a point also made in relation to environmental security by Trombetta.²⁶ Yet such a contextualisation runs counter to the defining move of the CS, which is the focus on a specific “grammar” of the securitising move that sets it apart from politics. This circle can only be squared if we relax the conditions of this grammar somewhat so that securitisation is still the representation of threat, but the threat does no longer have to be immediate and existential, and its exact expression is therefore allowed to vary between policy fields (or “sectors” in CS parlance) and between different cultural contexts. Likewise, the criterion of emergency measures may be relaxed to include all measures that would otherwise not be seen as legitimate. With such a redefinition, we still have a workable definition of securitisation, while at the same time allowing for variation within the concept to take account of the diversity of security discourses that have been pointed to in the debate about the CS.

There are various climate security discourses that the literature has so far identified. Detraz and Betsill,²⁷ for instance, differentiate between “environmental security” and “environmental conflict” discourses.²⁸ The environmental conflict discourse, which is based on Thomas-Homer-Dixon’s seminal work on resource scarcity, is characterized by a relatively narrow view on the relationship between security and the environment²⁹ and relates to the emergence of violent conflict³⁰ resulting from a degradation of natural resources. While this line of thinking still makes up a large portion of

the research, there are also voices disputing the link between environmental degradation, and especially climate change, and violent conflict,³¹ and recent studies come to the conclusion that the connection might be less direct and mediated by several intervening factors.³²

In contrast to the environmental conflict discourse, the concept of environmental security reflects a broader understanding of security that is closer to the concept of human security. Thus, the referent object of this discourse is the individual instead of the state. While the main threat remains a question of survival, the direct impact of climate change is on the daily lives of people rather than on state security and violent conflict behaviour. Further advancing the approach of Detraz and Betsill and employing the method of frame analysis for securitisation theory, Diez and Grauvogel developed a threefold matrix that adds an “ecological security” frame that is about human responsibility for the ecosystem as a whole.³³

Relaxing the “existential threat” and “emergency” criteria of securitisation also opens up the securitisation literature to the concept of risk,³⁴ which has frequently been applied to environmental and particularly climate issues. In contrast to security in the stricter Copenhagen version, risk constitutes a threat which is more diffuse, uncertain and less imminent. In a simplified way, climate change can be constructed as an immediate and existential threat to the survival of an entire island that requires urgent counter-action, or it can be constructed as a potential threat that may gradually undermine the way we live today and should lead us to take precautionary measures. The former construction is an example of security, the latter of risk. We will explore this distinction further below: for the time being it suffices to note that risk has found its way into the security literature³⁵ and has indeed been applied to climate security.³⁶

This literature has – on the one hand – made an important contribution to differentiating discourses of climate security, constructing the threat that climate change poses according to its own logic, relating the threat to different referent objects, and accordingly drawing different policy conclusions. But, beyond that, it has also contributed to a problematisation of the either/or logic of securitisation in the CS. The climate change debate encompasses different forms of securitisation, leading to different levels of emergency measures. However, the literature suffers from a rather ad-hoc and unsystematic conceptualisation of the discourses at stake. Are they two, as Detraz and Betsill suggest,³⁷ should we not add a third one, as proposed by Grauvogel and Diez,³⁸ or are there even more discourses to be found as outlined by Oels?³⁹ What exactly is the core difference between them – is it the securitising actor, the referent object (e.g. states or a global society) or the nature of the threat they propose (e.g. violent conflicts or desertification), or is it the kind of the measures they

put forward to tackle the threat? And what about possible alternatives to the suggested discourses, such as an inclusion of the concept of risk?

In the following, we propose to distinguish between different climate-security discourses according to two dimensions. Firstly, we suggest that a core difference between these discourses consists of the levels on which the referent objects of the proposed threats are located. Secondly, we suggest that discourses either tend to follow a securitisation logic “proper” in the sense that they refer to an emergency situation in light of a concretely identifiable existential threat, or alternatively they argue on the basis of risk in the sense that they invoke a diffuse threat that imposes radical uncertainties on actors. This is not to say that in practice, arguments stick neatly to these ideal typical discourses. They are the endpoints of a continuum rather than distinct categories. Yet having said that, they will tend to emphasise either security or risk – both as part of a broader notion of securitisation.

