Blaming the weather

The moral danger of the securitization of climate change

MA Thesis International Relations
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Cover image:
Sheikh Ghazi Rashad Hrimis touches dried earth in the parched region of Raqqa province in eastern Syria, November 2010 (Stokes 2016).

Content

Introduction

1.1. Research questions

In the last few years, a connection between the Syrian Civil War, the refugee crisis and climate change appeared in media articles and was discussed in policy circles. The Dutch Broadcasting Foundation (NOS) published a short video explaining this connection, which mentioned climate change as a so-called 'threat multiplier' of existing instability. In all my years of study, never before did I come across the relationship between climate change and conflict. My interest was aroused and the idea for this thesis was born. Initially, my intension was to defend and strengthen the argument for a link between climate change and conflict. After all, it seemed to make sense that when people lose their livelihoods and migrate to other places, only to find themselves with other people in the same situation, tension rises and conflict might erupt. My own frame of reference played a part in this. I am deeply concerned about a changing climate, our human role in this and the possible future consequences. The fact that prominent people like former-president Barack Obama, former vice-president Al Gore and UN Messenger of Peace - with a focus on climate change - Leonardo DiCaprio spoke out about this, contributed to my view. The picture of climate change as the biggest threat to our planet led me to believe that the Syrian conflict must have been the (direct) result of climate change. A much-debated article by Kelley et al. (2015) strengthened my beliefs. In short, Kelley et al. argue that a drought preceding the Syrian uprisings had contributed to the escalation of the conflict. They also argued that the drought was the result of human interference with the global climate. In other words, it seemed clear that human induced climate change is not only causing rising temperatures, but apparently it is capable of causing conflicts as well.

A few months into my research, however, I realized that reality is not that simple. Moreover, such a simplistic statement could even make things worse. It came to my attention that shortly after the Kelley et al. research was published, climate change was blamed for Syrian Civil War and the refugee flows in the media, followed by politicians making similar claims. Newspaper articles implied that climate change did not only pose a threat to Syria itself, but also to other countries - even the one in which environmental changes did not occur. As a consequence of climate change, 'climate refugees' appeared to become a global threat to national and international security. My view, and idea for this thesis, had changed. I asked myself, why would a war and its consequences be explained with climate change? Why now

and not before? What is the process behind this? Who benefits from this? And why is there such a focus on the risks and threats of climate change?

This led to my research question: *why did climate change become such an influential explanation for the Syrian Civil War?*

My sub-questions are the following:

1. In what way did climate change play a role in the eruption of the Syrian Civil War?
2. In what way did climate change play a role in the migration of Syrians?
3. What way of conceptualizing the connection between climate change and migration has obtained the most influence?
4. In what way are the Syrian Civil War and the refugees portrayed in the media?
5. In what way does the alarming narrative facilitate politicians?

1.2. Methods and design

To strengthen my arguments, the effect of climate change on the events leading up to the Syrian uprising and civil war will be examined in a case study. My choice for a 'within-case' design stems from the fact that I am seeking to find a causal relationship between climate change and conflict. Climate change is not the only variable – and I do not wish to imply that it is – which makes spuriousness more likely when examining this link. I am aware that conflict is caused by multiple factors, of which climate change might be just one. One case study is used in order to diminish the chance of spuriousness. To enhance the quality of the research and arguments, other possible causal factors of the conflict will be addressed and kept in mind.

The method of process-tracing[1] will be used, while at the same time trying to link the similarities or differences to the events leading up to the Arab Spring in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. The choice for process-tracing stems from my aim to identify the causal processes between climate change and conflict. The advantage of process-tracing is that it can check for spuriousness, also it is a powerful way for observing causal inference. It is however, not without its flaws, since "measurement error and omitted variables can lead to incorrect inferences in process tracing just as they can in statistical methods" (Bennet 2004,

[1] "Process tracing looks at the observable implications of putative causal mechanisms in operation in a case [..] The goal is to establish which of several possible explanations is consistent with an uninterrupted chain of evidence from hypothesized cause to observed effect" (Bennett 2004, 22).

24). However, the method is chosen for it can examine the observable implications of causal mechanisms in an individual case (Bennet 2004, 35; George & Bennett 2005). Further research could take my findings and use this in comparative case studies.

Several reasons led to choosing the Syrian Civil War as my case study. First of all, the Syrian Civil War, which begun in 2011, resulted in 2 million displaced persons and it is the largest refugee catastrophe since World War II. Syria is a relevant case, due to its cross-border implications, threatening its own and other territories' internal stability. Darfur could have been a case-study as well, but the choice for Syria stems from its current relevance and the fact that scholars and politicians have been paying increased attention on the possible link between climate change and the Syrian Civil War. On the other hand, however, the impact of climate change is still highly contested and spillover effects like migration and refugees are also caused by economic and social factors. De Châtel, for example, recognizes the temptation to include climate change as one of the triggers of the Syrian Civil War, but states "it is important to keep a clear view of the correlations between different causes and effects of events" and "it strengthens the narrative of the Assad regime that seizes every opportunity to blame external factors for its own failings and inability to reform" (2014, 532). However, this is precisely why there is a need for research on the security implications of climate change. A good step has already been taken by the Foresight (2011) report on migration (Theisen et al. 2013, 621).

Each separate chapter deals with a sub-question. Chapter one will deal with the first one. It starts with giving an overview of the 2011 uprisings and the Syrian Civil War. While the first uprisings in Dara'a were peaceful, a disproportionate counterattack by the Syrian regime caused the start of a very chaotic and bloody conflict. After this overview, I discuss in more depth the Kelley et al. (2015) research on the connection between climate change and the conflict in Syria. In short, the argument is as follows: an extreme drought, which was the result of human induced climate change, led to a rural-urban migration. This in turn created chaos and tensions, which resulted in the civil war. In order to provide a more comprehensive explanation about this connection, other scholarly research is used as well. The chapter makes clear that climate change could be a 'threat multiplier' if the circumstances are 'right'. The Syrian uprising, a shock to many, took place as a result of economic and political factors, aggravated by the government's unsustainable water policies, resource mismanagement and failure to adequately deal with the drought. I end the chapter with a discussion of the current scholarly debate regarding the climate-conflict nexus.

Chapter two answers the question regarding the impact of climate change on migration. The chapter demonstrates that this relationship is a very complicated one, different in every context. Climate change could cause environmental changes, such as droughts or floods. This in turn could indeed affect migration. However, it depends on multiple factors and other drivers whether the migration takes place over a long or short distance, whether it will be for a short period of time or permanent, and whether the migration is voluntary, forced or a combination of the two. The mega drought played a role in the internal rural-urban migration in Syria. One must, however, not forget that people also might be trapped in place, unable to move because of the economic hardships the drought might have caused. Further internal migration took place during the conflict, which was therefore the result of the violence, not the drought. Most importantly, the external or international migration is the result of the violence as well, and cannot be attributed to the drought.

Chapter three provides background to the media and political discourse on the connection between climate change, conflict and migration. In order to better comprehend why this discourse has taken root, this chapter discusses the most influential perspectives on the relationship between humans and the environment, also known as human ecology. I will demonstrate that Malthusian thinking, while simplistic and not based on solid evidence, appeals to most people. The 'alarming' perspective is based on this line of thinking. I provide counterarguments against the use of this narrative, in line with the 'sceptic perspective' and the framework of political ecology, which stresses that the human-environment relationship cannot be seen without taking politics into consideration. My arguments in this thesis are based on this sceptic perspective and framework of political ecology.

In chapter four, a discourse analysis is made on the media narrative regarding climate change and Syria. The media narrative is of importance for its influence on government activity and public opinion. I give a short overview of media representations on climate change. The media narrative on Syria is clearly an alarming one, depicting the conflict and the refugees as the result of climate change. Thereby it also makes claims about future mass displacement and chaos. By reviewing multiple newspapers, it becomes clear that the overall narrative is a simplistic and sensational one, but powerful enough to influence politics and public opinion.

Chapter five explains why this way of framing the conflict has received so much attention by the media and politicians. The alarming narrative is beneficial for its users and appealing for its audience because of the securitization of climate change that has taken place in the last few decades. After a short overview of the securitization process, the benefits for

climate activists and politicians are discussed. The consequences are striking, however. Internal displaced persons tend to be overlooked, refugees are stigmatized and risk losing their right to protection and security, the responsibility of the human agents of conflicts tends to be diminished because the causes of war are de-politicized and it has led to the militarization of climate change. The latter could potentially shift the focus away from mitigation and adaptation measures to combat climate change, to a focus on defence. The chapter ends with a few comments on the politicized environment that occurred as a result. The environment and climate change have become political tools, diminishing the moral responsibility from the actual agents of conflicts and human misery.

This thesis ends with my conclusion. By focusing on climate change, conflicts are perceived as being the result of one dimension. Climate change has become a political tool to promote one's own interest, be it a call for climate action, securing one's borders or arguing for better defence mechanisms to combat climate change. As will become clear, we should be wary of securitizing the climate in such a way, for it does not protect the environment, does not stop climate change and is of no help to the people suffering from the poor economic and political circumstances, be they aggravated by climate change or not.

