Counter Narrating the Violence of Hegemony in Climate Change Conflicts

Introduction

Climate change, extreme poverty and conflict emerge from social relations based in fear, selfishness, hatred and ignorance. To transform the inherent destructive powers of these relations requires a confrontation with governments, corporations, and individuals committed to following the same scripts that benefits the privileged minority while billions suffer the consequences. This project demands a battle of ideas, a radical shift to confront radical inequality. While wealth redistribution is not the topic of this paper, the ideologies that sustain and innovate processes of exploitation and inequality are central. More so in the ways these processes manifest themselves in climate change and conflict narratives. Nonetheless, the glaring increase of capital accumulation in the hands of a few governments, corporations, and individuals – despite radical inequality – deserves our attention and critique. As a privileged member, in many ways, of the world's enigma – the United States of America – it is my responsibility to question the policies, ideologies, and practices that (re)produce inequities in social-environmental interactions. As one scholar eloquently put it –

> The way humans pollute, degrade and destroy the natural world is merely a very visible indicator for the way they treat each other and particularly weaker members of society. The logic that allows us to fell thousands of square

> kilometres of rainforests, to dump toxins in waterways or pollute the air is precisely the same logic that produces racism, misogyny and xenophobia. Tackling one problem inevitably implies tackling all the others (Verweij 2006, 826).

In this paper, I attempt to tackle how academics, policymakers, politicians and the media reinforce the dominant narrative on climate change and conflict. I argue the dominant narrative emerges from the inequities of the global system – the colonial present made manifest. The dominant narrative produces knowledge and polcies, which lack empirical evidence, and utilize tropes steeped in (neo)colonial imaginations of Africa, privilege, and hegemony. The narrative resonates and dominates because they are myths normalized throughout history to us to justify our (Western) actions. The conflict takes place within our hearts and intellect, and then plays out on the complex field of global social relations. The counter-narrative demands responsibility, rights, duties, respect and compassion. A movement of peace.

My attempt at fleshing out the dominant narrative in one of it many guises – climate change and conflict – requires several sections. The first section looks to the recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reports on climate change. These reports form the foundation of climate change science utilized by actors throughout the world. Following this section, I quickly examine the intersections of international environment law and international human rights law. I do this to point out the ways in which these two legal doctrines can be mobilized

and the inherent gaps of protections existent within the two systems. The final two sections closely examine the dueling narratives concerning climate change and conflict. My analysis attempts to deconstruct and critique the dominant narrative. I then argue for a methodological gaze that accepts and welcomes “on the ground” complexities while acknowledging the influence of global political economy concerning climate change and conflict. This paper provides a much-needed critique concerning the literature on resource conflicts while utilizing several important studies on the connections between climate change and conflict.

The IPCC Reports Concerning Adaptation and Conflict

The IPCC published its main reports over the past several months and continues to highlight the possible disastrous consequences of climate change and ways to mitigate and adapt to those affects. The IPCC divides itself into three working groups with each focusing on distinct aspects of climate change. For instance, working group one (WGI and so on) focuses on the physical science basis of climate change while WGII looks at impacts, adaptation and vulnerability and WGIII examines mitigation. While the IPCC prides itself on the diverse countries represented in the WGs, the reports lack significant contribution from social scientists thereby creating a culture of hard science knowledge production. Therefore, the reports lack diverse viewpoints required to understand the

complicated universe of climate change and its impacts on society in any meaningful way beyond reducing human experience into variables for mathematical models. Nonetheless, the reports form the foundation through which social scientists, policy makers, and the media form their opinions and arguments.

Since the IPCCs last substantial publications in 2007, the recent WGI report reinforces several decades of warnings urging us to change our ways or suffer the consequences. Despite these warnings, the atmosphere has higher concentrations of CO2, methane and nitrous oxide than at any time in at least the last 800,000 years (IPCC 2013, 11). Since the 1950s climate changes are "unprecedented over decades to millennia" with warming of the atmosphere and ocean, snow and ice melting, sea level rise, and significant increases in greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) (IPCC 2013, 4). Instead of heeding the early warnings we have increased the activities causing climate change. The report reiterates that continued and unabated GHG emissions will cause further warming necessitating a substantial reduction of emissions to limit its effects (IPCC 2013, 19). Despite any substantial mitigation actions "[m]ost aspects of climate change will persist for many centuries even if emissions of CO2 are stopped" and the report notes mankind's remarkable engagement with climate change as "represent[ing] a substantial multi-century climate change commitment created by past, present and future emissions of CO2" (IPCC 2013, 27). In other words, the world we live in today will be climatically

different for each generation and each day our decisions flow throughout the centuries.