Dimension 1: Referent Object

Our first dimension to differentiate between climate-security discourses follows a core distinction underpinning the existing literature but never spelled out systematically. One of the variations between the environmental conflict, environmental security and ecological security discourse is the level of their respective referent object of security. In the environmental conflict discourse, it is mostly the state that is conceptualized as the referent object, although it may also refer to other group entities. What is at stake here is the defence of a particular territorial order – that of the state or a particular region. In contrast, the environmental security discourse, due to its links with human security, focuses on the individual or on a global society of individuals as referent objects. Finally, in the ecological security discourse with its cosmological and holistic outlook, it is the planet as a whole that is threatened. Thus, we conceptualize this first dimension as consisting of three levels on which referent objects are situated: territorial, individual, and planetary.

Dimension 2: Security – Risk

The second analytic dimension concerns the distinction between security and risk. In the literature it can be found in sociological works on risk⁴⁰, in the so called Paris School of Securitisation⁴¹ and also in publications that draw on Foucauldian ideas and concepts.⁴² Closest to our endeavour is Olaf Corry⁴³, who has put forward the idea to speak of two very different logics or grammars of security, namely traditional securitisation as proposed by the CS, and a second mode named “riskification”.⁴⁴

The literature does not agree on a single definition of risk.⁴⁵ At least for our purposes, however, we can highlight a number of common features, especially if we contrast risk to our archetypical

understanding of security: Security threats tend to be short-term oriented, whereas risk poses a rather long-term potential threat, is often characterised by a radical uncertainty and leads to a more diffuse sense of unease.⁴⁶ Security threats are always existential, whereas risk often seems manageable and invites the calculation “of the incalculable” as in Ulrich Beck’s famous phrase,⁴⁷ and is only potentially an existential threat.⁴⁸ Security threats tend to be identifiable or even personalisable (as, for example, the Soviet Union), whereas risk is often a lot more diffuse, with a diffuse referent object.⁴⁹ Security threats are to be eliminated or alternatively call for a clear strategy of defence focused on the threat; risks cannot be eliminated, they call for precaution, and risk-reduction-programmes rather aim at the referent object with the goal of increasing its resilience.⁵⁰ Security threats are uninsurable because they lead to destruction, whereas risk is typically the object of insurance.⁵¹ A Security logic tackles the direct causes of harm (e.g. addresses climate conflicts) whereas a risk based approach aims at the constitutive causes (e.g. prevent climate change) of the danger.⁵²

Given the current popularity of the concept, risk has also been applied to a wider variety of situations, some of which we would, following our definition, see as security matters. This is the case, for instance, when an imminent and existential threat is invoked or a “risk” is regarded as potentially catastrophic to such an extent (e.g. a nuclear terror plot) that it must be avoided at all costs, hence the precautionary measures are so drastic that they become very similar to what the CS has proposed as exceptional measures (e.g. Guantanamo, illegal kidnapping, extra-legal killings, patriot acts etc.) – such an articulation has clearly moved from “risk” to “security”.

In our treatment of security and risk, we therefore take issue with the suggestion that security and risk are intimately related to each other.⁵³ While we agree that any security discourse needs to invoke a threat, we disagree with the claim that “the antagonism constitutive of climate discourses takes the form of an apocalypse”.⁵⁴ For one, in our view the apocalypse is only one of the possible threat constructions; and furthermore, even the apocalypse can be constructed in different ways and with different consequences. What we develop in the following are ideal types which in practice are often used alongside each other, and which in the course of the political debate may become even more muddled and cross-referenced so that the initial threat invocations do not necessarily result in the policies originally proposed. Yet, we nonetheless claim that the differentiation between different climate security discourses allows us to analyse climate security articulations more systematically and alerts us to a number of normative problems and policy implications that arise from the different ways to represent the threat of climate change. Thus, our framework firstly contributes to a better

understanding of the securitisation of climate change and secondly to a systematic reconceptualisation of securitisation theory.