Chapter one

Climate change and conflict in Syria

1.1. Historical overview: the 2011 uprisings and the Syrian Civil War

The start of the Syrian Civil War can be traced back to the peaceful demonstration in Dara'a. On that day, in March 2011, the Syrian government fired the first shots. Only a few months later, a significant part of the Syrian people decided to fight back, supported by defected members of the Syrian troops who called themselves the Free Syrian Army. With this, the initially peaceful uprising resulted in a bloody civil war by January 2012 (De Châtel 2014, 521; Hokayem 2013, 9).[2] Many armed groups made use of the chaos that swept the country. Already in mid-2011, Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) set up its new branch in Syria called Jabhat al-Nusra. It officially announced its formation at the beginning of 2012. Meanwhile, Syrian Kurdisch groups, which have longed for autonomy for a long time, took up arms against Assad. A few months later, the Syrian Civil War has turned into a proxy war when Iran intervened on Assad's behalf and the Gulf States started to financially support the rebels, mainly through Turkey. Hezbollah, with help from Iran, joined the war on the side of Assad, after which the Gulf States sent even more money and weapons to the rebels, this time also through Jordan. In 2013, the Middle East was extremely divided between Sunni powers backing the rebels and Shi'i powers on the side of the Syrian regime. The conflict became even more chaotic after Assad used chemical weapons against his own citizens in the town of Ghouta. For the United States (U.S.), Assad has taken matters much too far with this action. On September 10, 2013, then-president Obama mentions in his speech: "Men, women, children, lying in rows, killed by poison gas […] it is in the national security interest of the United States to respond to the Assad regime's use of chemical weapons to a targeted military strike" (Obama 2013). In response, Russia proposed to Syria to surrender its control of chemical weapons to the international community to avoid a U.S. military strike, upon which the U.S. decides to back down (Hanlon & Christie 2016, 8). However, a few weeks later, a U.S. training program from the CIA started to aid the rebels. With that, the U.S. became an active participant in the war.

The war is transformed once again in February 2014. An Al-Qaeda affiliate, which was mostly based in Iraq, breaks away from the group due to internal disagreements. The faction calls itself the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), later to be called IS. IS does not

[2] This paper defines civil war as "armed combat within the boundaries of a recognized sovereign entity between parties subject to a common authority at the outset of the hostilities" (Kalyvas 2006, 17).

fight against Assad, but rather targets the rebels and the Kurds, thereby increasingly claiming territory and declaring the Islamic Caliphate. IS is considered a major security threat to the U.S., which is therefore determined to move ahead with its air strikes against them. A new training program by the Pentagon has started to train the rebels to fight IS instead of Assad. Meanwhile, Turkey was bombing the Kurds, even those which are fighting against IS, and it does not target IS itself. This has led to increased tension with the US, but also adds to the confusion as to where the U.S. stands. Assad has been losing ground all this time, but finds himself an ally in Russia in September 2015 when Russia starts to fight on his behalf. Russia, however, claims to be fighting IS, but in fact only attacks anti-Assad rebels (Vox 2017). As of today, there still seems no end in sight for this terrible civil war.

1.2. Climate change: a 'threat multiplier'?

> *"Of course [it is because of the drought]. The drought and unemployment were important in pushing people toward revolution. When the drought happened, we could handle it for two years, and then we said, 'It's enough'."* (Interview displaced Syrian farmer, quoted in Kelley et al. 2015, 3245).

The study conducted by Kelley et al. in 2015 has put forward evidence that "anthropogenic forcing has increased the probability of severe and persistent droughts in this region […] and made the occurrence of a 3-year drought as severe as that of 2007-2010 two to three times more likely than by natural variability alone" (2015, 3241). This extreme drought[3], which lasted multiple years, affected the Syrian people and their already vulnerable living conditions in such a way that it played a part in the start of the uprisings. This section does not diminish the social, economic and institutional conditions that increase the likelihood of violence, but demonstrates in what way climate change has the potential to worsen such conditions, which has happened in Syria (Solow 2013, 180). This part argues there is a connection, albeit a very complex one, between climate change and the likelihood of conflict.

Climate change is expected to change weather patterns and affect livelihoods in multiple ways. Changes in temperatures, rising sea levels, diminished river flows, severe storms and excessive or diminished rainfall are all part of the consequences of climate change, even though it is still very difficult to determine where and in what severity this will take place in the future. For Syria, the increased likelihood of severe droughts is of special

[3] While in the academic literature and media this drought is revered to as a 'mega drought', this is not correct. A mega drought lasts multiple decades, which is not the case for this one. Therefore, I refer to this drought as an extreme drought, to emphasize its impact and the fact that it lasted multiple years.

importance. In the first decade of this century, an extreme drought occurred in the Fertile Crescent.[4] Syria has experienced six droughts in the last century, but five of them were only one-season droughts. In contrast, this last drought was a multiyear drought with enormous agricultural consequences. In 2007/2008, already 97,1 percent of Syria's vegetation was affected, herders had lost 85 percent of their livestock and by 2009 over 800.000 people had lost their livelihoods. This resulted in the fact that many "farmers and herders had little choice but to move elsewhere, starve, or demand change" (Werrel, Femia & Sternberg 2015, 32-4). It is estimated that 1.5 million people moved from rural to urban areas within Syria. This movement was preceded by a migration flow of around 1.5 million Iraqi refugees to Syria in the years between 2003 and 2007 (Kelley et al. 2015, 3241).

The extreme climatic circumstances, even though experienced as a gradual change, had worsened the existing conditions and vulnerability of the Syrian people. Syria was indeed a country characterized by conditions of which has been proven that they increase the likelihood of violence (Fearon & Laitin 2003, 75-6, 83-5, 88). It has experienced corruption, high unemployment rates, inadequate government policies and inequality for a long time. Even though the country was considered relatively stable, in the years before the uprising it suffered from decreasing economic health, pressures on its water resources were growing and civil unrest and calls for political reform were sweeping over the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region (Gleick 2014, 331). The government's failure to respond to the growing grievances, such as the rising rural poverty, was one of the most important triggers for the uprisings (De Châtel 2014, 524-32; Hokayem 2013, 13, 19). However, these conditions were present long before the uprisings started and Syria had always been regarded as a relatively stable country in the Middle East. The fact that the Arab Spring uprisings reached Syria was, therefore, a surprise for many.

The uprisings are not so surprising anymore when one takes into account the aforementioned extreme drought that occurred in the years before the uprisings. The people that moved from rural to urban areas, found themselves with fellow sufferers – either complaining about the government, the lack of food or the rising unemployment. For example, Dara'a, the city where the uprisings began, experienced five years of drought and received little assistance from the state. This created a breeding ground for unrest and discontent about the living conditions (Campbell & Goddard 2015; Kelley et al. 2015, 3245). There is a consensus in academic literature that rapid demographic change ignites instability and it is

[4] The Fertile Crescent is an area encompassing parts of Cyprus, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, the Palestinian Territories, Syria and Turkey.

more likely that harsh conditions and vulnerability increase tensions when a lot of people move to the same place (Kelley et al 2015, 3242). The migration increased urban unemployment and this resulted in social unrest, an occurrence previously found in other cases and studies (Gleick 2014, 333; Goldstone 2002, 10). Importantly, the presence of poverty and inequality, grievances present in Syria, do not cause violence on their own. According to the Climate and Migration Coalition, such grievances did not severely cause tensions between people, but was directed at the Syrian regime (Randall 2016). People mobilized and started to work together, instead of fighting each other. This is why the initial uprisings were peaceful, just as they were during the Arab Spring in other countries. Disproportionate violence by the government has turned the events in a bloody civil war.

Climate also played a role in the Arab Spring outside of Syria. Climate change seems to be a necessary causal factor, even though it was not able to trigger the events on its own. Rather, it amplified existing grievances. The Arab Spring took place in a context of discontent about government policies. Drivers such as a youth bulge, sectarian divides, government oppression and economic insecurity, are well known factors that led to the civil unrest (Werrel, Femia & Sternberg 2015, 29). For example, youth bulges have been associated with political crises. Young people – also the ones that participated in the first demonstrations in Syria – are more easily summoned to participate in such events. They have fewer responsibilities, which makes them more prone to participate in civil unrest. They also feel more attracted to radical sects that promise liberation and an overall better future (Goldstone 2002, 11; Hanlon & Christie 2016, 20; Klare 2007, 357-9). This has made extreme Islamist groups rather successful, for such movements are likely to take root in such circumstances.

The bigger context of the uprisings of the Arab Spring should not be overlooked. Extreme weather across the globe had caused a surge in food prices, resulting in the fact that in 2011 the food price index had exceeded the already extremely high levels of 2008 (Johnstone & Mazo 2011, 11-13). The global food crisis, combined with inadequate government policies to address people's grievances, contributed to increased instability. It is true, for example, that both Egypt and Syria suffered from mismanagement leading to water and food insecurities (Werrel, Femia & Sternberg 2015, 30). The Arab spring was, therefore, a "textbook example of complex causality and the role of climate change as a threat multiplier" (Johnstone & Mazo 2011, 11). Simply put, threat multipliers make conditions even worse than they already are. In this case, it means that climate change has heightened other threats: the drought was a catalyst in the unrest that swept the Syrian nation, eventually resulting in the Syrian Civil War.

1.3. Why Syria?

> *"It is when extreme events affect people with high levels of vulnerability that they become disasters"* (Tacoli 2011, 115).

Whether climate change will act as a threat multiplier depends on the country and its circumstances. States that are relatively vulnerable may have more difficulty to provide protection from climate change, which could increase the likelihood of conflict (Barnett & Adger 2007, 641-3, 649-51; Hanlon & Christie 2016, 44). In other words, it depends on a state's ability to adapt and its degree of vulnerability.[5] Only if a state is able to adapt and mitigate its vulnerability, climate change is less likely to act like a threat multiplier. It makes sense that the relatively wealthy states that experience adequate governance will be much more able to do so, than a state such as Syria. However, the question remains why Syria was hit to such an extent, even though the drought affected multiple countries in the region.