The recent WGII report, which focuses on adaptation, reveals that climate change may have effects on conflicts and poverty alleviation. The IPCC reported that "[v]iolent conflict increases vulnerability to climate change" and that "[l]arge-scale violent conflict harms assets that facilitate adaptation, including infrastructure, institutions, natural resources, social capital, and livelihood opportunities" (IPCC 2014a, 8). These statements are qualified by "medium confidence, high agreement" and the causation is tenuous at best since violent conflict increases vulnerability in all circumstances. The authors also argue that "[c]limate change can indirectly increase risks of violent conflicts in the form of civil war and inter-group violence by amplifying well-documented drivers of these conflicts such as poverty and economic shocks. Multiple lines of evidence relate climate variability to these forms of conflict" (IPCC 2014a, 20). Of particular note, which I expand upon later, is the reducibility of causation, in least developed countries, between climate change and conflict. Of course, the waning ecosystem services affect us, but that does not lead logically to conflict. Beyond the economic impacts of reducing a carbon intensive system, the IPCC argues "[t]hroughout the 21st century, climate-change impacts are projected to slow down economic growth, make poverty reduction more difficult, further erode food security, and prolong existing and create new poverty traps, the

latter particularly in urban areas and emerging hotspots of hunger" (IPCC 2014a, 21). This statement takes the world as it is today – radically unequal – and applies possible climate change effects to that model. This statement, however, is worthless. If we remove climate change as a variable and the global society continues on the same path those outcomes will manifest. The topics highlighted here point to instances where social scientists could provide useful insights into the IPCCs normative frameworks.

In addition to recognizing the importance of societal values, objectives and risk perception – along with the diverse sets of cultural interests, contexts and expectations each individual qua nation embodies – WGII promotes the importance of indigenous adaptation strategies. This section of the report is a nod in the general direction of the hosts of sidelined countries in climate change politics. As one critique of global climate change negotiations J. Roberts notes, "for more than thirty years the environmental issues of most concern to developing countries have been brushed aside and replaced with First World issues" (Roberts 2007, 6). However, the report states that integrating "indigenous, local, and traditional knowledge systems and practices, including indigenous peoples' holistic view of community and environment…increases the effectiveness of adaptation" (IPCC 2014a, 23). If heeded, this may have influential weight in the struggle for food justice against Western dominated so-called "green revolution" touted by NGOs

and undergirded by for-profit chemical companies as well as other forms of transnational NGO and corporate exploitation.

The new WGIII IPCC report, which focuses on mitigation, highlights the need for global cooperation and awareness of adverse side effects and co-benefits of climate policy and other societal goals. WGIII argues that effective mitigation is impossible if individual agents follow their own interests independently (IPCC 2014b, 4). GHG emissions accumulate over time and mix globally, so if several highly industrialized states continue unabated GHG emitting, then those self-interested states continue harming the world. The report also highlights the importance of beginning on the right foot, "[i]nfrastructure developments and long-lived products that lock societies into GHG intensive emissions pathways may be difficult or very costly to change, reinforcing the importance of early action for ambitious mitigation" (IPCC 2014b, 20). Context and cultural relativism concerning adaptation development projects are significant variables in gauging the possible adverse effects and co-benefits associated with these projects. WGIII points out that these effects, whether positive or negative, are dependent upon each unique case along with "local circumstances and the scale, scope, and pace of implementation" (IPCC 2014b, 20). Importantly, development goals must be aware of the multiple objectives and voices of those effected by such projects, and how projects can be enhanced by focusing on these multiple goals by ensuring

development projects pay attention to the complexity of society and the environment.