A Typology of Climate Security Discourses

The two dimensions developed in the previous section lead us to the typology of six climate security discourses summarised in Table 1.

Logic of Discourse Level of Referent Object	Security	Risk
Territorial	Territorial Security	Territorial Risk
Individual	Individual Security	Individual Risk
Planetary	Planetary Security	Planetary Risk

Tab. 1: A Typology of Climate Security Discourses

Drawing on the literature on framing, which distinguishes between diagnostic and prognostic frames,⁵⁵ we argue that each of these six discourses has to address two constitutive questions: Firstly, a diagnostic one that gives a distinct description of the problem at stake and the threat involved; and secondly, a prognostic one that proposes a specific solution i.e. certain measures to counter the threat. As a consequence, these discourses can be expected to have very different impacts on political processes and the resulting policies.

Territorial security resembles the “neo-Malthusian”⁵⁶ climate-conflict discourse⁵⁷. At the diagnostic level it focuses on the possibility of violent conflict in the face of limited and degrading resources due to climatic changes. At the territorial level the actual threat is neither climate change as such nor its direct physical effects, but rather the indirect socio-economic effects on social orders. Concerning the prognostic level, this discourse concentrates on short term measures to counter these socio-economic problems and focuses on immediate adaptation measures instead of long term mitigation efforts. The actual measures can be political as well as military interventions in countries and regions that face climate induced conflicts or instability in order to reinstate statehood and prevent conflicts from spiralling out of control and becoming a threat to industrialized countries e.g. through large-scale migration movements or terrorism. This discourse focuses on national security conceptions⁵⁸ with the state or a geographical region as the referent object, and extraordinary measures to tackle these dangers. In the political debate this discourse seems to be widely used and references can be found especially in US think tank reports, for example in the 2007 CNA report, where: „(...) climate change poses a serious threat to America’s national security”⁵⁹ and is said to exacerbate already

instable regions and countries which in turn could lead to violent conflict and terrorism.⁶⁰ But also government reports like the worst-case study of Schwartz and Randall⁶¹ and the EU-Solana report⁶² make use of this argumentation.

Territorial risk, at the diagnostic level, focuses on the probability of climate induced conflict as identified by statistical risk-assessments and scenario planning schemes. Contingency planning is conducted for climate induced events that seem unlikely but entail catastrophic consequences.⁶³ Just as in the territorial security discourse, adaptation measures and military actors play a decisive role at the prognostic level, but here the focus lies more on a general readiness of the respective actors (governments and militaries) and the enhancement of resilience towards climate change effects in case the risk turns into reality. Because constructing climate change in terms of risk entails longer time horizons than the direct identification of threats, this discourse leaves more time for the implementation of counter measures – e.g. resilience building⁶⁴ – and acknowledges the possibility to prevent the worst outcomes i.e. lower the risk if appropriate actions are taken.⁶⁵ The 2007 International Alert report for instance argues: “These fragile states thus face a double-headed problem: that of climate change and violent conflict. If nothing is done, the relationship between the two parts of the problem will be mutually and negatively reinforcing. There is a real risk that climate change will compound the propensity for violent conflict which, in turn, will leave communities poorer, less resilient and less able to cope with the consequences of climate change.”⁶⁶ Moreover, actors in the US military and defence sector have already begun to integrate the risk of climate induced violence and conflicts and the resulting new challenges for the military (in the form of risk and vulnerability assessments as well as scenario- and contingency planning) into their respective planning documents e.g. the Quadrennial Defence Review 2010.⁶⁷

