Evaluating Climate Migration
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Evaluating Climate Migration

POPULATION MOVEMENT, INSECURITY AND GENDER

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Abstract

Climate change will negatively impact human communities and ecosystems, including driving increased food insecurity, increased exposure to disease, loss of livelihood and worsening poverty. Recent climate debates have focused attention on climate migrants, people who are displaced by the ecological stresses caused by climate change. To date, these debates have focused a great deal of attention on state security issues and have left the gender implications largely unexplored. In this article we examine the securitization of climate migration debates through gender lenses. We find that gender helps reveal and focus attention on the human security implications of climate migration and offers a useful discourse for climate policymaking.

Keywords: climate change, climate migration, gender and migration, human security, security

The international policy and academic communities have in recent years paid increasing attention to the deleterious effects of climate change, focusing a great deal on implications for state security at the expense of human security. This article addresses this deficit in three parts: first, we explain the relationship between climate and migration; second, we discuss the securitization of climate and migration; finally, we propose how a gendered perspective on climate and migration would better inform our academic and policy agendas. Examining these connections through gender lenses offers an important way to explore the human security impacts of climate migration in particular. Following the work of Cynthia Enloe (2007), we think it is important to use a feminist curiosity to ask how the processes and policies of climate migration are gendered.
The implications of recent decades of scientific research on anthropogenic climate change include admonitions about the irreversible consequences of reliance on fossil fuels, neo-Malthusian social collapse and mass human displacement. Climate change has particularly been linked to migrating populations since at least the mid-1980s due to its impacts on sea-level change, impacts on agricultural productivity as well as the presence, frequency and severity of natural disasters like storms, floods, droughts and fires (Brown 2008). As climate change has become more prevalent, discourses on climate migration have been used to highlight a number of issues and concepts. These discourses include narratives about where climate migration is most likely to occur, and the range of implications that climate migration has for people, states and ecosystems.

Climate displacement is a longstanding problem which has negative consequences on health and human security and which is projected to affect multiple regions of the globe (Zhang et al. 2007; Biermann and Boas 2010; Piguet et al. 2011). Climate-induced migration is not limited exclusively to low-income states. Several scholars have identified high-income countries as destinations for people directly displaced by disasters like floods, droughts and shrinking coastlines, as well as those indirectly displaced by climate-related problems such as food and livelihood insecurity (Feng et al. 2010).

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) discussed the phenomenon of climate migration in their 2007 Fourth Assessment reports. The synthesis report claims that population migration is likely to occur in areas affected by drought, as a result of increases in storms like tropical cyclones, and due to rising sea levels (IPCC 2007). The International Organization for Migration (IOM) acknowledges the difficulty in predicting how many people will be forced to relocate due to climate change impacts in the future. Some of the difficulty in predicting the number of people who will become climate migrants stems from the differing definitions used to distinguish climate migrants from other types of migrants, along with the variability in climate models (Biermann and Boas 2010). Despite these limitations in establishing definitive numbers, the most widely cited estimate is that there will be around 200 million climate migrants by the middle of the century (IOM 2012). Figure 1 identifies the global migration trends plotted alongside the increase in climate-related natural disasters (Em-Dat 2010; Global Bilateral Migration Database 2013). Men and women migrate at relatively equal rates, both trending upward since 1960. The number of climate-related natural disasters is also increasing. While correlation does not establish causality, there are several recent studies which identify a link between environmental change, like that associated with climate change, and population movement (Reuveny 2007; Feng et al. 2010).

Variation in the expected number of migrants coupled with the extended time frame of climate models may encourage some to doubt the veracity of
the expected effects of climate migration. We focus not on the magnitude of the problem, but on the gendered implications of climate migration that are, as yet, largely unaddressed. Climate change policy documents from several states mention population migration in the face of drought or natural disasters as a concern that they currently face and will likely face in the future, but few consider how climate migration is gendered. States whose policy documents mention this concern include Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Tanzania and Yemen, among others (Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh 2005; Government of Tanzania 2007; Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan 2009; Republic of Yemen 2009).