The breadth of the IPCC reports is astounding and quite overwhelming. The short excerpts I noted are small glimpses into the reports and only issues relevant to the paper at hand. As would be expected, GHG emissions have increased and the negative impacts of climate change have only begun to manifest in ways obvious to the naked eye (or at least the imagination). While the IPCC notes climate change can exacerbate conflict and vice versa, there are some promising notes that suggest global cooperation and indigenous traditional knowledge will support adaptation and mitigation strategies. These adaptation and mitigation strategies, in turn, must be sensitive to the diverse contexts and interests to ensure projects do more good than harm. The main message of the reports is that the world is changing before our very eyes and the outlook is bleak. However, if we begin to cooperate with each other and design policies that secure low GHG emissions, than perhaps we can change our course and exist in a world that is only 2 degrees warmer not 7.

International Environmental Law and Human Rights Law

In 2008, the Human Rights Council of the United Nations passed a resolution finding that "climate change poses an immediate and far-reaching threat to people and communities around the world and has implications for the full enjoyment of human rights" (Council 2008). Most of the international and regional human rights treaties contain provisions concerning the right to dignity, life, health, decent living conditions and working environment, amongst many others that require life-sustaining ecosystems. Indeed, potential disastrous environmental impacts have a thick relationship to basic human rights. According to scholars Boyle and Anderson, the relationship between the environment and human rights has two main theoretical conceptions – achieving environmental protection as a means to realizing human rights and/or human rights realization as a means of achieving environmental protection (Anderson 1998, 2). However, the praxis of international environmental law and international human rights differ.

This difference profoundly affects the utility of international law and environmental issues. Simply put, international human rights law focuses on human impacts, whereas international environmental law concern itself primarily with transboundary environmental harms or global commons impacts and not preventing or addressing human impacts. Thus, the human rights and environmental nexus in international law coalesce in theory while practice sets a clear distinction marked by legal efficacy and argument. For example, in Hari Ososfky's study of international

environmental justice case studies, she found that in fifteen of the sixteen cases, "the claimed rights violations included the environment as part of the factual situation causing the harm; the rights themselves had no specific connection to the environment" (Osofsky 2005, 79). Unfortunately, this doctrinal distinction creates gaps in protection, "when such threats are a consequence of actions or inactions taken by an individual's own national government" (Rodriguez-Rivera 2001, 31). Of course, the international community uses the responsibility to protect doctrine (cyclone in Burma) and Chapter VII authority of the Security Council (earthquake in Haiti) to intervene in such circumstances, yet significant environmental and human harms go unaddressed because of this gap in countless situations.

Differences between the two doctrines notwithstanding, two legally binding human rights treaties provide explicitly for environmental protection – the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the Organization of American States' San Salvador Protocol. Article 24 of the African Charter states "[a]ll peoples shall have the right to a general satisfactory environment favourable to their development." Despite the declaration of requirements and inherent principles accorded in the African Charter, The African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights still struggle to maintain influence and enforce justice on the continent. Article 11.1 of the San Salvador Protocol states "[e]veryone shall have the right to live in a healthy

environment and to have access to basic public services" and Article 11.2 states, "[t]he States Parties shall promote the protection, preservation, and improvement of the environment." Yet, these are just treaties that require commitment by nation-states. As one critical legal scholar noted "international law is not itself capable of bringing about change" (Taylor 1998, 3). The mere presence of enumerated rights and duties does not guarantee those rights will be realized and duties honored. Like any international treaty, enforcement mechanisms depend upon the nation-states willingness to comply or enforce. In other words, laws are nothing but text unless exercised with power and authority.

To end this section, I wanted to address the most sustaining critique of international human rights – cultural relativism. In alignment with my thoughts on the matter legal scholar Rosalyn Higgins argues that cultural relativism –

> Is a point advanced mostly by states, and by liberal scholars anxious not to impose the Western view of things on others. It is rarely advanced by the oppressed, who are only too anxious to benefit from perceived universal standards. The non-universal, relativist view of human rights is in fact a very state-centred view and loses sight of the fact that human rights are human rights and not dependent on the fact that states, or groupings of states, may behave differently from each other so far as their politics, economic policy, and culture are concerned. I believe, profoundly, in the universality of the human spirit (Higgins 1994, 96–7).