Syria is a country defined by water scarcity. It is heavily depending on rainfall to cultivate the lands and the rest of the land depends on groundwater irrigation. However, not only diminished rainfall, but also the government's water policy is, to a large amount, to blame for the population's vulnerability to the extreme drought of the previous decade. It has been widely known that Syrian agricultural policies and water management are extremely unsustainable (Barnes 2009, 521-3; FAO, WFP and Syrian Ministry of Agriculture and Agricultural Reform 2012, 6; Gleick 2014, 332-3). Close ties between the ruling Ba'th party and the agricultural sector, which can be traced back to former president Assad, have resulted in biased water policies.[6] In recent times, the Syrian regime has promoted water sensitive agriculture, such as cotton. Groundwater resources have diminished due to the government's unsustainable policies. The decline in groundwater resources exhausted the buffer, which was needed for years with decreased precipitation, such as the years during the extreme drought. This further increased the population's vulnerability. The government did not intend to increase the country's water scarcity, but it did have an unsustainable water policy by choosing to focus on cotton for export and striving for food self-sufficiency (Barnes 2009, 520). In sum, the government's water policy errors contributed to growing social, economic

[5] Vulnerability can be defined as "the potential for loss or harm due to some external stress", whereas adaptation takes place "through adjustments to reduce vulnerability or enhance resilience to observed or expected changes in climate, and involves changes in processes, perceptions, practices and functions". Moreover, "vulnerability differs across households, communities and regions, as the fundamental components of vulnerability differ significantly over space and time" (Brown & McLeman 2009, 294). This thesis will come back to this issue in chapter two and three.

[6] For an extensive discussion about this relationship, see Barnes (2009).

and political uncertainty and discontent. Or, in Saleeby's words: "the regime's failure to put in place economic measures to alleviate the effects of the drought was a critical driver in propelling such massive mobilizations of dissent" (2012).

1.4. Critique to and support for the climate – conflict nexus

Conflicts are unique events, never caused by the same set of causal factors. They are the result of complex causal chains, in which it is often difficult to determine which one was a significant contributor. The Syrian Civil War is no exception. As discussed, Syria is characterized by many factors that are commonly known to increase the likelihood of civil violence. Climate change was one of them – it did not solely cause the violence, but played an indirect role in its occurrence. There is, however, still much debate about this link between climate change and conflict.

Global environmental change[7] has gotten increased attention over the last years. An increasingly widespread view regards climate change as one of the greatest challenges to global peace (Theisen et al. 2013, 614). This link between climate change and conflict has not only been made in the case of Syria, most importantly by the study of Kelley et al. (2015), but also by other scholars. Incidences as droughts in India, heat waves in the U.S., civil wars on the African continent and ethnic violence in Europe, have all been used by scholars to support the claim that a shift in the global climate is linked to a lot of violence in the world. American scientists, for example, argued that even small changes in rainfall or temperature can be associated with violence either committed by individuals or groups, possibly leading to war (Hanlon & Christie 2016, 43). It has also been argued that hot temperatures are linked to individual aggression and a recent study found that years which are relatively warmer than usual increase the risk of violence. Moreover, violence has also been associated with wet periods after extreme rainfall (Anderson 2001, 33-6; Hendrix & Salehyan 2012, 42-6; Hsiang et al. 2013, 9-10). In sum, climate change has been increasingly linked to violence and the eruption of conflict. Importantly, this link is an indirect and very complex one, different in every case.

At the other side of the debate, other studies disregard a link all together. Salehyan, for example, argues that climate change is not useful in predicting the likelihood of conflicts. He claims that human agency, the role of political institutions and technological innovations are

[7] Global environmental change is the phenomenon of "natural and human induced changes in the Earth's environment, affecting land use and land cover, biodiversity, atmospheric composition and climate" (Page 2002, 27).

the factors causing conflicts (2008, 317-19). Evans argues weak governance contributes to problems that are associated with scarcity, thereby suggesting that people in fragile states are more at risk (2010, 6, 10). Claiming climate change is solely responsible for conflict is "misleading and misses recognizing the complexity of the various potential threats to human security" (Evans 2010, 17; Hanlon & Christie 2016, 45-6). Theisen et al. found no support for a link between drought and conflict (Theisen et al. 2013, 618-9). Other scholars claim that environment does play a role, albeit not such an important one as economic and political factors (Goldstone 2002, 6-14; Hanlon & Christie 2016, 43). Most of these studies, however, focus on environmental degradation and issues such as international water disputes. They do not talk extensively about climate change in the way it has occurred in Syria.[8] While not all scholars accept a link between climate change and violent conflict, there is a growing consensus that when states are not able to *deal* with the consequences of climatic changes, the *likelihood* of violence increases (Barnett & Adger 2007, 643, 649-51; Buhaug et al. 2010, 12-16, 22-25, 30-33; Hanlon & Christie 2016, 44; Theisen et al. 2013, 622). In other words, even more sceptic scholars do acknowledge that climate change can 'cause' conflict *indirectly*. Other factors that bring about conflicts are therefore not less important, but they are intensified by climate change, thus resulting in an indirect causal link.

Concluding, there seems to be a complex connection between human interference with the global climate, the severe drought in Syria and the mass migration within Syria from rural to urban areas, which influenced existing factors such as vulnerability, government policies and instability.[9] The government did little to alleviate people's growing grievances, both in the rural areas and urban centres. Moreover, research has shown that "where urban population growth is not matched by an increase in economic growth, risks of political turbulence increase" (Goldstone 2002, 10). The migration, therefore, resulted in rising unemployment and inequality, which only aggravated the existing social unrest. By this means, growing discontent in the urban peripheries increased the likelihood of conflict, which is supported by the conflict literature stating that rapid demographic change encourages instability (Gleick 2014, 333; Kelley et al. 2015, 3242). Importantly, the drought and the resulting scarcity did not ignite violence between the Syrian people, but was directed against the state. The context of the Arab Spring, therefore, cannot be overlooked.

[8] For example, Baechler (1998) and Hauge & Ellingsen (1998).
[9] According to Kelley et al., "no natural cause is apparent for these trends, whereas the observed drying and warming are consistent with model studies of the response to increases in greenhouse gasses" and the Syrian drought was "more than twice as likely as a consequence of human interference in the climate system" (2015, 3241).

Chapter two

The story of Syrian migration

2.1. Climate change and migration

It has been widely acknowledged that climate change is able to re-shape future patterns of human movement. However, the way this will happen has most often been misunderstood. This chapter discusses more in depth how the internal and external migration took place, both before and during the Syrian Civil War. Research in climate change and migration still contains many gaps. Importantly, migration is not only a reaction to weather changes, but also depends on one's vulnerability and ability to adapt (Black et al. 2011, S4). The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre describes the climate-migration nexus in the following way, which is applicable to the case of Syria:

> *"The worst impacts of slow-onset hazards and processes take months to decades to manifest. Population movements in these contexts are best understood along a continuum from voluntary to forced, with some households using migration as an early adaptive measure to increase their resilience. Patterns of displacement among people in severe distress may involve dispersed movements as well as tipping points into whole community displacements. At the same time, others unable to move away, may become trapped in life-threatening situations."* (IDMC 2017b).

Migration is different in every region and circumstance, which is why there is hardly a consensus concerning the drivers for migration, with theories offering several explanations rooted in political, economic and social factors. A comprehensive framework is set up by Black et al. (2011). They agree that migration depends on social, economic, political and demographic factors. Additionally, they add environmental change in two ways. First, as a direct driver, for example the exposure to hazards and changes in ecosystem services, such as water and food. Second, as an indirect driver it affects the other four drivers (Black et al. 2011, S5).[10] Whether one decides to move, depends not only on these drivers, but also on personal characteristics and intervening obstacles, for example ethnicity and costs of moving respectively. All drivers seldom act in isolation, but reinforce and interact with each other, eventually leading up to the decision whether or not one will move. In other words, it depends on a person's decision, which is influenced by personal characteristics and one's ability to move or stay (Black et al. 2015, S10).

[10] For the complete overview of this framework, see Black et al. 2015, S5, figure 2.

2.2. Climate change and internal migration in Syria

As discussed above, migration from rural to urban areas has played a part in the complex causal chain between climate change and the outbreak of the violence. Internal migration in this paper is meant to be migration that "refers to the forced movement of people within the country they live in" (IDMC 2017a). Already in 2009, herders have started to move in large quantities from their lands to urban areas and the south in search for work. By 2011, around 2 to 3 million people were driven into extreme poverty, according to a United Nations (U.N.) report (Femia & Werrel 2012, 1; Werrel, Femia & Sternberg 2015, 33).[11] As mentioned, it was estimated that around 1.5 million people moved from rural areas to the peripheries of urban areas due to crop failures and loss of livestock (Kelley et al. 2015, 3241).

While the drought was a significant driver for internal migration, it still should be seen separately from other matters. First, a large part of the Syrian population depends on agriculture. A change in environment, such as the extreme drought, directly affected their livelihood and well-being as a result of reducing crops and livestock. Besides that, it indirectly affected their well-being and cause for migration, by influencing the economic driver. It influenced this economic driver by reducing their household incomes. Importantly, however, not all people will be migrating as a result. While a lot of them did, it is striking that the most vulnerable and poor people will not be able to migrate, precisely because of their diminished incomes (Black et al. 2011, S6-8). In other words, environmental change can have different impacts on one's motivation and ability to move, which is not any different in the case of Syria.