Research identifies categories of climate change processes that instigate migration: slow-onset processes like desertification, extreme temperatures, drought and sea-level rise; and rapid-onset processes like hurricanes, tornados and floods. Slow- and rapid-onset climate-related natural disasters have different implications for preparations for migration, as well as different policy outcomes. Slow-onset climate disasters may give migrating populations more time to prepare, whereas rapid-onset disasters can cause immediate displacement, meaning that climate migration can be voluntary, compelled and involuntary (Bates 2002). Studies find that migration patterns in the face of drought often follow pre-established labor migration patterns. On the other hand, rapid-onset disasters tend to result in temporary distress migration with populations ultimately likely to return to their original location. The temporary nature of distress migration often displaces people within their own country, rather than across borders (Raleigh et al. 2008). This article is
largely focused on that category of migrants who are compelled to relocate in
the face of relatively extreme climate change impacts, including sea-level rise,
extreme weather events and drought or water scarcity (Biermann and Boas
2010). These climate migrants therefore fall under the category of forced
migrants.

The way that policy and academic communities frame climate migration
problems facing people and states contextualizes the solutions and policies
that actors implement to address both the origins of contemporary climate
changes as well as the problems that ensue. Both the policy and academic com-

munities have frequently linked climate migration to security narratives.
When actors link security and the environment, they typically focus either

on the potential for groups to engage in violent conflict over access to
resources, or on the range of threats to human security that stem from environ-
mental damage. These security and environment discourses are often linked to
either state security (i.e. the security and stability of state governments), or
human security (i.e. the well-being of individuals or groups). The following
sections describe perspectives on the securitization of climate migration
through a state security lens, through a human security lens and finally
through a gendered lens. With different frames, the referents, or objects, of
security vary. In the first case, the state is the referent. In the second and
third, people are the referents.

State Security and Climate-Induced Migration

Securitizing environmental issues, including migration, is not a new trend.
Many actors have used security discourses to understand issues like hydropo-
litics, wildlife management and climate change (Detraz 2009), and have
specifically incorporated migration into the category of ‘high politics’,
rooted in realist scholarship. We conceptualize security as a term with multiple
meanings, and which inspires discursive struggles. Much of the existing litera-
ture on climate migration treats it primarily as a state security issue (White
2011), meaning that the problems of and solutions for addressing climate
migration are defined at the state level. As such, the concepts of threats,
risks and vulnerabilities related to climate-induced migration are posed to
states, rather than people within states, and policies are derived to address
state-level concerns. These include reinforcing borders and boundaries, quan-
tifying and regulating the number and types of migrants who enter the society
and protecting perceived ‘societal security’ from the influence of immigrants
(Castles 2011; White 2011).

Under a state security framework, climate migrants pose risks to the health
and safety of the target country’s citizens, as well as to the state’s economy.
The state security discourse posits that climate migrants free ride on the collec-
tive goods provided by ‘legitimate’ citizens, like access to health care, edu-
cation and employment opportunities, and that they may also bring
diseases, ideologies or latent problems from their country of origin to their des-
tination country. Climate migrants also highlight weaknesses in the destination country’s borders and security measures. When the lens is focused on state security, the state is the entity which faces vulnerabilities from climate migrants, like porous borders that climate migrants may opportunistically violate. Climate migration through a state security frame views immigration as a threat to the territorial integrity of the destination state, challenging its fundamental notion of sovereignty. Language describing potential ‘waves of immigrants’ invokes an invasion frame, which, in turn, invites militarized responses (Castles 2011).

States across the international system have long considered the security implications of migrating populations, both within their borders and moving across borders (Marchand 2008; Freedman 2012). ‘Climate security’ has joined the list of reasons that states give for managing immigration (White 2011). State security narratives within climate migration debates focus mainly on the stresses that migrating populations will place on the resources within states and on services provided by state. There are many examples of states using securitized narratives to discuss and describe the process of climate migration. A 2003 report for the United States Pentagon claims that for some states ‘climate change could become such a challenge that mass emigration results as the desperate peoples seek better lives in regions such as the United States that have the resources to adaptation’ (Schwartz and Randall 2003). The European Union has issued reports that similarly use securitized narratives to explain migration. Policy documents suggest that ‘EU migration policy should [...] take the impacts of climate change into account, in particular in migration management’ (Commission of the European Communities 2007: 21).

A great deal of the academic literature on climate change and security raises the issue of the implications of the influx of migrants into new areas (Percival and Homer-Dixon 1998; Baechler 1999; Barnett and Adger 2007). Some large migrations have exacerbated conflict over resources, which is generally regarded as having a great deal of potential to result in state instability and potentially even inter-state conflict (Homer-Dixon 1999; Lee 2009). Borders are both a symbolic and functional feature of states that signify the changing nature of the state in an era of continuing globalization and environmental challenges. When populations get the sense that borders are insecure and that this threatens state security, there is often a backlash against those who traverse those borders (Marchand 2008).