The universality of the human spirit she argues for exists outside of any laws and emerges from universal moral principles. Human rights and justice are foundational to the existence and realization of rights in the wake of climate change (Shue 2010,

103, Williams 2009, 97, Humphreys 2010, 299–302). To deny these rights because of cultural relativism implies that certain individuals exist outside of basic human rights and the duties of mankind to protect them. Simply put, we all have duties to mankind.

This section briefly examined the connections and distinctions between international human rights and environmental law. While there are two binding legal treaties concerning the human right to a healthy environment, the international legal treaties are ill equipped to deal with the dangers of climate change and increased environmental degradation. As a practical matter, advocates can utilize both doctrines to achieve both human and environmental protection.

Examining the Dominant Narrative

Climate change will impact many diverse layers of society challenging our capacity to adapt to its effects. Migration due to sea level rise, desertification and extreme weather events will place burdens on members of society. As mentioned earlier, food supplies may dwindle as climate change alters weather patterns negatively effecting agriculture. Climate change, in some ways, will exacerbate already existing social tensions as individuals, communities and nation-states struggle to fulfill their needs. With water supplies being over-exploited and precipitation patterns changing, we can safely assume the world will be facing a

water crisis. Population growth and limited natural resources sustaining human life means, at some point, there will be a reckoning. In the U.S. we are better off than most. In Africa, however, armed conflict over natural resources is highly likely. Most of the continent currently struggles with failed states, scarce resources and poverty. Climate change will be a "threat multiplier" driving armed conflict in the region. This is the dominant narrative.

The dominant and mainstream academic and policy accounts of the casual relationship between natural resources and conflict are organized around three main principles – scarcity, state failure and under-development (Hoffmann 2014, 1). The tropes are familiar in the sense that scarcity of resources implies that population and the "carrying capacity" of the environment produces tensions resulting in conflict; state failure implies the obligations of the state to protect its citizens is non-existent or the state is the cause of the conflict itself; and, under-development implies the lack of institutionalized resources to support a flourishing population. Thus, the solutions rally behind population control and the "green revolution," regime change or democracy, and finally, financial or humanitarian assistance. Each solution requires an intervention of some sort driven by charity or self-interest.

A fascinating article in the *New York Times* reported on the integration of the military apparatus with climate change. The article commented on a CIA funded

report published by the National Resource Council entitled *Climate and Social Stress: Implications for Security Analysis*. The report concluded, "[c]limate-driven crises could lead to internal instability or international conflict and might force the United States to provide humanitarian assistance or, in some cases, military force to protect vital energy, economic or other interests" (Broder 2012). This analysis echoes throughout U.S. Security think-tanks such as Center for Naval Analyses and the American Security Project, which publish reports and blog posts highlighting the connection between climate change and U.S. (in)security. Critical to this analysis is the conclusion of a Department of Defense Science Board report — "the highest potential for instability will come from the most vulnerable regions of the world where the United States obtains vital fuel and strategic mineral imports and combats terrorism" (Board 2011). Thus, there is a direct link between the securitization of climate change and U.S. geopolitical interests. As noted by Betsy Hartmann, a critic of the securitization of climate change, the dominant view of U.S. Defense circles is that climate change is an accelerant of instability and a "threat multiplier" leading to resource conflicts and mass migration thereby requiring strategic plans to maintain and enforce global stability (Hartmann 2014, 18). Global stability means the stability of the current economic and political order. Without delving into the details, a link surely exists between sites of exploitation and

terrorism. Meaning, military buildups to combat terrorism manifest in nation-states where vital resources exist.

The United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) also promotes the dominant narrative. In a 2008 report entitled *From Conflict to Peacebuilding: The Role of Natural Resources and the Environment*, UNEP draws a long and narrow line between conflict and natural resources. UNEP stated that since 1990 a least eighteen violent conflicts were fueled by natural resources, and since 1950, at least forty percent of intrastate conflicts are linked to natural resources (UNEP 2008). The report also links conflicts in Darfur and the Middle East with the control of scarce resources such as fertile land and water (UNEP 2008). The warning put forward by UNEP deserves special attention here –

> As the global population continues to rise, and demand for resources continues to grow, there is significant potential for conflicts over natural resources to intensify in the coming decades" and climate change effects "may aggravate existing tensions and generate new conflicts (UNEP 2008).