Individual security builds on the concept of human security and prioritises the individual or human communities not tied to particular states.⁶⁸ This discourse is similar to what others have called environmental security⁶⁹ or human vulnerability.⁷⁰ Concerning the diagnostic level it highlights the vulnerability of individuals and groups towards a changing environment and the direct implications for the everyday life of human beings such as decreasing crop yields, desertification, water scarcity, changed precipitation patterns, disasters and the spread of vector-borne diseases. Thus, unlike at the territorial level, at the individual level the direct physical effects of climate change constitute the threat. Regarding the prognostic level it emphasises strategies aimed at individuals and the reduction of their direct vulnerability to climatic effects through adaptation measures e.g. increased development aid, technical support in building dams or organising the relocation of threatened populations.⁷¹ Due to the rather positive “image” associated with human and individual security or

vulnerability, this discourse is widely used. References to it can be found in governmental, NGO and think tank reports⁷² as well as in reports and debates of the United Nations General Assembly⁷³ and Security Council⁷⁴: “The impact of climate change has implications for human security. The livelihoods and survival of communities are at stake.”⁷⁵

Individual risk does not identify specific individuals or communities as referent objects a priori but relies on risk assessment to statistically generate certain groups that are seen to be especially at risk.⁷⁶ It thus focuses on the probability of a diverse set of climatic effects in certain risk areas for particular risk groups and accepts a general level of uncertainty concerning the scope and regional impact of these effects. The prognostic focus lies on long term preventive strategies to mitigate climate change⁷⁷ and on increasing the coping capacity of individuals and communities. In contrast to the individual security discourse, the focus is on reducing the “contextual” vulnerability of communities, which includes strengthening the society or community as a whole, thus increasing its general resilience towards possibly harmful impacts.⁷⁸ Another strategy is the provision of insurance schemes for populations/individuals and areas that are at risk of being hit by adverse climatic effects. Such a strategy would not eradicate the climatic threats but rather aims at reducing the risk of the referent object to a tolerable level. In the climate change debates references to this more risk oriented version of the individual discourse can be found in reports that refer to the need for early warning mechanisms, vulnerability monitoring and risk-management schemes concerning the individual vulnerability of certain risk groups.⁷⁹ Furthermore, several organisations in the development field make use of this discourse: “The second goal aims to determine priorities in climate risk management and take adaptation precautions for the development of the capacity for adjustment”.⁸⁰

Planetary security is based on the critical discussion of linking national security with the environment⁸¹ and new conceptions of environmental security – also labelled complex ecology – as put forward by Cudworth and Hobden⁸² or Dalby.⁸³ At the diagnostic level it focuses on the embeddedness of human beings in the global ecosystem, the symbiotic nature of this co-existence⁸⁴ as well as on the strong interdependencies of human activity with the environment – in positive (conservation, mitigation measures) as well as negative (economic activity that destroys, over-uses or pollutes the environment e.g. the global climatic system) ways. Consequently, it considers the health of the environment⁸⁵ and an intact biodiversity as important goods as such i.e. as threatened referent object. The actual threats at the planetary level are dangerously high CO₂-levels, as well as human activity or certain practices that lead to changes in the atmosphere. Concerning the prognostic level this discourse proposes concrete, immediate and relatively drastic measures to stop

human activity that has the potential to harm the planetary security, such as global greenhouse gas (GHG) production. Tangible examples could be a global GHG moratorium or tax to secure the conservation of the ecosystem and atmospheric stability as well as concrete initiatives to conserve certain ecosystems, species or regions.⁸⁶ The planetary security discourse is often used by environmental activists and discussed at the climate summits and in the IPCC reports. Thus, Greenpeace argues: "We realized years ago that it [climate change] has the potential to wipe out most of the gains the environmental movement has made in other areas. Disruptions to ecosystems will likely harm everything from minke whales to coral reefs to polar bears. Whole forests will be lost, and hundreds of thousands of species will become extinct."⁸⁷

