RESISTING THE CLIMATE SECURITY DISCOURSE

Restoring “the political” in climate change politics

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Introduction: climate change-induced migration as a security threat

Some years ago, there was a competition in the media to identify “the first climate refugees.” For the Global South, the relocation of 1,500 residents in Papua New Guinea from the low-lying Carteret Island (an atoll of the autonomous region of Bougainville) to the mainland was considered to be the first case of climate change-induced migration. In the North, those displaced in 2005 by Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans were labelled by some as the first climate refugees in an industrialized country (Giroux 2006). The term “climate refugee” is used to describe a person who has decided (or was forced) to migrate in the face of climate change impacts. However, there is no official political definition and no official refugee status for affected populations.

The “climate refugee” or “climate change-induced migrant” has emerged as a key player in climate security discourses. In 2009, the Secretary General of the United Nations presented a report on Climate Change and Its Possible Security Implications (UNGA 2009) in which he recommended the development of a new legal status to protect those displaced by climate change. The following year, the international climate negotiations under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) recognized “climate change-induced migration” in the Adaptation Framework as an issue that might receive funding via the adaptation funds (UNFCCC 2010). The year after that, in a presidential statement, the United Nations Security Council recognized climate change as a threat to the national security of low-lying small island states that face submergence (UNSC 2011).

Most articles on the issue of climate refugees ask one or more of several questions. How many people are likely to be affected (for a critique, see Jakobeit
and Methmann 2012)? How should climate refugee status be defined? Who should be eligible for help? And who should bear the costs (Docherty and Giannini 2009; Biermann and Boas 2010)? In this chapter, I ask a different set of questions. I investigate the climate refugee as a discursive construct in a contested narrative landscape on climate change. I ask: which (climate) policies are enabled by the changing problematizations of climate refugees? I draw on Foucault’s (2007) governmentality studies in order to distinguish between three different discourses that have been problematizing climate refugees or climate change-induced migrants in different ways. For each discourse, I assess the policies mobilized and offer a critique of the policy implications.

The empirical analysis for this chapter draws on the most cited documents on climate (and environmental) refugees, from the publication of the first document by the UN Environment Programme in 1985 (El-Hinnawi 1985) until the present. Moreover, fieldwork was conducted at the fifteenth Conference of the Parties (COP15) to the UNFCCC in Copenhagen in December 2009, where I carried out a series of interviews with activists, small island delegations, and scientists, and recorded all side events with a focus on climate change-induced displacement. All interviews and side events were transcribed. The collected material was then subjected to a discourse analysis, which sought to distinguish between competing ways of framing the issue of climate change-induced migration. I analysed which discourses were dominant or marginalized at which point in time and discuss the policy implications of each discourse. Moreover, I analysed the ways in which dominant discourses were contested and by whom.

In the remainder of this chapter I present the findings of that discourse analysis. I distinguish between three discourses of climate refugees and climate change-induced migration. Each discourse was dominant at some point in time, but all three still exist today. The second section introduces the discourse that constructs “millions of climate refugees” as a threat to states’ national security. I associate this alarmist discourse with Foucault’s concept of sovereign power and argue that it mobilizes defence against the presumed threat. The third section presents the discourse that considers climate change as a threat to the human security of people (mostly in developing countries). This discourse charges industrialized countries with “saving” climate refugees. I argue that it mobilizes risk management to secure people in line with Foucault’s liberal biopower. Finally, the fourth section introduces the discourse that accepts dangerous levels of climate change as inevitable and recommends migration as a rational strategy of adaptation to rising sea levels. I show how advanced liberal government renders affected populations responsible for helping themselves. For each discourse, the resulting policies are discussed and the policy implications highlighted.