The report goes on to the affect that "no serious discussion of current or emerging threats to security can take place without considering the role of natural resources and the environment" (UNEP 2008). The UNEP report establishes a connection between climate change, natural resources, and conflict in unambiguous terms. The link between the environment and conflict seems almost natural. Most believe the U.S. invaded Iraq for oil or Afghanistan for precious minerals. It seems natural to fight over scarce resources or even an overabundance of valuable resources. The

overarching principle is environmental determinism – a principle most apparent in the continent of Africa.

In James Lee's 2009 book, *Climate Change and Armed Conflict: Hot and Cold Wars*, he argues climate change will exacerbate conflicts around the Equator (Hot Wars) and will mark the ascendance of conflicts near the poles (Cold Wars) (Lee 2009, 14). Lee's book more than any other published material I found maintains the specter of racism and staunch alignment with neocolonialist ideations. He argues –

> Africa especially will encounter declining climatic fortunes, increasing demographic needs, lagging economic opportunities, and a growing resort to violence to solve problems of livelihood wars…The quality of life in Africa will deteriorate on many dimensions in the twenty-first century (Lee 2009, 138).

Without relying upon any empirical data, his words exist as a sort of academic Nostradamus. His book lacks self-reflexivity as his focus of "Africa" is an imagined geography filed with savages who "resort to violence to solve problems," yet as an American citizen, Lee ignores the world's military superpower that "resorts to violence to solve problems." As Edward Said stated in his book *Orientalism* –

> As much as the West [created] itself, the Orient [or Africa in our case] is an idea that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and for the West. The two geographical entities thus support and to an extent reflect each other (Said 1979, 5).

The imagined geography of Africa, which is so rudimentary independent nation-states cease to exist, embodies the failings of humankind. They just cannot get it right. Lee continues on with his predictions of the violent Africa —

> …some states will cease to function, and tribes or city-states will emerge as the only viable levels of political organization…Collapse of states is quite likely in sub-Saharan Africa. Such a collapse indicates a level of anarchy below the level of a failed state. Major loss of life can be expected, without substantial changes in trajectory…Climate change may push some people into wars over livelihood. As more livelihood wars accumulate, they can cause countries to fall into the category of failed states. One or two failed states may lead to a cascade of failures, and create failed regions (Lee 2009, 140).

What concerns me about the dominant narrative is the focus on resource conflict through a lens of control, containment and fear. This provides yet another justification for military buildups and interventions. As you can imagine, these same narratives do not include advanced capitalist countries or "civilized" nations. We do not hear about the potential for Mexico and Canada to attack the U.S. Because of water resources or fertile land. We can't imagine California invading Oregon to secure water resources. However, policy makers, academics and politicians *can* imagine climate change conflicts in Africa. Indeed, this discourse permeates global policy.

Following a detailed study of government funded reports concerning climate change and conflict, Michael Brzoska found that –

Many governments see climate change as a minor threat. Another group of governments classifies climate change as an emerging or growing threat. Only a few governments, mostly major powers, see climate change as a major threat. Major powers also dominate among those governments who make the connection between climate change and conflict or even see climate change as a threat to national security by external violent actors (Brzoska 2012, 170).

As a concerned U.S. Citizen it is my responsibility to question the securitization of climate change. Will humanitarian assistance be the new guise of military intervention? Is environmental determinism alive and well within policy circles and academia? Or as Lee posits, “could there be special UN or other multinational forces trained for cases of climate change and conflict? The answer is yes” (Lee 2009, 161). If we look for violence, we will find or create it ourselves. The largest military in the history of the world is not meant to sit idle. Those in power want to use it. They will find ways to use it. Resource conflicts exacerbated by climate change combined with humanitarian assistance and the Global War on Terrorism provides the discourse and reasons for international military interventions. Hartmann argues, “[d]efining climate change as a security threat also fits well with the shift in defence thinking toward a focus on counterinsurgency” (Hartmann 2014, 19). This discourse needs to be changed. We can’t limit our imaginations to ideas of peace backed up with guns and security at any cost. This process of securitization of climate change is not an aberration, but a state sponsored policy.