In the *planetary risk* discourse the diagnostic level highlights long-term risks for the wellbeing of the global ecosystem that are statistically identified. Unsustainable economic activity, as well as a growth-centred and (fossil) resource-based capitalist system⁸⁸ are diagnosed as core problems putting the whole planet at risk. At the prognostic level, the restructuration of risk creating activities on a planetary scale is being highlighted such as an adaptation of the capitalist economic system, a move to more sustainable ways of economic activity, hence the enhancement of planetary resilience and a move to the precautionary principle. The goal is to prevent possibly devastating and not exactly known consequences of climate change from becoming concrete threats. Because of the conceptualisation in terms of risk, the measures do not have to be as extreme and immediate as in the planetary security discourse, likewise the goal is not a complete eradication of the threat but the management of the risk to keep it at a tolerable level. Concrete measures could be the fostering of energy efficiency or renewable (green) energy sources for example through tax based incentive schemes. This discourse is discussed predominantly by scientists and environmental activists and organisations as a normative blue-print, for instance by the IPCC: "Confidence has increased that a 1 to 2°C increase in global mean temperature above 1990 levels poses significant risks to many unique and threatened systems, including many biodiversity hotspots."⁸⁹ Due to its longer time-horizon and more gradual risk management approach planetary risk might be more compelling for political actors and has therefore already entered, to a certain extent, into political debates for instance in Germany or more recently in the United States (yet obviously not at the scale needed to really reconstruct the whole economy) – especially when connected to the economic opportunities: "I urge this Congress to pursue a bipartisan, market-based solution to climate change, like the one John McCain and Joe Lieberman worked on together a few years ago. But if Congress won't act soon to protect future generations, I will. I will direct my Cabinet to come up with executive actions we can take, now and in the future, to reduce pollution, prepare our communities for the consequences of climate change, and speed the transition to more sustainable sources of energy."⁹⁰

Two observations on the empirical distribution of these discourses are in order. Firstly, on the dimension of the referent object, we expect the first two discourse-dimensions, territorial and individual, to be more common than the planetary discourses because at the diagnostic level, the environment as such does not lend itself easily to a construction as the referent object in a securitisation process,⁹¹ and at the prognostic level, the planetary security discourse in particular calls for drastic measures concerning GHG production, which seem to be rather unlikely to be adopted at a larger scale. Secondly, on the security/risk dimension, the literature observes a move from traditional, “hard” security to risk-based conceptions.⁹² On the one hand, a general development over time can be identified. In the initial climate security orthodoxy that was our starting point, the debate mostly looked at climate-induced conflicts and how they affect national security. However, with the realisation that the connection between climate change and violent conflict is not as straightforward, risk conceptions gained in importance.⁹³ On the other hand, there is a movement from security to risk along our first dimension. On the territorial level, traditional conceptions of security are more likely to be found, whereas on the human and especially on the even more abstract planetary level, risk conceptions are more common. This may be an effect of state and military actors being more likely to use traditional, national security conceptions, whereas on the individual level, many actors are sensitive to not using “hard” security logic, while on the planetary level, the uncertainty of climate predictions and the level of abstraction increases, making nuanced risk conceptions more compelling.

On the Normative Implications of Securitising Climate Change

Looking at climate security discourses through our theoretical lens highlights the very diverse ways how climate change is linked to security, with very different political consequences. Although the initial climate security orthodoxy of territorially based discourses still dominates the debate, other discourses and particularly those based on the individual level are increasingly being used. There is also a clear tendency to move the emphasis from security to risk. Thus, issues such as climate change that are fairly complex and long-term seem to challenge the narrow security logic used by the original CS. However, these discursive shifts cannot in and of themselves solve the normative problems associated with linking climate change to security. As our elaborations on the prognostic dimension have shown, even securitisations outside the climate security orthodoxy can have problematic consequences.