I conclude that all three discourses on climate refugees or climate change-induced migration contribute to legitimizing the displacement of millions of people. By presenting dangerous levels of climate change as inevitable and by making resilience the new leitmotif of climate policy, the third and most recent discourse depoliticizes the issue of climate change in a radical way. From a critical
perspective, it is necessary to contest this “partition of the sensible” (Rancière 2004) in order to restore our ability to address the causes of climate change. I highlight the need for an alternative framing in which calls for emission reductions in industrialized countries can be legitimately made and compensation for damages suffered requested. By contesting the dominant discourses on climate change–induced migration, I seek to open up new ways of acting on climate change and to contribute to an ecological geopolitics.

Defending against the vulnerable

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the environmental refugee emerged as a figure that the industrialized countries were told to fear. At the time, there was rising concern that ongoing environmental degradation could lead to mass displacement and possibly even violent conflict, especially in fragile states (Homer-Dixon 1999; see Meierding, Chapter 4, this volume, for further discussion). The emerging chaos in the Global South would lead to the North being overwhelmed by waves of refugees. This section presents evidence of such discourse with regards to “climate refugees” and analyses its policy implications.

In 2007, Greenpeace Germany was responsible for media headlines warning of more than 200 million so-called “climate refugees” worldwide by 2037. Greenpeace had commissioned an academic study on the issue of climate refugees (Jakobeit and Methmann 2012) and launched its findings at a big press conference. At a time when international climate negotiations were deadlocked, the environmentalists hoped to attract public support for emission reductions. Another example of this discourse is Michael P. Nash’s documentary Climate Refugees (2009), which includes the phrase “the human face of climate change” in the subtitle. In the film, Nash interviews people who have been severely affected by changing weather patterns around the world. Shown in close-up, they describe losing their homes, their communities, and their children to extreme weather events, often with tears in their eyes. These images are linked together by a narrative of forced migration; all of these people will have to migrate sooner or later as a result of climate change—and, as the film suggests, the migration route will lead straight from Global South to North. At one point a globe appears on the screen with red arrows illustrating the presumed migration patterns of the affected populations. As all of these arrows terminate in the United States or Europe, a threat to national security is clearly established. Such migration will be a problem, the film tells us, because it will cause conflict, possibly violence, and even climate wars. Nash interviews several high-ranking members of the US military establishment who provide evidence for these claims. After one hour, footage of an exploding nuclear bomb is shown to illustrate the possibility of a third world war as a result of unmanaged mass migration.

The film ends with a dramatic appeal to use energy-saving light bulbs and recycle household waste, because such behaviour will make a difference in the fight against global warming. No government-level political action is demanded; finding solutions to the problem is delegated to the individual consumer.
These two examples represent a discourse that constructs climate refugees as threats to national security in the Global North—a mass of people who should be feared. Moreover, migration is conceptualized as a problem that should be avoided—and where it cannot be avoided, security in the form of defence is advocated, for example by strengthening border installations. According to a Pentagon study, the results of abrupt climatic change will be a world in which “[d]isruption and conflict will be endemic features of life” (Schwartz and Randall 2003: 22). Other examples of this discourse include a report written by retired US military personnel (CNA Corporation 2007) and Harald Welzer’s *Climate Wars* (2012). All estimates of the number of future climate refugees cited in the reports mentioned above can be traced back to a study by Myers and Kent (1995), which has since been discredited for its flawed methodology. While this discourse of national security is no longer dominant, it is still popular, especially in the United States, where the CNA Corporation recently published a follow-up to its original 2007 study (CNA Military Advisory Board 2014). (Simon Dalby analyses this document in detail in Chapter 6, this volume.)

Which forms of governing climate change in general and climate refugees in particular are incited by the national security discourse? The Copenhagen School (Waever 1995) has developed a theoretical framework in order to investigate the social construction of issues as security issues. They argue that the successful “securitization” of an issue like climate change could elevate it to the level of high politics and enable politicians to circumvent democratic procedures and/or adopt extraordinary measures. The drastic articulation of climate change as an existential threat to the survival of nation states could justify such a political state of exception if it were to be accepted by a “relevant” audience (Waever 1995). Extraordinary measures like “the Security Council adopting resolutions to impose emission targets, and even military measures against polluting factories” (Trombetta 2008: 599) might then be adopted in such a case. While climate change has actually made it onto the agenda of the UN Security Council three times (2007, 2011, and 2013), not a single resolution on the subject has yet been passed. The reason for this is that the majority of developing countries contest the framing of climate change as a security issue and insist, instead, that it is an issue of sustainable development to be negotiated under the UNFCCC. The climate negotiations have continued without taking much notice of the climate security discourse and without any breakthroughs since the adoption of the Kyoto Protocol in 1997.