Second, and more importantly, the Syrian government failed to address the decreasing human security[12] of the people in rural areas. After initially ignoring the crisis, the Syrian regime made two appeals to the U.N. to finance development projects, but they only received a fraction of the needed funds. The regime itself also downplayed the severity of the crisis for a long time. It restricted foreign media coverage and internally used the framework of the global financial crisis and climate change to demonstrate Syria was a victim of external factors beyond its control (De Châtel 2014, 526-8). Moreover, the estimated number of 1.5

[11] According to the New York Times, "the four-year drought in Syria has pushed two million to three million people into extreme poverty, according to a survey completed here this month [October 2010] by the United Nations special rapporteur on the right to food, Olivier De Schutter" (Worth 2010).

[12] Human security entails the "protection of vulnerable individuals to threats and dangers posed by their environment. […] and has a normative bias in favour of the individual in a similar way as human rights" (Hanlon & Christie 2016, 4).

million internal displacements has been criticized by other research.[13] The number is much lower and just as much caused by the abrupt stop of government subsidies and fertilizers than the drought (Boas 2017; Selby & Hulme 2015). Since the Syrian government did not alleviate its population's vulnerability – and also increased Syria's water scarcity as discussed above – this political driver contributed to the increased migration flows from rural to urban areas. In sum, climate change was a significant driver for the initial internal migration, but the other drivers still should not be overlooked. Migration is never the result of one simple cause, but it is the result of a complex web of interplaying drivers and motivations.

2.3. Violence and internal migration in Syria

> *"Warring parties conduct hostilities with little, if any, regard for the laws of war and, in particular, its foundational principle of distinction. Regardless of the belligerent involved, the majority of attacks are not directed at a specific military objective or fail to employ a method or means of combat that can be directed at a specific military objective. Indiscriminate attacks on residential areas have led to massive casualties among Syrian civilians"* (UN General Assembly 2015, 6).

The internal displacement of the Syrian people does not get as much attention as the much more visible external migration. However, internally displaced people in Syria constitute around two-thirds of the total displaced people by the conflict. At the time of writing, with the conflict in its seventh year, around 6.3 million people have been internally displaced by the ongoing violence, which includes the bombing and shelling of civilian-inhabited areas (Mooney 2014, 44-5). Half of the Syrian population has been forced to flee their place of residence, most of them multiple times (WFP 2017, 1-4).[14] Widespread attacks on civilians have forced them to seek refuge somewhere else, with not enough measures to protect them. This displacement is a risky event in itself. According to the UN Human Rights Council's International Commission of Inquiry, the majority lacks safe access to water, medical care, food and shelter (UN General Assembly 2015, 9-10, 13-14). The conflict added more economic and political drivers to migrate. Before the conflict started, the internal migration flows were initially a response strategy, a way of adapting to the changing weather, which is often the case for internal migration (Black et al. 2011, S7). Yet, after the start of the civil war, one's ability to return home to their land was severely diminished as a result of the ongoing violence.

[13] According to Mahmoud Solh, the director-general of ICARDA (International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas), internal migration figures ranged from 40.000 – 60.000 families and the Syrian government estimated that around 200.000 – 300.000 migrated (Selby & Hulme 2015; Solh 2010).
[14] This analysis is also regularly updated by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre: unocha.org/syria.

2.4. External migration: climate refugees?

The Syrian Civil War has caused millions of displaced persons and it has been claimed that it has led to one of the largest refugee crises since the Second World War (Hanlon & Christie 2016, 125). A very clear consequence of the Syrian Civil War is the enormous number of refugees who have fled the country, with a total of more than 5 million as of January 2017 (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 2017). Most of them are housed in refugee camps in Lebanon and Turkey, with a large number of them trying to move to Europe. This is a very expensive and uncertain journey, which demonstrates that the horrors those people were facing were so severe that risking their lives to move to another country is the better alternative. Since climate change obtained a central role in explaining the Syrian Civil War, the resulting refugee crisis has likewise been explained with factors such as population pressures, the drought and climate change (De Châtel 2014, 530-32). Especially since 2015, various media reports have made claims that the refugees are 'climate refugees'.[15] The framing of them as climate refugees is discussed in greater detail below, for now it is ample to say that factors such as the unsustainable water management, agricultural policies and the bigger context of the Arab Spring should not be overlooked. It is tempting to use climate change as the sole cause, but it is important to not forget the government's failure to adequately deal with environmental changes. Thus, in contrast to the internal displacement prior to the civil war, it is incorrect to conclude that external migration is caused by climate change. The displacement during the conflict is a result of the violence – and the resulting insecurity and poverty – not the extreme drought.

[15] The term 'environmental refugee' was officially used for the first time by El-Hinnawi in a report called 'Environmental Refugees'. In that report, environmental refugees are defined as those who are "forced to leave their traditional habitat, temporarily or permanently, because of a marked environmental disruption (natural and/or triggered by people) that jeopardized their existence and/or seriously affected the quality of their life" (El-Hinnawi 1985, 4).

Chapter three

Perspectives on the human-environment relationship

The previous chapters have demonstrated two important things. First, it makes a lot of sense to link climate change with an increased likelihood of violent conflict and migration. Second, it is not nearly as simple as the previous point seems to be. However, this simplified view is exactly what politicians, environmentalists, the media and various scholars – albeit often with good intentions – are repeating. To call the displaced persons outside of Syria 'climate refugees' is not only false but has political consequences as well. This section demonstrates that over time, particular lines of thinking have created an environment wherein 'climate war' and 'climate refugees' seem the most logical ways of explaining the current situation. This chapter starts by laying out the most important arguments regarding human-environment relationships[16] – ecoscarcity, modernization and political ecology. Then it explains the debate between 'alarmists' and 'sceptics' in media, academic and policy circles, which reflects to a large extent the aforementioned viewpoints. The 'climate refugee' narrative regarding the Syrian refugees will be discussed in the next chapter.

3.1. Malthusian 'ecoscarcity'

The ecoscarcity argument derives from Malthusian thinking, which can be traced back to the 18th century with the publication of Thomas Malthus' 'Essay on the Principle of Population'. In short, the argument is as follows: "as human populations grow out of proportion to the capacity of the environmental system to support them, there is a crisis both for humans, whose numbers fall through starvation and disease-based mortality, and for nature, whose overused assets are driven past the point of self-renewal" (Robbins 2012, 14). With an apocalyptic manner of speaking, the argument entails that population growth will result in scarcity, poverty and famine, resulting in chaos and instability. It is a rather intuitive approach. Dividing limited resources by a growing number of people will result in increasingly less resources to divide. An important consequence of thinking in this manner is that the problem involves the number of people, rather than the economy or government policies. Scarcity and famine are therefore inevitable, rather than preventable. Population control is the solution, not a different distribution of goods. In this way, Neo-Malthusianism – focused more on the

[16] This theme is also known as human ecology. It concerns the interconnectedness between the environment and people and "attempts to provide a perspective that bridges the gap between the natural and social sciences (Wessels 2008, 31).

prospect of environmental degradation and famine than Malthus did – argues for population control as the solution to the appalling conditions resulting from overpopulation.

While this is an intuitive and appealing way of thinking about the relationship between humans and the environment, it is essentially flawed. The catastrophic prognoses offered by Malthusian thinking are criticized in various ways. Without going into detail, the 'modernization' argument entails that when goods become scarcer, people will come up with innovative and creative solutions in response. They either use the good more efficiently or demand will decrease, by using different technologies or creating substitutes (Robbins 2012, 16-17). When resources such as oil dry up, other alternatives such as solar power become worthy alternatives. There are several problems with this argument as well, the most important one probably that history has not provided strong evidence for environmental benefits resulting of the optimization of technologies and markets in underdeveloped states (Robbins 2012, 19). What both the ecoscarcity and modernization arguments fail to acknowledge is the significant political influence. Another way of thinking about the environment and human-environment interaction is therefore given by the 'political ecology' framework. It reflects the sceptic perspective to a large extent and is the framework on which the argument in this thesis is based.

3.2. Political ecology

> *"Political ecology presents a Jekyll and Hyde persona, attempting to do two things at once: critically explaining what is wrong with dominant accounts of environmental change, while at the same time exploring alternatives, adaptations, and creative human action in the face of mismanagement and exploitation: offering both a "hatchet" to take apart flawed, dangerous, and politically problematic accounts, and a "seed", to grow into new socio-ecologies"* (Robbins 2012, 20).

Political ecology is "an approach to investigating human-environment relationships that emphasizes the economic and political processes affecting access to and use of land and resources" (Castree, Kitchin & Rogers 2013, 379). The movement started in the 1960s in reaction to the problems caused by industrialization. In the 1970s, the movement grew and got a nation-state political focus (Doyle & McEachern 1998, 66). Political ecologists reject arguments that environmental problems are solely the result of overpopulation or oblivious land-users in underdeveloped countries. Rather, it should be seen in light of national and international relationships in which the land and its users are caught up. In other words, "costs and benefits associated with environmental change are for the most part distributed among actors unequally … [which inevitably] reinforces or reduces existing social and economic

inequalities … [which holds] political implications in terms of the altered power of actors in relation to other actors" (Bryant and Bailey 1997, 28-9; Robbins 2012, 20). In other words, environmental change can be regarded as the product of a political process. Importantly, the likelihood of environmental conflict rises when state institutions, elites or other groups enhance scarcity. Conflicts regarding the environment and its resources are therefore part of a larger political context.[17]

3.3. The alarmist perspective

> *"Evidence is fast accumulating that, within our children's lifetimes, severe droughts, storms and heat waves caused by climate change could rip apart societies from one side of the planet to the other. Climate stress may well represent a challenge to international security just as dangerous – and more intractable – than the arms race between the United States and the Soviet Union during the cold war or the proliferation of nuclear weapons among rogue states today"* (Homer-Dixon 2007).