There are at least three normative questions that follow from our findings: *Firstly*, in breaking with the climate security orthodoxy, is it preferable to use a risk logic rather than security conceptions? *Secondly*, are certain discourses of articulating climate security preferable because of the policies they legitimate? *Thirdly*, do the prevailing securitisations of climate change lead to increased efforts to halt climate change or do they rather undermine such efforts?

Security vs. Risk

Some authors suggest that a risk based securitisation can be less problematic because it does not necessarily lead to the exceptional and undemocratic emergency measures foreseen by the CS.⁹⁴ Others argue that even within a risk based approach – if aimed at radical uncertain, incalculable but possibly catastrophic risks – undemocratic and exceptional precautionary policies can be legitimized.⁹⁵ A third strand, based on the Paris School of securitisation, puts forward the idea of routine and hidden securitisations on the basis of risk that also have their perils.⁹⁶

There are indeed significant differences between security and risk centred discourses at the diagnostic and prognostic level. On the one hand, a risk oriented argumentation leaves the referent object and threat more diffuse, broadens the time-horizon and favours long term and precautionary measures. If a risk based securitisation leads to more preventive measures, aimed at the root causes of the problem, like mitigation, this can be regarded as positive for the ultimate goal to stabilize the global climate.

Yet, following Corry⁹⁷ and others,⁹⁸ one has to bear in mind that the goal is not to eradicate the risk completely but to manage and govern it and to bring it to a *tolerable level*. While this is presumably more in line with “normal” that is democratic politics, it raises the important normative question: tolerable for whom? The most serious climatic effects will firstly and almost exclusively hit poor populations in developing countries, whereas industrialized countries might even experience some advantages of warmer temperatures.⁹⁹ Keeping the risk at a tolerable level for industrialized countries – who clearly dominate the climate security debates – can thus very well mean to do only as much in terms of mitigation and adaptation that the worst forecasts are avoided. That is to keep violent conflicts at bay through the deployment of development aid and peacekeeping forces – without doing a lot in terms of mitigation.

A further criticism more in line with the so-called Paris School¹⁰⁰ argues that the resulting policy changes in a risk-based discourse will be observable and thus subject to public scrutiny to a lesser extent than it is the case when exceptional measures are proposed in a security discourse.¹⁰¹ Even if

one assumes that measures taken in such a framework are lower in their immediate impact and eschew direct physical violence, over time they can have adverse effects and alter the ways and possibilities how to govern climate change – as for example has happened within the migration sector.¹⁰² Risk centred securitisation has already led to changes in how the topic is seen in military circles, has altered procedures and played down other options.¹⁰³ In a Foucauldian sense the climate climate-risk-discourse alters what is taken to be normal and possible, just as a security based argumentation would do; only it does so in a more gradual and less notable way. Securitising climate change along the presented risk-based discourses therefore can lead to a less extreme but permanent and infinitive state of emergency.

Adding to that, a risk-based approach entails the danger that the groups or areas that are diagnosed to be especially at risk become stigmatised and in the end dangerous themselves:¹⁰⁴ “(...) risk-based categories can generate further stigma for individuals who are deemed to be members of those risk groups. To be ‘at risk’ is effectively to be at odds with, or even a danger to, the welfare of the population (...).”¹⁰⁵ Eventually a risk-based securitisation might not be less harmless than a security-based one and does not vaccinate against normatively negative effects.

Good and Bad Securitisations?

If we move to the different levels of securitisation, are some normatively preferably to others? On the *territorial* level, we agree with other scholars¹⁰⁶ that the securitisation of climate change in terms of conflicts between groups or states and national security conceptions is hugely problematic. On the positive side, this discourse helps to raise attention and is conducive in forging coalitions between actors that would otherwise not have approached the topic seriously, as has happened for example in US debates¹⁰⁷ or UN Security Council meetings.¹⁰⁸ However, such an argumentation also detracts the attention from the core issues – slowing down climate change through decisive mitigation efforts – to rather ad-hoc adaptation measures and interferences in risk countries that could in the end take the form of military intervention.¹⁰⁹ As a consequence, there is an increasing involvement of military and defence actors in climate politics as well as the adoption of concepts from the climate sector into military planning.¹¹⁰ Actors prepare themselves to cope with climate change’s secondary effects instead of preventing global warming from happening in the first place.¹¹¹ Moreover, using a territorial securitisation and national security conceptions reinforces Othering and friend-enemy conceptions (in line with the original CS argument) and shifts the attention to questions of security between states, thereby losing sight of the one most severely affected, that is poor populations within those states.