We are also not witnessing the militarization of climate politics at international climate negotiations (Oels 2013). Instead, there has been a climatization of security policy (Oels 2013): that is, the consideration of climate change impacts in military planning and training (Dalby 2014). Following Foucault’s governmentality lectures, national security discourse can be seen to mobilize a sovereign economy of power—namely, one based on the use of force as a last resort. Globalization has led to decentralized production networks, many of which draw directly or indirectly on resources and agricultural products from conflict-prone
regions. Defence is the favoured strategy of securing global economic flows where mass migration and resulting violent conflict threaten to disrupt these global production chains. Hartmann (2010) has argued that the climate security discourse may, in the end, legitimize military interventions in destabilized post-disaster regions. Moreover, it contributes to the long-standing securitization of migration. As Bigo (2007) has highlighted in his work on migration, governments draw on ever more sophisticated strategies of surveillance (such as satellite surveillance) in order to identify presumably “dangerous” individuals within the masses that migrate. The climate security discourse may lead to more investment in border technologies to keep out climate migrants.

In conclusion, this discourse spreads fear about climate refugees. It constructs climate refugees as a threat to the national security of states, and mobilizes defence as the mode of securing. However, there is no evidence that this discourse either facilitates emission reductions or leads to the militarization of climate policy. Instead, it seems to have led to the climatization of defence policy and the securitization of migration policy.

The discourse that urges us to fear climate refugees can be criticized on a number of counts. First, it is undeniably racist. For instance, Andrew Baldwin (2013) has highlighted the racist stereotypes reproduced in the film Climate Refugees. The documentary establishes Western experts as superior and developing country victims as in need of help, thereby echoing colonial stereotypes of “the dangerous South” (Dalby 1996, 2009). Climate refugees are presented as both threat and victim simultaneously (Baldwin 2013: 1479).

Second, raising fears about “millions of climate refugees” helps to legitimize restrictive migration policies and the militarization of borders. The UN Commissioner for Refugees, Antonio Guterres, in an official side event to the UN Climate Conference in Copenhagen in 2009, spoke strongly against linking migration and security:

> I don’t think migration is a security threat . . . Now, migration is a security threat for those countries that believe the way forward is to close their borders and not let anybody in. Of course, the best way to justify that is to invoke security reasons, like if every migrant was a potential terrorist . . . And traffickers and smugglers . . . they develop because there is not enough opportunity for legal migration.

Roland Emmerich’s movie The Day after Tomorrow (2004) offers a powerful reminder that anybody can become a refugee. The movie focuses on a temperature drop – as does the aforementioned Pentagon study (Schwartz and Randall 2003) – that forces US citizens to flee to warmer countries, such as Mexico. The images of desperate Americans risking their lives in order to overcome their own sophisticated border defences are, of course, highly ironic.

Third, while many proponents of this discourse claim otherwise, it does not facilitate emission reductions. Some studies do not even mention the causes of
climate change. For instance, Schwartz and Randall’s (2003) report for the Pentagon was written under the George W. Bush administration, which denied that climate change was human-made. As a result, there is no talk of causation in the study, and the evidence presented in it is divided. Moreover, if the causes of climate change are mentioned at all, the problem of climate change is individualized. As mentioned above, in the concluding section of Climate Refugees, the documentary focuses on behaviour that everybody should adopt to limit climate change. However, there is no talk of the need for new policies, such as climate laws or international treaties.

I conclude that this discourse can be criticized for being racist and for potentially making migration more difficult.