The alarmist perspective offers a familiar discourse, based on Malthusian environmental explanations. It is no surprise that politicians, the media, civil society and environmentalists often use this discourse. It is called 'alarming' for its focus on the possibility of extreme future implications of climate change and its impact on (human) security. Or in other words, the perspective argues that environmental changes contribute to insecurity, most often with rather apocalyptic visions. This narrative has gotten more authority after the Cold War, when the notion of human security became more prominent. In line with Malthusian thinking, the main idea focused on the environmental degradation and the resulting migration as a consequence of population pressures (Hartmann 2010, 234-5). As the perspective evolved, human displacement became a more prominent issue. The perspective argues "environmental disruptions, among which the impacts of climate change in particular, will induce massive population displacement" (Gemenne 2011, 226). Thomas Homer-Dixon, a prominent scholar within this line of thinking, focuses especially on the security implications of climate change and argues that climate change will directly cause "waves of environmental refugees that spill across borders with destabilizing effects on the recipient's domestic order and on international stability" (Homer-Dixon 1991, 77). His legacy still persists in media and policy circles, especially the link between climate change and conflict and the 'threat' of 'environmental refugees'.

[17] Political ecology deals with a number of other related questions and subjects, which are laid out in more detail by Robbins (2012).

While it has received much criticism, which is discussed in more detail below, one could hardly blame the many people using this narrative. They are most often deeply concerned about climate change and the possible threats involved. The alarmist perspective gives such actors the ability to make their case for new policies to protect the environment and people suffering from such a changing environment (Gemenne 2011, 230-2). However, the term 'environmental refugee' should be used with caution.

3.4. The sceptic perspective

> *"This deterministic perspective serves many worthwhile goals, and highlights in particular the need to fight against climate change. Thus portraying 'climate refugees' as the human face of climate change is helpful in many ways, but certainly not to accurately describe the realities of migration associated with environmental changes"* (Gemenne 2011, 254).

In contrast to the alarmist perspective, the sceptics argue "migration is multicausal by nature, and that environmental drivers should not be set apart from other migration drivers" (Gemenne 2011, 226). To call certain refugees 'environmental refugees' has several shortcomings. In claiming that people are displaced because of one factor, other economic or political factors lose significance. It has yet to be proven that people move because of one sole reason. Moreover, it cloaks the importance of the role of political responses to environmental degradation and it overemphasizes the role of demographic pressure, while there is little evidence for this. In other words, the term 'environmental refugee' does not "help us understand the complex processes at work in specific situations of impoverishment, conflict and displacement" (Castles 2002, 5; Hartmann 2010, 235). The alarmist perspective has the tendency to overreact indeed. Sensational stories of 'hundreds of millions' of refugees crossing borders in the future were not supported by strong evidence. Most of the scientific evidence concludes that much of the migration caused by human-induced climate change will take place internally, or over a short distance to neighbouring states. The predictions provided by the alarming discourse will probably not happen. According to the sceptics it is therefore both an unworkable and unethical way of framing climate change. It is counterproductive, merely focused on short-term solutions (White 2011, 7-9).

Two scholars have been particularly critical of the alarmist perspective. Gaim Kibreab argued that framing environmental displacement in such a way gives politicians a reason to neglect their obligations to provide asylum because an environment criterion is not present in the 1951 Geneva Convention (1997, 21). The causes of migration are depoliticized, diminishing politicians' obligations. The convention only recognizes refugees who are faced

with persecution and the term is therefore a political construct (Gemenne 2011, 239, 248-9). In response, some have called for modifications of the Convention to include people who are displaced by environmental changes. However, various scholars working on refugee rights have criticized this plight. They are afraid that it would be used to further restrict the responsibility to help displaced people. They also argue that, even though the convention does not recognize environmental refugees, it could still be of help to them if they are also subjected to recognized criteria, such as conflict, which is often the case.

Richard Black argued in a similar manner that the climate-migration nexus advocated an extension of this convention in order to protect those displaced by the environment. He claims, however, that climate as the sole driver for migration is never the case and it might lead to stricter asylum policies in European and North American states (Black 1998, 1-23; Gemenne 2011, 239-41). Such stricter asylum policies are possible, because when the grounds for asylum are depoliticized an obligation to grant them asylum fades away. To sum up, the sceptic perspective calls into question the simplistic generalization given to the climate-migration nexus put forward by the alarmist perspective and sheds light on the political consequences. These political drivers and consequences are discussed in greater detail below.

Chapter four

The discourse on climate change, 'climate conflict' and 'climate refugees'

4.1. Discourse analysis and the importance of the media

This next section discusses in greater detail the media's portrayal of the Syrian conflict and the growing number of Syrian refugees moving to Europe. The media narrative is of importance, for it has a critical impact on the formation of the public discourse and policy formation on climate change. The media raises awareness and distributes knowledge. It acts as a forum for discussion on climate governance. On the one hand, media representations make sense of ongoing scientific research, and on the other hand they frame "climate change for policy, politics and the public" (Boykoff 2011, 3). In fact, research has shown that media attention has an influence on government activity, especially when it comes to climate change (Schmidt, Ivanova & Schäfer 2013, 5). The narrative surrounding an issue matters to determine whether it is or will become a political problem. The narrative has implications to questions such as 'who is responsible' or 'what should be done', which influences policy making.

An analysis of the media and political discourse is of great importance to understand how climate change is currently perceived, how people make sense of the scientific research and how it should be addressed. Discourse can be defined as "an ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categories through which meaning is given to phenomena", it "provides the tools with which problems are constructed" and importantly, "discourse structuration occurs when a discourse starts to dominate the way a society conceptualizes the world" (Hajer 1993, 45-6). For example, the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) definition of climate change aligns itself more with the scientific definition,[18] but the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCC) focuses more on the human contribution to it.[19] This has an impact on what to do about it and who or what is responsible. Likewise, the different usages of 'climate change' and 'global warming' invoke different reactions. While climate change can be regarded as a remote problem, global warming speaks more to people's fears of an increasingly heating planet.

[18] Climate change is "any change in climate over time whether due to natural variability or as a result of human activity" (IPCC 2001, Annex B).

[19] Climate change is "a change of climate which is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the consumption of the global atmosphere and which is in addition to natural climate variability over comparable time periods" (quoted in IPCC 2001, Annex B).

4.2. Media representations on climate change

Since the 1980s, climate change entered the public sphere. Many actors made enormous efforts to not only make people aware of the science, but also to try to increase engagement around the climate agenda (Boykoff 2011, 12-13). Since the turn of the millennium, the framing of climate change as a 'threat' become more prominent. In 2007, media representations about climate change peaked all over the world. Specific events contributed to this, such as Al Gore's documentary '*An Inconvenient Truth'* and the publication of the IPCC Fourth Assessment Report (IPCC 2007). After the economic recession, which got a lot more media attention, climate change again got increasing media attention in 2009 (Boykoff 2011, 20-21; Schmidt, Ivanova & Schäfer 2013, 8). Mass media is a perfect instrument to distribute such messages and increase awareness. While using various media 'frames' and making bold claims, many actors try to influence the science, understanding and governance of climate change. Understandably, the way climate change is framed - as a threat, opportunity or problem - has a serious impact on policy priorities and responses from civil society (Boykoff 2011, 11, 15).

While the media influences politics and civil society's comprehension of climate change impacts, media representations exist within a larger political context as well. While it influences politics and scientific considerations, science and politics likewise influence the way the media portrays the impacts of climate change (Boykoff 2011, 29, 76). There is a danger in this. Mike Hulme has warned that "it seems that mere 'climate change' was not going to be bad enough, and so now must be 'catastrophic' to be worthy of attention" (Hulme 2006). Using alarming discourse can therefore be used to provoke more - or less - alarmed responses in civil society and from policy makers (Boykoff 2011, 9). However, exiting news and fearful messages speak to the public and "feed readily into journalistic norms of dramatization and personalization", resulting in their primacy over objective, dry, stories about climate change (Boykoff 2011, 16, 86). By framing climate change in this alarming way, emphasis is put on the danger of it on human security, trade and the economy, rather than the other way around. In terms of media headlines, "war linked to global warming" is a much more appealing one than "global warming might exacerbate some of the factors that can lead to conflict" (Westervelt 2015). This is precisely the case for the framing of climate change in Syria and the so-called 'influxes' of 'climate refugees'.

4.3. The media narrative of climate change in Syria

> *"This [climate change] can lead directly to refugees, or to unrest that produces even more refugees. The fabric that ties people to their homes is not as robust as we'd like to imagine. If you don't believe it, there is a long line of displaced people heading your way to explain it to you"* (Toles 2015).

The overall narrative, which really took root after the Kelley et al. research of 2015, is an alarmist one. In short, migrants in Europe are depicted as being a threat to Western security. They have been forced to move as a result of climate change and the media makes wild speculations about future human displacement and 'mass' migrations. As discussed in length above, migration is multi-causal in nature and when people move in part as a result of environmental change, this displacement is often temporarily and over a short distance. The media reports are simplified accounts of this connection between climate change and migration and they represent the refugees as a source of chaos, causing future insecurity and instability, without solid evidence to support these claims.

While most media reports connecting the drought with the conflict in Syria were published as a reaction to the Kelley et al. research, the 'link' was discussed before that, albeit to a lesser extent. In 2013, former advisor to President John F. Kennedy, William R. Polk, wrote an article on the issue that the population and resource ratio was out of balance in Syria. According to him, the conflict erupted because different groups were competing over scarce resources, thereby stating: "and so, tens of thousands of frightened, angry, hungry and impoverished former farmers were jammed into Syria's towns and cities, where they constituted tinder ready to catch fire" (Polk 2013). In 2013 and 2014 two pieces on the drought in Syria, connecting it to the conflict, were also published in the New York Times. In those articles, the drought was told to be the key driver, but the failure to respond to the drought likewise played a huge role (Friedman 2013; Friedman 2014). When it comes to the narrative regarding Syria and climate change, headlines demonstrate that an apocalyptic narrative is describing the link between climate change, conflict and migration. This was already present in the headline of one of the articles just mentioned: "Without Water, Revolution" (Friedman 2013).