Narratives about the state security impacts of climate migration persist, despite the fact that there are ongoing discussions about the extent of climate migration inducing conflict, as well as indications that most migration will take place within state boundaries (Gleditsch et al. 2007; Raleigh et al. 2008). Thinking about climate migration using a state security discourse emphasizes military preparedness and border control. It entails using narratives of the potential for conflict and state instability. In short, it envisions those who are particularly vulnerable to the negative impacts of climate change as threats to the state (Hartmann 2010; White 2011).
Rethinking Security: Human Security and Climate Change

A human security framework assesses the threats, risks and vulnerabilities that face climate migrants themselves. The human security discourse on climate migration focuses on human vulnerability to environmental change, focusing on people, not states. Vulnerability is central to the problem of climate migration because it includes economic, social and physical factors. According to Raleigh et al. (2008: 4):

> Economic considerations include assets, type of employment, future income potential; social aspects shaping vulnerability include type of political institutions, marginalization, minority status, education, gender and age. Finally, physical vulnerability considers the geography of livelihoods and hazards, previous disasters, resource depletion and scarcity, and established infrastructure.

Vulnerability influences whether groups will be forced to relocate in the face of climate change as well as whether groups have the capacity to migrate. Catastrophic disasters, whether slow- or rapid-onset, displace people from their homes and community infrastructure (Hunter and David 2011; Brown 2012). Migrants displaced by climate change potentially face the loss of their livelihoods and incomes, as well as uncertain access to clean water, adequate nutrition, sanitation and electricity. Their lives are threatened by a lack of support from their country of origin, from their host country and from the international humanitarian community. Climate migrants are at risk for many problems during the process of relocation and resettlement. Facing deteriorating conditions in their environment, climate migrants may encounter hardships in their journey to a new destination, like exposure to conditions that compromise their health, such as insect- or water-borne illnesses, inadequate nutrition, lack of personal security and risk of assault or detention (Gregory et al. 2005; Podesta and Ogden 2008).

Additionally, poverty and livelihood insecurity are closely tied to climate migration. In general, climate change is predicted to worsen poverty across low-income and high-income countries, and it is predicted to jeopardize people’s livelihoods, particularly those who work in agricultural sectors (Brown et al. 2007; German Advisory Council on Global Change 2008). Jon Barnett and W. Neil Adger (2007: 643) argue that climate change may directly increase poverty by undermining access to natural capital:

> It may indirectly increase poverty through its effects on resource sectors and the ability of governments to provide social safety nets. Stresses from climate change will differentially affect those made vulnerable by political-economic processes such as liberalisation of markets for agricultural commodities.

In sum, a human security discourse on climate migration focuses attention to the security plight of those people who are forced to migrate in the face of climate change. It uses narratives of threats and vulnerabilities to assess the
predicaments of those who lack the adaptive capacity to avert the problems of climate migration. It includes a concern for the security implications of internal and trans-border migration.

**CLIMATE MIGRATION THROUGH GENDER LENSES**

The vast majority of climate migration debates have taken place as if migration were a gender-neutral phenomenon. We argue that revealing the gendered nature of climate migration reorients scholarly and policy debates toward using a human security discourse rather than a state security discourse to understand and discuss climate-related migration. While scholars have critiqued human security discourses for their potential for cooptation and ignoring gender, we feel that gender presents a useful frame for underscoring the threats and vulnerabilities associated with climate change (Bellamy and McDonald 2002; Hudson 2005). Likewise, some feminist scholars would caution against the trend of securitizing environmental issues like climate change (Urban 2007). For scholars who worry about the potential for securitization to lead to militarization, a decoupling of climate migration and security would be the preferred strategy going forward in climate debates (Hartmann 2010). Some scholars express a fear that securitizing the idea of climate migration could lead to repressive policies aimed at keeping climate migrants perceived as a threat to state security at bay (Trombetta 2008). While we acknowledge this concern, we argue that the securitization of environmental issues has been ongoing for the past several decades and is unlikely to recede any time soon. At present, we present an alternative security and environment discourse that has political salience, justice and gender emancipation as driving goals. This does not mean limiting attention to the experiences of women who migrate, but rather we stress the need for a feminist perspective on climate migration that evaluates the various ways that processes of migration are gendered.