On the *individual level*, scholars such as Detraz and Betsill¹¹² point out that the danger associated with the territorial discourse can be avoided, making the individual discourse more appropriate for climate security debates. Indeed, on the positive side, individual-level securitisation concentrates on the ones most affected and vulnerable to climate change and avoids national security conceptions that draw on a traditional, militarized and state centred security logic. Nonetheless, there is the danger that a concentration on individuals as being threatened and vulnerable can lead to the “vulnerable becom[ing] dangerous” themselves.¹¹³ In line with this argument, the seemingly less dangerous individual discourse can quite easily be used to make a more problematic territorial argument. If poor populations in unstable developing states are hit first and hardest by climate change i.e. threatened in their human security, it is not hard to think this argument further towards destabilized, weak or failing states, large-scale migration movements, terrorism and widespread conflict which in turn could transform into national security concerns for industrialized states.¹¹⁴ Moreover, a concentration on the vulnerability of individuals can have the somewhat ironic effect that less is done to mitigate climate change, because the individuals at risk mostly do not live in the biggest polluter states but in poor developing countries. To lower the immediate risk adaptation measures – which can be integrated into on-going development aid programs without having to change too much in western economies – seems more compelling than mitigation efforts. Furthermore, because the vulnerability of individuals to climate change is conditional on adaptation measures taken by their respective countries, the responsibility of the biggest polluter states for adverse effects could be retargeted at the developing states themselves because they have failed to adapt properly.

Planetary level discourses seem to be the least problematic. They highlight the interdependency of the whole human existence with its surrounding ecosystem, and call for decisive GHG reduction measures and for the restructuring of risk creating activities i.e. more sustainable economic activity. However, such an approach at the same time does not seem to lead to a very successful policy output. Although being sustained to a second period, the only legally binding agreement, the Kyoto protocol, accounts for about 15 per cent of worldwide GHGs and merely aims at a reduction of about 18 per cent until 2020; and even with these conservative goals its success is rather doubtful.¹¹⁵ Furthermore, the constantly failing negotiations about the inclusion of the US and other major emitters like China, India or Brazil into a new global agreement from 2020 on exemplifies the difficulties with such a planetary approach. Eventually, a securitisation along this discourse might be too weak in its political effect, which could be judged negatively as well on a normative basis.

Does the Securitisation of Climate Change Prevent its Primary Goal?

Because the security-oriented argumentation in the climate security orthodoxy draws the attention to violent conflicts or directs threats to individuals in developing countries, the appropriate response to tackle the immediate danger is not long term mitigation but short term adaptation or intervention. What is happening is not an improvement in climate policy but a “climatisation” of the defence, military and development sector.¹¹⁶ The security discussions also help industrialized or major polluter countries to shove a part of their responsibility towards the most affected developing countries.

Although in the risk dimension the time-horizons widens and mitigation is an important option, the focus on managing the risks and keeping them at tolerable levels can also have the effect of doing less than needed. And because of the already stated problems, the planetary discourse has difficulties to gain widespread approval and therefore does not lead to substantial efforts either. Eventually, it may be true that the securitisation of climate change so far has prevented rather than furthered its primary goal: the radical reduction of GHG emissions. Yet the issue is more complex. Thus, securitisation has helped to get the topic on the agenda, form new coalitions and to fast-start important attempts for climate legislation, for instance in the US.¹¹⁷ On this basis, securitisation is a strategy to be carefully employed by political actors. In climate security, it has been vital for making climate change a credible topic to be addressed, but it may be counter-productive if further securitisation moves are not scrutinised carefully.