In reviewing multiple newspapers, with a focus on U.S. and European ones from 2015 onwards, two key points stand out which are addressed by the media. The first is the argument that climate change has caused a severe drought that played a role in the onset of the violence in Syria in 2011. For example, The New York Times reported on the Kelley et al. research. It explained how the conflict was linked to a drought that was made worse by climate change

(Fountain 2015). The second key argument not only mentions that the draught led to the violence, but it highlights the migration from rural to urban areas, which attributed to the start of the conflict. For example, a National Geographic report repeated the Kelley et al. arguments that mass migration causes social stresses, which in turn had resulted in the uprisings (Fountain 2015). Media reports such as these are very vague, however, about the causality between migration and conflict, just as the Kelley et al. study was too. The Independent briefly touched upon the impact of scarcity, in line with Malthusian thinking, stating that: "experts have long predicted that climate change will be a major source of conflict as drought and rising temperatures hurt agriculture, putting a further strain on resources in already unstable regimes" (Bawden 2015).

Besides the connection between climate change and conflict, the media talks about two significant consequences of climate change in Syria: terrorism and refugees in Europe. The Toronto Star and Time, for example, presented the possible connection between climate change, Syria and the terrorist attacks in Europe (Burman 2015; Worland 2015) and The Atlantic argued that a "link between climate change and IS is not crazy" (Graham 2015). As mentioned the consequence of the refugees in Europe has also been discussed in many media reports. For example, a Time report argued "how climate change is behind the surge of migrants to Europe" (Baker 2015) and, as reported by CNN, Hillary Clinton argued that the refugee situation in Europe is a consequence of climate change (Merica 2015).

Perhaps even more importantly, the media has made predictions about the future. The New Yorker argued that a binding climate deal is the best chance for preventing future conflict (Box & Klein 2015). The Guardian published two pieces, one arguing that "failure to act on climate change means an even bigger refugee crisis" and another that the current situation would become the "new normal" (Bennett 2015; O'Hagan 2015). The Washington Post ran a piece stating that "climate future will be the Syria refugee crisis times 100" (Toles 2015) and The New Scientist argued that the Calais refugee camps were only a "taste of what a warmer world may bring" (Le Page 2015). Finally, another rather alarmist headline is from The Daily Impact: "A Tsunami of Climate Refugees is Drowning Europe" (Lewis 2015). However, as argued, most refugees remained within Syria, or at least in neighbouring countries. Climate change might cause some initial and internal movement, but the refugees in Europe have more to do with political factors than the drought that occurred years before. Safe to say, it is too simplistic to argue that the displacement to Europe took place because of climate change and it is highly doubtful that climate change will cause such movements in the future as predicted by the media.

On the one hand, one could hardly blame the media for simplifying the extensive research done on this difficult topic. On the other hand, however, there have also been reports that have been able to touch upon the simplistic link between climate change and conflict. An article in the Guardian, for example, expressed some doubt about an article published by the Guardian in that same week, stating that: "While researchers agree that climate change can exacerbate human conflict, there are many that caution against using it to explain the root causes of war" (Westervelt 2015). This piece even represents the precise criticism that many sceptics have on the alarmist narrative. Sceptic scholars warn that "work on this subject might disproportionately influence policy decisions in unproductive or even problematic directions" (Quote Edward Carr in Westervelt 2015). Alarming representations become significant when they make statements such as "if the government continues to move backwards on climate change, then we should get ready for a much bigger refugee crisis before long" (Bennet 2015) or "even if countries stick to their emission promises […] global temperature rise will soar past 2 °C. And illegal migration will soar along with the temperature" (Le Page 2015). To sum it up, the refugees from Syria have been depicted as threats to our future security and well-being (Randall 2016). The media focuses more on people's fear of future migrants, instead of climate change itself. Without solid evidence to support this, the (future) refugees are depicted as a source of chaos and insecurity, and in the future only more will come knock on 'our' borders. Inadvertently, this narrative has serious political consequences. Yet, at the same time the narrative facilitates policy making as well.

Chapter five

The benefits of an alarming discourse

5.1. The securitization of climate change

> *"Securitization is an active process, then: one that identifies a threat, specifies its character, taps into a 'social imaginary' of fear, and crafts a response that, presumably, is robust and effective in enhancing safety. How an authority or responsible power responds to a threat is crucial"* (White 2011, 62).

A link between climate change and security is not new and has been a policy matter since the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change in 1992. In a way, climate change could be regarded as securitized by reason of risk logic.[20] However, it is not a neutral analysis, but subjected to many discursive lenses of which two have been discussed above (Boas & Ruthe 2016, 614, 617). Initially, the risk of climate change entailed the more 'obvious' consequences, of which desertification and rising oceans are two examples. The risks are of a 'first order': the direct changes of the weather and the environment that could occur as a result. As more people had started to be concerned about this, climate change entered the realm of 'high politics'. Various 'green' parties and politicians emerged and calls for sustainable development followed suit (Castles 2011, 415). With the turn of the century, climate change preoccupied many minds of politicians, journalists, NGOs and civil society. Considered as such, the focus of combating climate change was on mitigation and adaptation. The first entails the reduction of greenhouse gasses into the atmosphere. The second entails the adaptation to the consequences and impacts of climate change (Gemenne 2011, 247). Migration as a result of environmental degradation has mostly to do with adaptation, whether as adaptation to stay at one's place of residence or one's adaptation strategy to migrate somewhere else. This has been stressed in the IPCC reports, but not repeated in instruments related to this such as the Kyoto Protocol (Gemenne 2011, 247; IPCC 2014).

Since the mid-2000s, the attention for the idea of climate change as a 'second order' security risk increased. The securitization of climate change in this perspective has to do with the potential spillover effects of climate change from the global South endangering the global North (Boas & Ruthe 2016, 615-16; Gemenne et al. 2014, 5; Hartmann 2010, 234-6). Since then, the problem of climate change was increasingly perceived as a national[21] and

[20] This is visible from a definition of security: "the condition of being protected from threat and avoiding the absence of anxiety stemming from a fear of perceived danger" (White 2011, 60).

[21] In this thesis, a threat to national security is "an action or a sequence of events that (1) threatens drastically and over a relatively brief period of time to degrade the quality of life for the inhabitants of a state, or (2) threatens

international security threat. This chapter will demonstrate why this has happened and concludes that it potentially shifts the focus from adaptation and mitigation to a focus on defence. While framing climate change as a security matter is a political move to raise more awareness, this chapter will demonstrate that even the best intentions could have negative side-effects.

5.1.1. Europe

In Europe, the 'second order' security risks of climate change became the focus of attention in the last decade. Reports from individual states contained apocalyptic future scenarios in which climate change threatens national and international security. Similar to reports from the U.S., they have argued that climate change is a security risk and have warned governments that climate change could act as a 'threat multiplier', a driver that amplifies other risks (U.S. CNA 2007; Gemenne 2011, 231-2; Gemenne et al. 2014, 3; WBGU 2008, 1-13). The risk of extensive migration is also mentioned. An EU report has stated "Europe must expect substantially increased migratory pressure" (European Commission and the Secretary-General/High Representative 2008, 7). A report by the German Advisory Council on Global Change (WBGU) stated that climate change was "jeopardizing national and international security to a new degree", thereby mentioning the increased likelihood of environmental migration. Even though the report stated that most migration would be internal, it still emphasized that northern states should expect increased migration (WBGU 2008, 1; White 2011, 77). During the U.N. Climate Conference in France in 2015, Jean-Claude Juncker, the president of the European Commission, told world leaders that climate change could "destabilize entire regions and start massive forced migrations and conflicts over natural resources" (Chan 2015). In other words, the emphasis on security and the prospect of 'millions of refugees' has evolved into the securitization of climate change in Europe (White 2011, 65).

5.1.2. The United States

The U.S. has started to shift its focus to environmental conflict as the result of climate change especially since 9/11 (White 2011, 64). In 2003, the Pentagon emphasized the climate-security link and presented an apocalyptic future scenario of global food scarcity, millions of refugees and violent conflict (Schwartz & Randall 2003, 4-22). In that report, it urged the U.S.

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significantly to narrow the range of policy choices available to a state or to private, non-governmental entities (persons, groups, corporations) within the state" (Ullman quoted in Levy 1995, 40).

government to take climate change seriously. Since then, the U.S. Department of Defence (DoD) released several other reports on climate change as a threat multiplier (Boas & Ruthe 2016, 613). The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) and the Center for a New American Security (CNAS) have even claimed that climate change is one of the biggest threats facing the U.S.: "the most worrisome problems […] are from large-scale migrations of people - both inside nations and across existing national borders" (Campbell et al. 2007, 9).[22] More recently, the Obama-Biden administration emphasized the climate-security nexus in various ways. First, the CIA established the Center for the Study of Climate Change in 2009. Second, in 2010, climate change was included as a security threat in the Quadrennial Defence review. And third, climate scientists were allowed to use defence and intelligence data (U.S. DoD 2010; White 2011, 81). The idea of climate change as a threat multiplier has become so mainstream in the U.S., that U.S. Senator Bernie Sanders mentioned it is "directly related to growth of terrorism" (Selby & Hulme 2015). Inside the U.S., the security risks of climate change have increasingly become an important matter of debate. A statement by the White House from 2015 aptly describes the U.S. outlook on the threat of climate change:

> *"Many governments will face challenges to meet even the basic needs of their people as they confront demographic change, resource constraints, effects of climate change, and risks of global infectious disease outbreaks. These effects are threat multipliers that will aggravate stressors abroad such as poverty, environmental degradation, political instability, and social tensions – conditions that can enable terrorist activity and other forms of violence. The risk of conflict may increase"* (White House 2015, 8).