Feminist scholars have contributed valuable scholarship on migration for several decades. Nicola Piper (2008: 1) explains that gender lenses are essential for understanding migration because policies:

> may affect men and women differently, resulting in gendered patterns of migration; laws regarding both emigration and immigration often have gendered outcomes; and policies that affect the integration, or re-integration, of migrants into societies may also affect men and women differently.

Women make up approximately 49 per cent of international migrants (Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2009). These large numbers of women have differing experiences that should be recognized. Rather than essentializing women’s migration experiences, we seek to contextualize the role of women in the larger climate migration process. This section reveals gender
in climate migration debates, and puts forth some future shifts that would be helpful for reflecting on the processes of climate migration. Revealing gender in climate migration debates requires engaging in critical scholarship about the ways in which decisions to migrate are gendered, as well as reflection about the fact that multiple security issues, like physical security, food security and livelihood security, are gendered.

At the outset, the very decision to migrate is gendered. The ability and willingness to migrate in the face of environmental degradation or change is influenced by characteristics such as age, gender, race/ethnicity and economic status. Power imbalances directly affect the daily lives of migrants/immigrants (Boehm 2008). For example, not all populations have the same freedom to relocate, nor do they have the same opportunities once they have relocated. The factors that contribute to women’s and men’s decisions to migrate are contextualized by the networks that facilitate their journey, by the problems they encounter along their journey, and in the opportunities in their target destination (Castellanos and Boehm 2008).

Evidence suggests that environmental push factors are directly tied to the socially conditioned responsibilities that men and women have within their communities. Several migration scholars have documented the pervasive narratives about a man’s responsibility to provide for his family influencing decisions about whether and how to migrate. This includes past examples like Mexican men working in agriculture feeling pressure to migrate internally as well as to the USA during times of economic hardship (Boehm 2008), or the search for remittances pushing young men from West African states to try to reach Europe (Terry 2009). These trends also manifest in migration due to environmental change as well, with men representing a greater number of seasonal migrants, many of which migrate due to factors like drought or agricultural shifts (Leighton 2011). A study from rural Namibia illustrates that when agricultural activities no longer support livelihoods, men and women often develop different coping strategies. These differing strategies typically influence the extent to which they migrate or not. The study found that women tended to adapt through:

engaging in a range of informal activities from basketry, nut processing or rearing of chickens and other small animals. The fact that women lacked the technical skills to participate in formal employment led them to diversify into small local activities, whilst men tended to search for work further afield, often in small-scale mining. (Skinner 2011: 32)

Men were better able to use migration as a coping strategy in this case. At the same time, a recent study from Nepal details how deforestation is linked to increases in collection times for gathering fodder and firewood. Women are traditionally responsible for performing these tasks, so when the search for fodder and firewood necessitates local migration, it directly involves women (Hunter and David 2011). Using gender lenses to evaluate climate migration
requires understanding the expectations of masculinity and femininity and how these intersect with migration processes.

One key way that gender lenses contribute to climate migration debates is revealing the gendered aspects of physical security related to migration. Migration can result in several forms of physical insecurity, including the physical toll of the migration process, the potential for contentious interactions with agents of the state or populations in a new location, or the negative impacts of poor living conditions in a new location (Indra 1999; Palmary et al. 2010). In particular, state operations to control migration across borders have increased the incidences of abuse and death for many migrants. These policy approaches fit with state security notions of migration as a threat to the stability of the state. Examples include abuse and violence directed at migrants at the hands of militarized members of border police in countries around the world (Wiesner and Cruz 2008; Human Rights Watch 2012).

Reflecting on the experiences of women and girls around the world who are forced to migrate, we consider some of the gendered aspects of current and future climate migration. For example, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a state that has experienced conflict since 1998, it is estimated that more than 400,000 people have been made refugees, and a Human Rights Watch report suggests that tens of thousands of girls and women (some as young as three years old) have been raped or subjected to other forms of sexual violence as refugees (Stabile and Rentschler 2005). Likewise, many scholars have chronicled a great deal of gendered violence and insecurity that female migrants experience during and after their migration from Mexico to the USA. These include physical violence and abuse, but insecurity also encompasses lack of access to credit and identification, and loss of neighborhood and family networks (Staudt et al. 2009). These examples illustrate that there are important gendered components to migration that must be taken into consideration when thinking about the phenomenon of climate migration.