**Protecting vulnerable populations (interventionism)**

During the 1990s, a new way of framing climate change and climate refugees emerged. In this new discourse, the international community of states was said to be responsible for “saving” climate refugees from rising sea levels, enabling a regime of liberal biopower. The discursive shift was facilitated by the rise of the concept of human security, which was advocated by the United Nations Development Agency in its *New Dimensions of Human Security* report (UNDP 1994). Moreover, after the end of the Cold War, the international community launched a number of so-called “humanitarian” military interventions in conflicts, overriding national sovereignty in the name of universal human rights, thereby ushering in an interventionist era (Chandler 2012).

This discourse, which was dominant from the 1990s to the early 2000s, conceives of climate change as a risk to humans that is calculable and therefore manageable. Global climate modelling provided the technology for calculating emission pathways that were presumably “safe” for the majority of people. However, there was also an acknowledgement that current weather variations were already dangerous for many people, the biosphere, and the economy. Climate scientists were increasingly able to map populations who were considered to be particularly vulnerable to climate change, including those whose livelihoods might be destroyed and who might therefore be forced to migrate. Governments were charged with targeting interventions on the most vulnerable (Methmann and Oels 2014) – the “dangerous” groups, as Foucault would say. Such vulnerable populations were considered to be in need of assistance by the international community.

This interventionist stance on the issue of climate change-induced migration was facilitated by the rise of the human security discourse and the spread of humanitarian interventions in the 1990s. In his report on *Climate Change and Its Possible Security Implications*, the Secretary General of the UN establishes climate change as a threat to human vulnerability; however, he refrains from explicitly using the politically contested term “human security” (UNGA 2009). Instead, he states: “Adequately planning for and managing environmentally induced migration will be critical” (UNGA 2009: 17).
The overall policy rationale of the human security discourse is risk management, based on scientific calculations and cost–benefit analysis (Oels 2013). Rather than banning greenhouse gas (CHG) emissions in general, risk management seeks to keep them at a presumably “safe” level. The two-degree target, which seeks to keep the average global temperature increase to two degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, is a good example of this. Global warming is not stopped, but the rate of warming is supposed to be manageable for nature, the economy, and humanity. According to Foucault’s governmentality lectures, we can classify this as a regime of liberal biopower (Dean 2010). Liberal biopower uses statistics and scientific calculations to manage the well-being of the population at large. In risk management, particular attention is paid to those who deviate statistically from the norm(al), and interventions are targeted at them.

In the case of climate change, this implies that policy must focus on those who are most vulnerable to climate change: for example, those living in so-called “climate hot spots.” According to the human security discourse, governments should identify these groups and target their interventions on them. Where national governments fail to protect their own populations – for example, in so-called “fragile” states of the Global South – Northern governments may legitimize themselves to intervene by humanitarian or military means (Hartmann 2010). The human security discourse creates “the ‘humans’ requiring securing” (Duffield and Waddel 2006: 2) so that they can then be legitimately subjected to Northern interventionism.

In Climate Change and Its Possible Security Implications, the Secretary General of the UN demanded new legal frameworks to protect those displaced by the impacts of climate change, especially those from low-lying small island states rendered stateless as a result of rising sea levels (UNGA 2009). The academic literature has discussed various options for a legal framework, ranging from a recognition of “environmental persecution” under the UN Refugee Convention (Conisbee and Simms 2003: 33), via a protocol to the UNFCCC (Biermann and Boas 2010), to a stand-alone convention (Docherty and Giannini 2009). However, there seems to be no political support for a refugee status of any sort. The issue was taken up at the international climate negotiations in 2010 in Cancun under the new label of “climate change–induced migration.” This wording was chosen to clarify that no asylum will be offered to climate refugees and no claims can be made against the industrialized countries. Instead, Article 14f of the Adaptation Framework agreed at Cancun lists climate change–induced migration as eligible for funding from adaptation funds (UNFCCC 2010). However, even this had not been operationalized at the time of writing (late 2014).