The dominant narrative is produced and reproduced throughout academia, think tanks, policymakers, international organizations and nation-states. Its logic is

simple, but flawed because it relies upon common narratives and myths passed down to us for generations. Undercurrents of Malthus, the tragedy of the commons, carrying capacity and racism flow throughout the dominant narrative. And while each of these have been critiqued and found extremely lacking, they still retain their prominence in our imaginations thereby constricting our capabilities to see outside of its constructs. We are liken to those in the *Allegory of the Cave*, chained staring at the shadows believing they are reality, when in fact reality lies outside the cave – and such a beautiful reality it is.

Complicating the Matter

Intuitively we recognize the relationship between the environment and human rights, since the environment undergirds our very existence. We rely on the bounty earth provides. The relationship between environment change and conflict, however, is more complicated than the levels of a rainfall gauge. This section of the paper attempts to complicate, question and critique the dominant narrative concerning the connections between the environment change and conflict – particularly climate change. First, I examine how a nation-states placement in the global economy and how power is organized within the state strongly correlates with structural vulnerability to climate change impacts. Next, I look at the causal connections of climate change and conflict. Finally, I argue that climate change

impacts and environmental degradation can provide opportunities for peace and community building as opposed to the dominant narrative – conflict.

In their seminal study on climate change vulnerability, Roberts work focuses on how "[s]tructural disadvantages indeed limit the ability of many countries to address poverty and environmental degradation and…prepare themselves for, cope with, and respond to climate-related disasters" (Roberts 2007, 104). At the nation-state scale, structural disadvantages determine the resiliency and capacity to adapt to climate change effects. The structures Roberts speaks of in his book are highly influenced by the world's political and economic structures and decolonization policies. One scholar discloses the general sentiment of the Global South, "[t]he self-definition of the South…is a definition of exclusion: these countries believe that they have been bypassed and view themselves as existing on the periphery" (Najam 2005, 305). The periphery of trade, of politics, of aid, of justice – the periphery that created and sustained the structural disadvantages Roberts speaks of. The periphery where the most vulnerable to climate change impacts are those most highly exposed to risk and have little capacity to manage and recover from them (Barnett 2009, 132-3). The decision not to develop global policies to aid the most vulnerable nation-states and their people constitutes, as one scholar argues, negligent genocide (Glazebrook 2010, 163). Any forecast of climate change warns of the severe loss of life. The conscious decision by politicians to marginalize these

people while knowing of the outcomes at least triggers human rights violations on a global scale.

The global economic structure, past and present, created the structural disadvantages states face. Failed, weak, or "lesser developed than" states are products of a system that provides an unequal exchange in multiple scales in multiple ways. As Roberts study found, "[b]y almost any measure, states that are heavily reliant on the extraction and export of natural resources face a unique set of constraints, and we argue that these are largely due to their incorporation into the world economy as extractive colonies" (Roberts 2007, 108). Significant decolonization occurred only sixty years ago. Remnants exist. European and American (neo)colonization policies strategically creates systems of disadvantages to the nation-state. Neoliberalism, globalization, international trade and supranational lending agencies all colluded to perform what David Harvey calls accumulation by dispossession – a global redistribution of wealth through neoliberal policies (Harvey 2003). This structural disadvantage was codified through the evolution of international law since Vitoria's 16th century treaties and maintains these structural disadvantages (Anghie 2005). The suffering experienced around the world is a consequence of historical and contemporary policies that unevenly share the costs and benefits of modern society.

The clear dominance of Europeans countries in most spheres of influence limits the capabilities for countries to adapt to environmental shocks, but how power is organized with the nation-state itself further defines structures of disadvantage. As one author notes, “it is not really possible to analyse the problems of climate change or figure out what to do about them without addressing how power is organized” (Vivekananda 2012, 80-1). The activities of elites in politics and economics can have negative outcomes such as corruption, clientalism, racism and repression. A recent report found that capital flight in Sub-Saharan Africa alone totaled $814 billion dollars from 1970 to 2010 (Ndikumana 2012). Those countries would be in a much better shape if those funds went to the people, as it should. One scholar warns that climate change impacts can provide new opportunities for elites to concentrate their power and privilege through licit and illicit diversion of adaptation funds (Vivekananda 2012, 78-9). Elite interests can and often do override the interests of the marginalized creating atmospheres of poverty, desperation and the experience of existing within a state that does not recognize basic human rights.