5.1.3. Internationally

On an international level, the securitization of climate change is visible as well. In 2007, public opinion started to change tremendously (White 2011, 57). As discussed, the IPCC published its Fourth Assessment Report and the documentary of Al Gore was released. Concern likewise increased because the conflict in Darfur started to be explained as a climate-conflict.[23] Substantial attention was given to this in the media and scholarly and policy circles.[24] Ban Ki-Moon, U.N. Secretary General (UNSG) at the time, called Darfur the 'first

[22] In 2016, former-president Obama acknowledged this line of thinking with regard to IS, by stating that "ISIS is not an existential threat to the United States […] Climate change is a potential threat to the entire world if the we do not do something about it" (Obama in Johnson 2016). Al Gore has called it an existential threat already in 2010 (Al Gore 2010).

[23] While scholars have explained the war as partly caused by climate change, the media narrative largely neglected the Sudanese government's agricultural policies. Scarcity was a fact, but the situation was political in nature (Hartmann 2010, 233, 236).

[24] For example, in the Guardian (Borger 2007), U.N. News Centre (2007), The Atlantic (Faris 2007), BBC News (Black 2009), USA Today (Surmi 2007) and New Scientist (Brahic 2007).

climate change conflict' (Notaras 2009).[25] In that same year, the UNSC discussed this matter for the first time in a landmark session, as did the World Bank in 2008 and 2010. The UNSC has mentioned it again in 2011 and informally in 2013 (Boas & Ruthe 2016, 613-14; Gemenne 2011, 233; White 201, 84; World Bank 2008). Just this month, UNSG Antonio Guterres spoke on the subject, stating that "water, peace and security are inextricably interlinked" and that the U.N. would pursue preventive measures to limit water competition leading to conflicts both within and between states (Lederer 2017). The security discourse is therefore not likely to die out anytime soon.

5.2. Benefits of securitizing climate change

Homer-Dixon was one of the earliest scholars who used the security discourse to describe the growing problems of a changing climate (1999). Other various actors were brought together within this alarmist discourse through the perception that climate change would negatively affect the environment, cause instability and ignite conflicts and migration, which would in turn spillover and negatively affect the global North (Boas & Ruthe 2016, 620). Framing climate change as such is of use to a variety of actors, most of all politicians. Politicians need a discourse that supports their policy goals and ideologies, and this rhetoric of fear offers a useful way of framing climate change. In various manners discussed below, climate change has become a tool in policymaking.

5.2.1. Calls for climate action

First, it is more likely to draw attention to the problem of climate change by framing it as a security threat. It helps climate advocates to address the need to combat climate change for its negative effect on the world's atmosphere and human livelihood. It can be used to demand recognition of the need to curb carbon emissions (Hartmann 2010, 239). Not only politicians use this discourse to help their cause. NGOs and aid agencies concerned with the climate use it as a way to mobilize support and get attention from policy makers (Castles 2011, 418; White 2011, 63). They argue that the world should be awakened to the dangers climate change poses. Indeed, research has found that fearful and dramatic representations can

[25] Ban Ki-Moon has written an article in The Washington Post, saying that "amid the diverse social and political causes, the Darfur conflict began as an ecological crisis, arising at least in part from climate change" (Ki-Moon 2007).

successfully raise awareness about the risks of climate change (Boykoff 2011, 16).[26] The end seems to justify the means. This is in line with media reports that stress the need for governments to agree on climate deals. The aforementioned report by climate advocate Naomi Klein in The New Yorker is therefore a logical call for climate action at a governmental level.

5.2.2. Border control

A second reason for regarding climate change as a (national) security threat stems from the link between security and the fear of an outside threat. In the last couple of decades, anti-immigration sentiment and the fear of 'outsiders' became an important matter of debate in public opinion and policy circles. Initially, the debate was focused on economic and societal security. People had a fear of losing their jobs to new immigrants. In the 1980s and 1990s, national security was linked to this. People started to perceive immigrants as 'different' than themselves. Because a security discourse is appealing to voters, it is no surprise that migration has been extremely 'electoralized' in Western states (White 2011, 15, 57-8).

Now that there is a growing public fear of the potential 'second order' consequences of climate change, such as conflict, instability and immigration, climate refugees likewise speak to people's fears and they have started to be seen as a 'threat' to 'our' national security (Hartmann 2010, 236; White 2011, 5). Because the term 'climate refugees' has no legal basis – climate refugees enjoy no protection under the Geneva Convention – politicians are able to securitize climate migration as well (Fernández 2015, 42-3). The security discourse enables a strong state response and benefits politicians who wish to set up stricter border controls. Combining the fear of refugees and climate change creates a powerful narrative to achieve this goal (Myer 2013, 108-9; White 2011, 24, 65). In other words, the association of climate change with migration has made both climate change and immigration a threat to 'us' and more importantly, "the fear of migration multiplied by the uncertainties linked to climate change results in a persuasive discourse that can justify almost any form of policy" (Mayer 2013, 117).

[26] As concluded by Klare: "as if there were not already enough good reasons to take swift action to curb emissions of greenhouse gases, the prospect of increased armed conflict should, one would hope, convince those still unaware of the magnitude of the danger" (2007, 361).

5.3. Consequences of securitizing climate change

5.3.1. Internal displacement

Looking at the Syrian Civil War and refugee crisis, several negative consequences of the security discourse become clear. The first entails the failure to recognize internally displaced persons. There is no question that climate change has the potential to affect human movement. However, the idea that climate change will always cause chaos, violence, extremism and mass migration does not match reality. To argue that people move because of climate change as the sole driver is rarely based on strong evidence and very hard to detect. Exceptions could be sudden disasters such as floods or hurricanes or slow-onset disasters such as the drought in Syria, which could in some cases increase the likelihood of migration. However, such movement is in mostly internal and for a limited period of time, rather than the permanent international displacement many politicians talk about (Mayer 2013, 100). Moreover, migration could even be hindered as a result of climate change, due to economic hardships. The poorest people are trapped in place, without money to move in search of better livelihoods, let alone to migrate to wealthy countries thousands of miles away. Environmentalists should, therefore, reflect on regarding the poor people who are the most vulnerable to climate change as a security threat (Boas 2016; Hartmann 2010, 241). The security discourse on the Syrian refugee crisis is flawed and results in the simplification and neglect of the real effects of climate change on migration.

5.3.2. 'All refugees are dangerous and bad'

Another problem with the use of the alarmist discourse is related to the case of Syria. The securitization of climate change strengthens the stigmatization of refugees. Across the world, refugees encounter discrimination, which is fuelled by (far-right) political parties (Randall 2014). The discourse thus supports the stereotype of refugees as 'dangerous' and 'bad'. While many use the discourse with good intentions – climate change should be controlled in order to limit the occurrence of climate refugees – this does not help the refugees but merely supports the discourse that frames them as a threat, fuelling anti-refugee sentiment. The strengthening of the discourse therefore increases the stigmatization of *all* refugees crossing international borders (Castles 2011, 417).

There is no doubt that migration poses an ethical dilemma: who should bear the responsibility to give shelter and asylum to refugees? Certain politicians have used the security discourse to promote strict border controls, resulting to the de-politicization of

climate migration: as long as they do not fit under the Geneva Convention, they do not 'deserve' asylum. While people rarely migrate as a direct result of climate change, framing refugees in that way might exempt politicians from asylum obligations. This, however, creates a security dilemma. It means that the obligation to provide relief and shelter to refugees is shifted from one state to the other. One could speak of some sort of "remote immigration control" (Fernández 2015, 42-3; White 2011, 8). As Castles put it: "by creating fears of mass influxes of 'misery of the world' to the rich countries, politicians and the media have encouraged racist and restrictionist responses which offer nothing to address the issues" (2011, 426).

This has been the case for the Syrian refugees. European politicians have been trying to keep as many of them in the peripheries of the EU or in countries neighbouring Syria, such as Turkey. Relief and shelter in the region have become the new goal. While some reasons for this policy might be based on good intentions – to help them close to home in their own environment – the result is not always the desired one. For example, Amnesty International concluded that the EU-Turkey refugee deal has led to extremely poor living conditions for thousands of refugees on the Greek islands. Gauri van Gulik, Amnesty International's Deputy Director for Europe, stresses the importance of human rights protection and warned against repeating this deal: "Leaders who claim that the EU-Turkey deal could be a blueprint for new ones with countries like Libya, Sudan, Niger and elsewhere should look at the horrible consequences and be warned: this should never be repeated" (Amnesty International 2017). In sum, the discourse stigmatizes refugees and provides a strong state response, rather than raise environmental awareness and make calls for the shared responsibility to help those most in need. The security discourse enables politicians to base their policy on fear rather than facts based on strong evidence.