Human security discourses facilitate reflection on these threats to physical security in a way that state security discourses do not. They allow for a discussion about immigration that avoids painting those most at risk of climate change impacts as a threat, and reorienting the policy discussion toward solutions that reduce the incidence of forced migration due to climate change. This shift in focus is particularly relevant to understanding migration in the aftermath of natural disasters. Climate change is predicted to increase the frequency and severity of several types of natural disasters. A 2009 Oxfam report estimates a 54 per cent increase in the number of people affected by climate-related disasters such as floods and droughts. Women and men tend to face unique challenges and sources of insecurity during and after natural disasters (Mishra et al. 2004; Rajagopalan and Parthib 2006; Oswald Spring 2008; True 2012). Lori Hunter and Emmanuel David (2011: 318) argue that gendered insecurity related to disasters is ‘[l]inked to inequalities such as poverty, limited access to resources and mobility, as well as culturally constructed expectations.
that shape work patterns, household divisions of labour, and caretaking responsibilities, including those that are gendered’. Gendered insecurity manifests in differential access to public early warning systems, the ability to move easily through public spaces due to gender norms, recognition of male heads of households by relief workers, impediments in transferring land title to female survivors of disasters or physical insecurity of marginalized populations in evacuation sites (Battersby and Siracusa 2009). Natural disasters frequently lead to migration and, often, higher levels of vulnerability and insecurity of those women who exist on the margins of society (Reuveny 2007; Hunter and David 2011; Brown 2012). The IOM (2007: 8) argues that natural disasters often increase the number of people who migrate, as well as increase the vulnerability of migrant communities who ‘may become forgotten, hidden groups unplanned for in the disaster response’.

Food security is another issue that has been linked to both climate migration and insecurity. Several reports have explicitly highlighted the connections between gender and food insecurity. For example, a recent policy report from the UK claims that malnutrition and under-nutrition may increase due to climate change impacts: ‘There are gender dimensions to malnutrition, with women and children making up the larger proportion of malnourished people in the world, due to social and cultural norms regarding who is prioritised within the household’ (Skinner 2011: 27). Gender inequality typically makes women in female-headed households more vulnerable to increases in food prices, as female-headed households are at great risk because they lack access to and control over resources (Sarelin 2007). Malnutrition accompanying food insecurity makes women and girls disproportionately exposed to epidemics like malaria, dengue and cholera (McDonald 2010). Populations suffering from chronic illness are less likely to be able to migrate in order to escape environmental change.

Gender lenses also contribute to thinking about livelihood security concerns for climate migrants. Much of the climate migration debate within high-income countries has speculated on the possibility of migrants from low-income states fleeing to their territory in the face of environmental degradation. While much of the migration that is likely to result from climate change will be short-distance, regional moves, some long-distance moves are also likely to take place, including migration to the USA, Australia and the EU (Feng et al. 2010; Asian Development Bank 2012). A recent study that examines migrant women’s integration into the labor market of six European cities finds that ‘foreign-born’ women tend to find work in roles that fit within many excepted standards of femininity, including roles as domestic or care workers, in accommodation and food services, in human health and social work and in manufacturing, administration and support service. The study finds that women in these fields ‘often work long hours for low pay and may be at risk of being severely exploited, especially if working in households’ (European Network of Migrant Women and European Women’s Lobby 2012). This is consistent with studies that find that the most highly skilled categories
of migrants tend to be male (Piper 2008). While there are a number of women who fall into this category, a great deal more are represented in household, service and unskilled labor migrant streams (Hunter and David 2011). Studies like these illustrate that female migrants currently face obstacles to achieving livelihood security, something that we must reflect on within discussions of present and future climate migration.

**Future Shifts in Climate Migration Narratives, Policymaking and Scholarship**

Gendering debates about climate migration is an important component of shifting attention away from the idea of climate migration as a state security threat to recognizing the human security implications of this phenomenon. Several scholars have outlined the potential negative ramifications of focusing solely on migration as a state security issue while ignoring the human security components of the phenomenon (Marchand 2008; Freedman 2012). We argue that these negatives can potentially plague discourses of climate migration as well. Climate migration will need to be reoriented through a human security framework by both scholars and policymakers in the coming years in order to justly and effectively address the individual-level security threats that face those most at risk of climate change impacts. For policymakers, this includes reflecting on climate migration as forced migration in the framework of international law, as well as striving to ensure gender equity throughout the policymaking process. For scholars, future shifts include engaging in studies that reveal the experiences of climate migrants in order to better understand the sources of insecurity that they face.