The human security discourse constructs populations in climate hot spots as helpless victims in need of Northern assistance. Their political agency is denied, and others are empowered to speak on the refugees’ behalf. Claudia Aradau (2004) has demonstrated that this sort of “politics of pity” is highly problematic. The discourse on human security can be criticized for reducing citizens to humans, thereby denying people’s political agency. As Agamben (1998) has
highlighted, the refugee is the citizen’s other; she or he is constituted by lacking much of what defines the citizen.

Second, the creation of a new category of climate refugee perpetuates a flawed refugee regime. In an interview conducted in Copenhagen in 2009, two No Borders activists argued that introducing climate refugee status would merely serve to “divide us as human beings” and “redefine who you exclude.” It would build on a refugee regime in which

the only way you can possibly hope to stay in the UK is if you are a really good victim. People have got to feel really sorry for you to be allowed to stay. You’ve got to have, like, persecution, scars, you know, like all this evidence.

Instead, No Borders works towards “freedom of movement for all,” which would allow people to say, "You know, I just wanted to move."

Third, populations under threat of displacement by climate change strongly resist their classification as “climate refugees.” In interviews with ambassadors from low-lying small island states, McNamara and Gibson (2009) repeatedly heard, “We do not want to leave our land.” Similarly, in my own interviews with NGO representatives from small island states, they all stressed that they do not want to migrate. However, if they are forced to leave, they wish to travel as labour migrants (which is currently highly restricted), not as designated refugees:

Our president made it clear – and we totally back him up on this – that we don’t want to be called climate refugees, because we are not. As I keep saying, we are so tiny, but we are very proud people and we would never dream to be a burden to other countries. I would never dream to come to one country and be called a climate refugee. I’d love to move with dignity and respect, with merit. And that’s why we back our government in trying to get skills … [so that] we move in with the skills and contribute to the country, rather than being a burden on the country.

Carol Farbotko insists that small island people in the Pacific have political agency; they are not passive, helpless victims, as the Western media claims. More importantly, they have a long tradition as seafarers upon which any self-determined migration could build (Farbotko 2012; Farbotko and Lazrus 2012).

I conclude that the human security discourse seeks to prepare the ground for Northern interventionism. However, those threatened by climate change do not want to be rescued; they do not want to leave their land.

**Inciting resilience in vulnerable populations (post-interventionism)**

The idea that populations affected by climate change have political agency and can take their own precautions has informed the latest discourse on what is
now officially called "climate change-induced migration." This discursive shift took place in 2011 when the UK's Government Office for Science published *Migration and Global Environmental Change*. Very much in line with neoliberal ideas of self-optimization and empowerment, this report reframed climate change-induced migration as a rational strategy of adaptation to climate change impacts.

This latest shift in the discourse is based on the assumption that dangerous levels of climate change cannot be prevented. Of course, this has become more likely since the climate negotiations failed spectacularly in Copenhagen in 2009. Indeed, current climate variability is already dangerous for many people around the world, and, with little or no progress on drafting a new comprehensive climate treaty, an average global warming of more than three degrees Celsius is now considered likely (Rogelj et al. 2010). Under such conditions, tipping points in the global climate system might be reached, and these could lead to the collapse of the Gulf Stream and the death of the Amazon rainforest (Lenton et al. 2008). The global climate system is theorized as non-linear, so any changes are highly unpredictable and radically contingent, but the consequences remain potentially catastrophic: "With such warming, there is little uncertainty over whether extreme impacts will occur, only when they will happen, and to what extent they will affect specific locales" (Mabey et al. 2011: 43). As a result, “[t]he threat of climate change is high-impact and high-probability” (Mabey et al. 2011: 84).

The latest discourse has reframed climate change as "environmental terror" (Duffield 2011: 763) that strikes unpredictably. The idea that science could define "safe" emission pathways has been dropped. Boykoff et al. (2010: 53) argue that, due to unknown climate sensitivity and unknown carbon cycle dynamics, it is almost impossible to identify a "safe" level of atmospheric carbon dioxide. In the face of the unknown, new sources of knowledge — such as scenario planning studies and worst-case scenarios — are spreading and forming the basis for a politics of preparedness.