Conclusion

In this paper, we set out to question the climate security orthodoxy that prevailed in the first decade of the millennium and which linked climate change to the rise of violent conflicts due to water shortages. We have asked whether there are alternatives to this climate-security linkage, to what extent these alternatives can be found in the political debates, and whether they would be normatively preferable to the old orthodoxy. The theoretical lens through which we have looked at the climate-security nexus was securitisation theory. By relaxing the criteria of what counts as securitisation, we were able to reject the view that climate change had not been securitised and instead proposed six different climate security discourses. These were the result of developing two analytical dimensions: one considering different levels of the relevant referent objects, and one distinguishing between a focus on security or risk. This led us to our taxonomy of climate security discourses: territorial security, territorial risk, individual security, individual risk, planetary security and planetary risk.

Even though these discourses are not of equal importance in the political debate, we argue that they offer openings within the discursive climate-security nexus. The question then arose whether they address the normative problems of the classic link between climate change and military security. We argued that each climate security discourse not only diagnoses the threat posed by climate change in a different way, but also proposes different policy solutions. While the literature at times has argued that framing the issue in terms of “risk” may be preferable over a “security” discourse, our discussion has been a lot more cautious. On the one hand, we have stressed the argument that securitisation can actually bring about politicisation in setting agendas and moving an issue forward in the policy-making process. We have also shown that “riskification” has its own problems in that it tends to evade the scrutiny of the public political process and installs governance instruments that have marginalising effects just as much as securitisation does. On the other hand, the securitisation process leads to the well-known exclusionary practices and may even undermine the goal of a sustainable strategy of reducing GHG emissions by focusing too much on fighting the indirect effects of climate change rather than its underlying causes.

Thus, securitisation, using any of the climate security discourses identified in this paper, remains a double-edged sword, and each securitising move has to be scrutinized closely and critically regarding its actual consequences.¹¹⁸ This is not the clear-cut blueprint for action that some may have wished for. Yet this is because securitisation is in itself a normatively ambivalent process that cannot be easily assessed in black-and-white terms. The reconstruction of alternative climate security discourses, in contrast to the old climate security orthodoxy, can keep contestation within discourse alive while recognising that in relation to climate change, securitisation may not per se be detrimental to the political debate. We also ought to be clear that our warning that some of the alternative discourses are not without their normative problems does not mean that these forms of securitising climate change are to be considered worse than the linkage between climate change and violent conflict. However, setting out the different discourses and their respective logic makes them available to more detailed scrutiny in terms of their potential impacts on society. Our piece was an attempt to start out such a discussion.

Further research will no doubt do more to evaluate the various climate security discourses in terms of their policy consequences. We also need to pay more attention to how some discourses have come to prevail over others in the struggle for the representation of climate change, in whose name they are invoked, and how they reconfigure the political debate on climate change and beyond. While we have not been able to pursue such an endeavour ourselves in this article, we hope that our

conceptual discussion has made it easier, and has at the very least contributed to the opening up of the old climate security orthodoxy that still seems to prevail all too often in many policy circles.

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⁹³ Oels, 'Climate Security as Governmentality: From Precaution to Preparedness' (note 11).

⁹⁴ Corry (note 12), pp. 438, 255.

⁹⁵ Aradau and van Munster, 'Governing Terrorism Through Risk: Taking Precautions, (Un)Knowing the Future' (note 42).

⁹⁶ Bigo, 'Globalized (In)Security: The Field and the Ban-Opticon' (note 41); Huysmans, *The Politics of Insecurity: Fear, Migration and Asylum in the EU* (note 41).

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¹¹³ Methmann and Oels (note 104).

¹¹⁴ CNA Corporation (note 3), pp. 6, 22; WBGU (note 2), pp. 2, 5.

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