Policymaking on climate migration must reflect the complexity of migration processes. It must also evaluate the actors most suited to addressing migration in the face of environmental change, and seek to bolster the agency of those most at risk of environmental damage. A feminist discourse on climate migration reframes the discussion, shifting the focus away from the threats posed by migrants to target states and societies toward the vulnerabilities of populations who see migration as a necessary option. As we reorient the climate and security discourse away from state security and toward human security, we involve a different set of actors to address climate insecurity. Using the frame of state security invokes the role of militarized institutions and policy options. State militaries have already begun to stress the issue of climate change and migration in several regions (White 2011). In 2003 India began construction on a 2,100-mile 'separation barrier' on its border with Bangladesh. Many have pointed to this as an attempt by the Indian government to control the flow of people moving into their country, particularly in light of Bangladesh’s vulnerability to climate change impacts (Riaz 2010). This state security frame constrains policymaking by exaggerating fears of cross-border migration and narrowing the terms of discussion to only involve...
those who cross international boundaries (White 2011). Those who migrate within the state are made invisible, despite the human insecurity they may face.

A gendered climate migration discourse focuses on human insecurity as a result of either internal or cross-border migration. We can make progress toward this goal by considering the strategies of extending citizenship and appealing to international law. Seyla Benhabib and Judith Resnik (2009: 2) define citizenship as ‘a legal, an economic, and a cultural event, denoting official recognition of a special relationship between a person and a country’. This political contract involves an obligation of protection and guarantees against ‘deportation, expatriation and denationalization’. If climate migrants have a path to citizenship, they may be able to avoid some of the insecurities that accompany illegal immigrant status. In the past, many high-income countries have based their decisions about admitting permanent residents on the basis of family reunification, economic benefits to the state and humanitarian concerns (Piper 2008).

It is clear that international law is presently ill-equipped to handle such nuanced classifications of people displaced by climate-related factors, but states have long pursued strategies for managing population influxes resulting from changing environmental and climate conditions. The United Nations Convention on Refugees identifies criteria for legal refugee status as a situation where people have ‘a well founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion’ (United Nations 1967). Much of the migration that stems from climate change is forced migration. Despite this, there has been a notable lack of movement on protecting the human security of climate migrants to the present. Oli Brown (2008: 10) argues that ‘[f]orced climate migrants fall through the cracks of international refugee and immigration policy – and there is considerable resistance to the idea of expanding the definition of political refugees to incorporate climate “refugees”’. Focusing on the range of human security threats that accompany climate migration may help to change these attitudes. It may also encourage policymakers to see the urgency necessary for devising climate change mitigation strategies, which may make forced climate migration less of a prevalent phenomenon.

Utilizing international law entails reflecting on the role of states and intergovernmental organizations to ensure human security in the face of climate change. Evaluating the role of the state does not mean ignoring the insecurities that people can face due to state actions. Rather, it means advocating for state policies that recognize human insecurity and climate vulnerability and working to reduce them. For example, natural disaster policies should include specific attention to the gender norms that contribute to marginalization and vulnerability and bolster the agency of those who are made vulnerable. This process of being made vulnerable is gendered in that gender norms impact societal expectations of the roles and responsibilities of both men and women. ‘Economic disadvantage, limited access to resources,
dependency on male family members, and lack of power in decision making’ are factors that are frequently linked to women’s vulnerability to environmental change (Mearns and Norton 2010: 19). Policymaking should be geared toward addressing/removing these sources of vulnerability which lead to environmental insecurity. This does not mean essentializing the experiences of women, or suggesting that all women are equally vulnerable or vulnerable in the same ways, but rather to focus on the social, political and economic factors that marginalize groups within society – including women. Numerous studies outline the resourceful ways women have devised to cope with environmental marginalization, and these should be used to guide policymaking toward the full incorporation of women as stakeholders in the future of communities (Uraguchi 2010; Arora-Jonsson 2011).