In a world presumably facing environmental terror, practices of securing are informed by the concepts of resilience and preparedness. The founder of the resilience concept, C.S. Holling (1973: 14), defines resilience as a social or ecological system’s ability to “absorb change and disturbance and still maintain the same relationships between populations or state variables.” Resilience can range from maintenance via adaptation to transformation. The resilient subject is “conceived only as an active agent, capable of achieving self-transformation” (Chandler 2012: 217). Resilience is in line with what Foucauldians would call advanced liberal government (Dean 2010; Oels 2005) and what Evans and Reid (2013: 11–12) have called the “neoliberalized care of the self.” In a regime of advanced liberal government, the individual is rendered responsible for self-optimization by building a strong social network for emergency situations. In a radically contingent world, the capacity for adaptive emergence, for reflexive self-transformation, is key for survival (Dillon 2007). Resilience mobilizes the
vulnerable towards programmes of self-help, to foster “their entrepreneurial abilities and technical skills” (World Bank 2010: 130–1).

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) published its Fifth Assessment Report in 2013/14 (for further discussion, see O’Lear, Chapter 7, this volume). In the concluding chapter, Working Group II, tasked with focusing on socio-economic aspects of climate change impacts, acknowledges that:

climate change [is] a threat to sustainable development ... as a result, transformational changes are very likely to be required for climate resilient pathways – both transformational adaptations and transformations of social processes that make such transformational adaptations feasible.

(Field et al. 2014: 1106)

In the latest scientific publications, climate change-induced migration is reconceptualized as a rational strategy of coping with climate change (Black et al. 2011). Migration and Global Environmental Change argues that migration is an excellent strategy of what it calls “‘transformational’ adaptation to environmental change ... [which] in many cases will be an extremely effective way to build long-term resilience” (Government Office for Science 2011: 7). The migration of some can allow those staying behind to engage in adaptation and survive, if enough remittances are sent (Scheffran et al. 2012). However, not all people in regions exposed to climatic changes and extreme weather events can become resilient. Some might become even more vulnerable in the process of migration. Many might be unable to migrate and end up trapped in dangerous places. Policy actors emphasize that the risk of what they problematize as “maladaptation” remains high. Therefore, careful planning is required in such cases (Asian Development Bank 2012: 47), focusing interventions on the “dangerous” or high-risk groups.

I conclude that the resilience discourse is rendering the potential victims of climate change responsible for taking their own precautions. It does so by drawing on advanced liberal technologies that seek to push individuals towards self-transformation, including relocation.

As critics of the concept of resilience have pointed out, resilience is not the same as sustainable development. The former is about survival; it defines a bottom line of “sheer survivability” (Evans and Reid 2013: 9). There is no promise of political rights, no talk of human rights, no minimum standards of existence. As a result, resilience is much less than adaptation, mitigation, and sustainable development. This enables a new form of government based on post-interventionism; the Global North is no longer responsible for fixing the situation in the South (Chandler 2012). Of course, this might lead to decreasing flows of assistance from North to South.

The most contested aspect of the resilience discourse is its assumption of the inevitability of disaster that many people around the world will presumably have to prepare for and then endure. At stake in this debate are alternative visions of
geopolitical futures (McNamara and Gibson 2009). It is simply unacceptable that affected populations are to suffer from extreme weather events on a regular basis or even disappear from the map. At the international climate negotiations in Warsaw (COP19) in November 2013, Yeb Sano, the spokesperson for the Filipino delegation, made a strong statement on this subject:

[W]e refuse as a nation to accept a future where super typhoons like Haiyan become a fact of life. We refuse to accept that running away from storms, evacuating our families, suffering the devastation and misery, having to count our dead, become a way of life. We simply refuse to . . . We can stop this madness. Right now.