Nation-state political and economic structures along with elite activity are lenses through which we can come to understand how power is organized within a country. Nonetheless, significant scholarly research further complicates this lens by examining informal institutions and cultural authorities that affect resource

distribution (Frerks 2014, 14). Thus, even the sovereign must be contextualized and complicated to understand the inner-workings of the state and its structural vulnerabilities.

Of equal importance to the organization of a nation-state in the global economy and local power holders consists of how knowledge itself is organized and utilized. Knowledge production builds ideas of how the world was, is and may come to be. We are all attracted to ideas that resonate with our worldview and legitimatize our ways of being. The danger, as I have noted above, manifests when the powerful resonate with fear-based knowledge – conflict, dehumanization, racism – and transform that knowledge into reality. One literature review study found that most of the literature concerning environmental conflicts "is more theoretical than empirically driven, and motivated by Northern theoretical and strategic interests than informed by solid empirical research" (Leetaru 2012, 57). This finding goes to the heart of my concern. Gramsci theorized that one of the most important characteristics of a group attempting social dominance is the assimilation and conquering of conflicting ideologies thereby creating a hegemonic discourse (Gramsci 1972, 10). The discourse directly linking climate change and conflict is hegemonic, yet consists largely of theoretical arguments.

Resistance to this hegemony exists, but almost entirely contained within academia. Another study on climate change and conflict found that most of the

literature is “speculative and based on either anecdotal evidence or possible future scenarios that are difficult to prove or test” (Vivekananda 2012, 78) and another study states, “there is simply insufficient evidence and too much uncertainty to make anything other than highly speculative claims about the effect of climate change on violent conflict” (Leetaru 2012, 57). Indeed, Hoffman’s findings concerning Sudan’s recent conflicts led him to the conclusion that internal colonization, elite resource capture, uneven economic development and renewed exploitation under the guise of climate crisis will drive future conflicts – not scarcity (Hoffmann 2014, 9). One African scholar argued, “[t]he primary cause of conflict is the dissonance between the modes of production in which Africa is immersed” (Mwangi 2014, 58-9) and not climate change. With little empirical evidence proving a direct causal link between environmental degradation and conflict, one study’s data argues that other facts such as “poor governance, large heterogeneous populations, societal inequalities, poor economic performance, and a conflict-prone neighbourhood” provides more insight than natural resources (Theisen 2012, 52). These studies point to the weak empirical evidence between climate change and conflict as well as ignorance of other important factors possibly driving conflict. As one author bluntly puts it, “environmental degradation may be seen more as a symptom that something has gone wrong than a cause of the world's ills” (Frerks 2014, 14). There is no human nature or evolutionary imperative to destroy, kill, or

battle over resources. Our past is not our future. Our present is only obfuscated by reports and studies attempting to define our future through a security lens.

Hypothesizing the vulnerability of a state, community, or individual to environmental degradation, climate change and conflict requires looking at the complex processes that undermine or strengthen human resiliency both geographically and temporally. These processes can be within the state, but also outside of it and include issues of transboundary pollution, international trade, a colonial history, democracy, corruption, climate change effects, resource exploitation, and geopolitics all of which influence shaping the "architecture of entitlements" that assess an vulnerability and resiliency of a nation-state and its people (Adger 2010, 121-2). A clear strategy designed to define nation-state outcomes by ignoring multiple complex factors inherent in the state's existence drives the dominant narrative. Reducing complex factors driving conflict to scarcity, failed states and under-development allows for a separation between "us" and "them" by ignoring the political economy that created those circumstances in the first place. One author eloquently notes this separation —

> There is a well-established tendency to reject, obscure or ignore data and theories that show that advanced economies and dominant groups are harming others. This includes a historical pattern in the rejection of scientific knowledge showing economic policies and development strategies of advanced economies have causal relationships to the life chances and opportunities of poor groups and poor regions, and a historical pattern in the rejection of scientific knowledge that challenges the lifestyles and ways of living that maintain and perpetuate the dominance of advanced economies and privileged groups. Ethics and morality concerns are entangled with such

> rejections of some scientific knowledge over other alternatives. There is a well-established tendency to separate 'us' (advanced economies or well-off groups) from 'them' or 'the others' (those in poor countries or poorer sectors of our own countries), and to presume instead that all is well with 'us' and shift personal blame on those groups that are deprived and marginalised (St.Clair 2010, 192)

This tells us how the securitization of climate change and the environment is a logical outcome of hegemonic ideologies, but also how responses to these possible conflicts consist of interventions such as military, humanitarianism, and development – not justice.