The UN is an actor who has consistently voiced the need to incorporate women into environmental decision making in order to effectively address large-scale issues like climate change (UN High Commissioner for Human Rights 2012). In 2008 the UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UN/ISDR) published a report that stressed the need to incorporate gender-sensitive tools and practices in order to reduce disaster risk. The report claims that due to their frequent role as natural resource managers ‘women have the experience and knowledge to build the resilience of their communities to the intensifying natural hazards to come’ (UN/ISDR 2008: iii). Recent climate negotiations have turned attention to the dearth of women participating in these regular conferences. According to figures from the Women’s Environment and Development Organization (WEDO), the number of women at the main UN climate meetings has been increasing over the past five years, but still remains around just over 30 per cent of national delegations (WEDO 2012). While addressing the gendered concerns of climate migration is not as simple as inserting women into the political process, the rates of their exclusion point to a systemic perspective which indicates a lack of inclusivity and which necessarily means that the range of topics, and the urgency with which they are addressed, is determined largely by male participants. Recognizing the roles and perspectives of both men and women on climate change processes and policies can aid in the creation of efficient and just policymaking. Scholars have demonstrated that environmental management increases in efficiency with the involvement of women (Arora-Jonsson 2011). Furthermore, women’s economic, educational and social security are integral to increasing state capacity and mitigating the deleterious consequences of climate change. Climate change policies should therefore be made with the goal of incorporating a variety of stakeholders in the process, and bolstering agency in climate change mitigation and adaptation. It should strive to promote gender equality, human security and environmental protection.

Finally, acquiring gender-differentiated information on migration can contribute to a critical, gendered, human security-oriented climate migration discourse. At present, reliable information about the unique migration
experiences of various communities is limited. Many migration streams are undocumented, particularly those that do not cross state boundaries. Gendered perspectives for both internal and cross-border migration are clearly missing from policy debates and more importantly, in policy implementation. This is in part due to the lack of gender-disaggregated data available to policymakers and scholars (Hunter and David 2011; UN High Commissioner for Human Rights 2012). The WomanStats Project and Database has sought to identify and expand the set of quantitative resources available that specifically address women’s security concerns (WomanStats Database 2012). However, while identifying important empowerment factors, this database has yet to include available figures on climate migration. Future research in this area is needed to give scholars and policymakers information about decisions to migration and the migration experience overall so that we can better understand this growing phenomenon.

CONCLUSION

According to UN figures, the total number of international migrants has increased over the last 10 years from an estimated 150 million in 2000 to 214 million persons today (UN News Service 2012). Climate change is contributing to these numbers at present, and will be a factor in future migration. Scholars and policymakers can do much more to make debates over the securitization of climate migration more inclusive of humanitarian concerns by incorporating a gendered approach to their work. Gendering climate migration discussions contributes to humanizing the phenomenon of migration, and calling attention to the fact that for many, this is an involuntary phenomenon. These shifts in perspective can hopefully make it easier for actors to adopt the idea of using the human security frame. Gender is an omnipresent factor in the process of migration, not an outcome or consequence to evaluate after the fact. Furthermore, gender does not preferentially rank the experiences of men or women, but provides a framework for carefully considering the implications of climate migration. At present, actors have largely ignored the gendered nature of climate migration, and securitized the phenomenon through state security discourses. This narrow focus misses important facets of the threats, vulnerabilities and risks associated with climate change.

When populations are faced with environmental change and/or natural disasters, migration is one adaptation strategy which is contextualized by numerous factors, including the scope and scale of environmental change, the vulnerability of populations to environmental change, the ability of vulnerable populations to relocate and the responses of source communities and destination communities (Raleigh et al. 2008). This list illustrates the complexities involved in climate migration processes. The complex nature of the problem, coupled with the social justice aspects of migration makes state security discourses too narrow and limited to consider the myriad human security
aspects of climate migration. A gendered human security discourse includes narratives that call scholarly and policy attention to the risks, threats and vulnerabilities that confront people in the face of climate change. Gender lenses serve as an important way to both acknowledge the gendered nature of climate migration, and highlight many of the significant human security aspects of migration in the face of environmental factors.

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Notes

1 For example, studies like Feng et al. (2010) use an instrumental variables approach to quantitatively examine the linkages among variations in climate, agricultural yields and people’s migration. They find that the USA can expect an additional 1.4 to 6.7 million Mexican immigrants between 2010 and 2080 solely attributable to the effects of climate change on Mexican agriculture.

2 There are also gendered implications of predicted resource conflicts that may accompany climate change (Homer-Dixon 1999; Detraz 2009).

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