*(Sano 2014)*

Sano pledged to fast during the conference until significant progress on emission reductions was made. (This was also an expression of solidarity with many of his fellow Filipinos, who had no food for three days after Typhoon Haiyan hit the islands.) His main point was that climate change can still be mitigated; that it is still possible to act and prevent many of the potentially catastrophic climate change impacts. It might be difficult to persuade people in the industrialized countries to abandon their SUVs, but that does not mean that it is impossible. The No Borders activists in Copenhagen in December 2009 suggested that those displaced by climate change should adopt the slogan “We are here because you drive SUVs” to establish that Northern lifestyles are a principal cause of their migration.

It is only by contesting the inevitability of climate change that demands for reductions in GHG emissions can be legitimately raised. As one small island state delegate declared during a side event at Copenhagen:

I am not going to turn and run away from my home because of the rising of the sea. No! . . . My biggest problem is people are not listening when we say, “Cut your emissions.” They don’t listen. They don’t care. That’s my problem. Not the water.

The chairperson of the Alliance of Small Island States insisted in an interview: “We are still hoping that all the members of the international community, especially in the General Assembly, will take necessary action in time to address climate change in such a way that it won’t affect us” (quoted in McNamara and Gibson 2009: 480). However, the resilience discourse rejects the possibility of a geopolitical future in which climate change does not have a devastating impact.

**Conclusions: restoring the political in climate change politics**

This chapter is based on the assumption that climate refugees should be investigated as a discursive construction that serves some purpose, to paraphrase
Robert Cox (1981). However, looked at more closely, it is clear that there is more than one climate refugee discourse. I have shown that climate refugees were first constructed as a threat to be feared; then as people who need our support; and, finally, as people who are capable of self-help and self-determined relocation. Over time, even the label for people displaced by climate change has changed from “climate refugees” to “climate change-induced migrants.” The former was dropped in order to signal that no claims to asylum could be made. This might be considered progress, as I have shown that the affected populations have no desire for refugee status. In fact, most of them flatly refuse to view themselves in such a light. If they are eventually forced to leave their homelands, they would prefer to do so as labour migrants rather than refugees.

However, there are some good reasons to be sceptical about the resilience discourse. It depoliticizes the issue of climate change, making it seem as if nothing can be done about it, as if it is merely a “fact of life” (Sano 2013). The displacement of millions of people is no longer framed as a political scandal, but as a rational strategy of adaptation. The loss of millions of livelihoods is reframed as unfortunate, but inevitable (McNamara and Gibson 2009). At the same time, the citizens of the industrialized nations continue to drive their SUVs without a trace of guilt. Populations under threat of displacement contest the inevitability of climate change as something for which they must prepare. They highlight that it could still be slowed and mitigated and its impacts minimized. They refuse to accept the inevitability of the disappearance of their homes from the map. They refuse to accept the need to live “dangerously” (Evans and Reid 2013). They insist that, if the large emitters act in time, their homes can still be saved. In fact, many climate change impacts could still be avoided, but they will not be if the industrial nations continue to show no interest in changing their behaviour. The resilience discourse effectively obscures this potential for action and naturalizes the impacts of climate change.

The resilience discourse most notably fails to problematize the causes of climate change: the fossil fuel-based capitalist system of production and consumption, which produces most of the GHG emissions. As Swyngedouw (2010: 223) has highlighted, if the fossil fuel-based capitalist system is problematized in climate security discourse at all, it is only in talk of an “aberration” of an otherwise flawless system that can be fixed. In fact, the same elites who created the problem in the first place are now charged with solving it (Swyngedouw 2010: 223), using market measures. Swyngedouw mentions markets for trading carbon and carbon offsets as examples of attempts to solve climate change by using the very methods that caused it (see also Glover’s discussion, Chapter 2, this volume). Ecological geopolitics make it very clear that the decisions that we make about how we produce and consume in the Anthropocene are shaping the planet’s geology for future generations. Emissions are deeply embedded in the lifestyles of the industrialized countries. A questioning of the very patterns of fossil fuel-based capitalist production and consumption is required if we are to address the problem of climate change at its roots and pre-empt the need for mass relocation.
References


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