While conceptions of justice and wealth redistribution lie outside of this paper's scope, the dominant response to environmental impacts is to "go out there and fix it" and not examine the pathways through which a nation-state become vulnerable in the first place, and the ways in which a nation-state can increase their resiliency to these impacts. This distinction teases out the questionable application of "top-down" development approach occurring throughout the world with the assistance of international financial institutions. The idea of resiliency demands a "bottom-up" approach that integrates multiple institutional factors and cultural meanings. In other words, adapting to climate change impacts requires strengthening the local community through developing locally relevant and tailor made strategies to build resilience (Wiseman 2011, 185).

The intervention strategies noted above deny access and collaboration opportunities with individuals and communities affected by such interventions.

Participation and access to decision-making processes empowers and promotes involvement in planning for the future and realizing the outcomes of those decisions (Nelson 2010, 83-4). This conception of involvement is seriously challenged in repressive nation-states that lack respect for human rights or enforce power and protection in uneven ways. These states would see the most benefit from resiliency strengthening strategies, yet there exists the marginalized within the marginalized. Therefore, an important step in increasing resiliency demands supporting democratic institutions since citizen accountability is an essential component of reelection (Sen 1999). Moreover, the multiple dynamics of institutional and non-institutional power holders must be reorganized to enable the types of changes needed to enhance resiliency (karen o'brien 2010, 220). Going beyond material adaptation measures and looking to issues such as access to health and justice, democracy, trade and labor along with other mechanisms that ensures basic human rights are significant factors in building resiliency to climate change. Social tension over natural resources does not necessarily imply future conflict, but instead, can be an opportunity for cooperative solutions and increased governance accountability (Frerks 2014, 14). Indeed, the environment can be a peacemaking tool since it ignores state boundaries, requires long term commitments, encourages participation, and extends community building to areas outside of economic relationships (Ken Conca 2005). These wider issues, not natural resources, are the

source of conflict. Thus developing state, community, and individual resiliency is a necessary component to achieve peace and realize human rights.

Conclusion

Imagining "Africa," or struggling nation-states, as ungoverned spaces prone to conflict – just waiting for climate change to spur violence – is unnecessary and damaging for both the perpetrator and victims of such ideologies. Climate change and adaptation practices are much more complex and varied than commonly assumed and portrayed. Indeed, customary practices of religion, property rights, state law along with the differences in relationships between communities, households, and gender leads to considerable complexity and ambiguity on the ground and policymakers must realize that imagined geographies will lead to further instances of conflict if these variables are not taken into account. The IPCC, the UN, the US, think tanks, policymakers, elites, politicians and the media insist upon the stresses of climate change creating armed conflict. This is the dominant narrative, the hegemonic discourse, the legitimating factor for deeper securitization of humanitarian aid and development. It is a discourse of containment that treats symptoms and not the political and economic structures at root. This strategy is doomed to fail while its consequences perpetrates violence and suffering across the

global periphery much like the current system already does, but under the specter of climate change.

As is often stated by the critics of critiques — what is the alternative? The first step in any transformation of hegemonic discourse begins in the development of counter-narratives that chip away the inconsistencies undergirding hegemonic ideas and strategies. Climate conflicts are just one aspect of *the myth* that this paper attempts to dispel. We are entering into a state of climate crisis as a consequence of our past decisions. The environment reflects us. We have to ask ourselves several questions — who do these ideas serve? Why do the social, economic, political, institutional contexts and structures that created the climate crisis and global inequality still maintain power? How can we end suffering and who are stopping us from doing so? The questions lead us to answers that lead us to alternatives. I know one thing – I do not want to live in a world where one person can make $4 billion in one year while billions live in poverty. In the battle of ideas, I will fight for peace.

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