5.3.3. 'Letting those responsible off the hook'

The security discourse makes states respond to the indirect threats climate change could pose to state stability and resource scarcity, rather than making them address the root causes of the problem (Gemenne et al. 2014, 7). For example, it is true that Syrian migrants from rural areas came to the cities, which were already full of Iraqi refugees. However, the role played by other nations in creating the refugee crisis in the Middle East, which has occurred ever

since the start of the 2003 Iraq invasion, should also be acknowledged (Böhm, 2015).[27] An emphasis on climate change and climate refugees disregards the interplaying political and economic factors on which the occurrence and extent of conflict and migration rests (Morrissey 2008, 29). This is also the case for the eruption of violence in Syria. While climate did play a role, the violence was mostly the result of unsustainable policies, mismanagement of natural resources and growing economic, political and social discontent among the Syrian population. The focus on climate change diverts attention away from the root causes of the conflict and "allows the Assad regime to blame external factors for its own failures" (De Châtel 2014, 522).[28] The argument that climate change causes violence and refugees makes war as something inevitable. In that way, the responsibility of humans tends to be cleared. It stresses the climate's agency - and paints Syria as subjected to external factors outside of its control - thereby diminishing human responsibility for the violence and its consequences. In that way, other causes of war tend to be de-politicized.

Whether people migrate significantly depends on their ability to adapt or cope with environmental change. Emphasizing the threat of migration, does not result in adequate policies to significantly limit migration, but merely limits the benefits migrants should receive (Commission on Climate Change and Development 2009, 69; Hartmann 2010, 234, 237). Indeed, by calling them climate refugees, the most important reason for their flight is neglected: the devastating civil war. In that way, one tends to neglect the distinction between genuine and perceived threats people face as a result of climate change. More attention is given to the ones who are indirectly facing the potential consequences of climate change in the global North instead to those who actually have to deal with environmental changes in the global South. In other words, "climate change as a security threat likely undermines, rather than strengthens, serious efforts to link climate change mitigation and adaptation to development efforts that reduce poverty and promote equity" (Hartmann 2010, 239). By using the security discourse, blame is put on the wrong factors and actors. It gives an excuse to leave other issues related to the conflict unaddressed. Blame seems to be put solely on nature (Livingstone 2015). In other words, when attention is put on climate change as the causal factor, other determining factors tend to be overlooked.

[27] Böhm additionally argues that the interference by the West in the Middle East is "one of the root causes of the current Syrian tragedy" and stresses the importance of the "political economy of water which has played a significant role in the Middle East for many decades" (Böhm 2015).

[28] The Daily Caller reported that during a speech, former-president Obama likewise shifted the "blame for the deadly conflict from the repressive Assad regime to people driving gas-guzzling SUVs" (Bastasch 2016).

5.3.4. The militarization of climate change

Securitizing climate change has another consequence. Since it is regarded as a national security matter, the issue is discussed in defence circles. It is in a state's national interest to prevent instability and expensive interventions by addressing the underlying causes present in foreign states. It is not surprising, then, that the first reports on this subject stem from military-attempts to link climate change to security interests (Selby & Hulme 2015). While attention and action is good, the direction in which it goes is of importance - and the direction it is going is potentially the wrong one. The securitization of climate change could militarize climate change, rather than maintain attention on preventive action, mitigation and adaptation measures. Combating climate change is no longer the focus of attention, but the security reaction against the potential threats it poses is (Elliot 2010, 180-1; White 2011, 125).

Already in 1988 during a world conference, a statement was issued emphasizing the need that governments need to realign "their national security and military spending priorities" by addressing "the geopolitical dimensions of climate change in resource allocation decisions" (Livingstone 2015). Examples from the U.S. demonstrate how the militarization of climate change has proceeded since then.[29] Among U.S. national security experts there is a consensus that climate change is one of the causes of instability, it is a threat multiplier and it should be addressed as a national security concern (Kenney 2017). In 2007, a report by the U.S. Center for Naval Analyses stressed the concern that "climate change will stress the U.S. military by affecting weapon systems and platforms, bases and military operations" (U.S. CNA 2007, 37). In January 2016, Deputy Secretary of Defence Robert Work argued that "All DoD operations worldwide must be able to adapt current and future operations to address the impacts of climate change in order to maintain an effective and efficient U.S. military" (Johnson 2016).[30] Just in January 2017, U.S. Secretary of Defence James Mattis argued to the Senate Armed Services Committee that climate change is a national security issue and he linked this to the U.S. military: [climate change is] "impacting stability in areas of the world where our troops are operating today" (Mattis quoted in Garcia-Navarro 2017). In an interview, Brigadier General Gerald Galloway from the Center for Climate and Security, argued that "instability breeds conflict" and droughts are likely to cause instability. He discussed the impact of

[29] The US is taken as an example, but it is likewise visible – albeit to a lesser extent – in other countries, such as The Netherlands. For example, the Dutch Chief of Defence argued in December 2016 that "climate change is a source of a lot of problems we are facing today, like extremism and instability" and that "he cannot guarantee stability without climate security" (own translation of Middendorp in NOS 2016). Dutch Foreign Minister Bert Koenders likewise told in a speech at the Planetary Security Conference that "climate and peace are intimately linked" (Koenders 2016).

[30] Importantly, DoD directives stay in place for ten years. Even with the new Trump administration, it is not likely that the focus of the military on climate change is disappearing anytime soon (Johnson 2016).

climate change extensively in a similar way. The focus lay on the U.S. military's presence in foreign countries, not so much on the population of the country (Galloway in Garcia-Navarro 2017).[31]

The attention is therefore not directed at combating climate change, but at preparing for the consequences of climate change. Of course, one should prepare for the (indirect) consequences of a changing climate. However, this militarized focus is not entirely necessary. The instability the military envisions is less the case than one would expect. While the link between climate, conflict and migration seems to make a lot of sense, people are more likely not to use violence when a drought occurs. In case violence does erupt, this mostly stems from existing socioeconomic and political factors; not climate change. The militarization of climate change thus creates a security reaction against a 'non-threat' (Boas 2017; White 2011, 125). Many acknowledge that climate change 'indirectly' is connected to conflict and migration, which is true. But then a lot of other factors are indirectly connected to instability as well. Should education and social security also become a matter of discussion for the military or in the UNSC? The military should not fight these battles, or we might risk militarizing developmental and humanitarian aid as well (Hartmann 2010, 242).

Second, and more importantly, the militarization perceives the issue of climate change not as an opportunity to heal the environment but as another enemy that it needs to combat and build a weapon and defence system against (Livingstone 2015). As a result, instead of combating climate change it is enhancing further damage to the environment. It results in the extended use of fossil fuels with the justification that wars need to be prepared for and invested in. In addition, more machinery and equipment is needed to deal with the consequences of climate change (Livingstone 2015).[32] It seems that the military is less concerned with the actual consequences for the planet and mankind and more focused on its budget, weapon systems and war plans. While preparing for the consequences of climate change, it is actually making it worse. One should be wary that the distinction between

[31] When asked about President Trump's refusal to combat climate change, he argued: "But I will tell you the Defence Department has been a leader since 2003 in dealing with these issues, identifying what they are, coming to the Congress and saying, we need to work in this direction. And if we do this, we think we can be prepared for it. Now, if that's pushed off the plate, that's a different issue, but I don't see someone who is told this is a national security issue saying, no, don't do that" (Galloway in Garcia-Navarro 2017).

[32] For example, retired Navy Rear Admiral David Titley has said in an interview that the "US military is preparing for conflict" and he sees "climate change as a driving force in the 21st century" (Titley in Holthaus 2014). Former Secretary of Defence, Chuck Hagel, argued that the military and the way it executes its missions will be affected by climate change and "our armed forces must prepare for a future with a wide spectrum of possible threats […] the Defence Department will keep pace with a changing climate, minimize its impact on our missions, and continue to protect our natural security" (Hagel in Banusiewicz 2014).

climate action and military action is starting to become blurred. A defence response might limit the mitigation and adaptation approach to combating climate change.

5.4. A politicized environment

> *"Central to the idea of a politicized environment is the recognition that environmental problems cannot be understood in isolation from the political and economic contexts within which they are created ... Indeed, the very definition of an environmental 'problem', and the priority attached to that problem by society, may itself be a reflection of those same processes"* (Bryant & Bailey 1997, 28).

The securitization discourse has politicized the environment in various ways. Climate change is not merely a phenomenon that needs to be controlled, but people use it as a tool to promote their benefits and interests (Boykoff 2011, 1). Syria is a recent example of the usage of climate change: "to warn for a state of chaos and mass migration in a future warmer world heavily affected by climate change" (Boas 2016). However, the alarmist and simplistic discourse on the relationship between climate change, conflict and migration promote climate reductionism (Livingstone 2015). The agency of climate change has become the centre of attention, rather than human agency. This seems to bring relief: the climate frees politicians from responsibility for causing the conflict, or politicians who no longer know how to solve the conflict. All actors involved are in that way relieved from moral accountability. The ethical concern of human agency in all wars is diminished with the politicization and securitization of climate change: "our agency is undone by our self-interest" (Gemenne 2015, 71). It is a paradox indeed: demanding climate action while at the same time releasing mankind from blame in causing the world's problems.

5.5. Concluding remarks: a reversed shift in attention

> *"Humans are political animals and the use of natural resources is a political act in which people interact at different levels between which various power relations exist"* (Wessels 2008, 53).[33]

The world we currently live in is experiencing the worst refugee and migrant crisis since World War II. At the same time, while nationalism and calls for closed borders increase, we are experiencing extensive famines all over the world. These are not the result of climate change, but of war. In other words, humans are still the cause of most of the misery in the

[33] In a similar manner, Wessels argued that water scarcity is a result of the human use of it for agriculture. Moreover, she stressed that nations in the Middle East need to import more food, grow less of their own wheat and should diversify their economies (Wessels 2009, 137-8).

world. The state should be regarded as the intervening variable that it is: it has significant influence on the occurrence of violence and the degree of vulnerability of its people. Fortunately, the level of vulnerability and adaptability is largely determined by factors that are not of an environmental, but of a political and economic nature. In theory, a state is therefore able to limit the negative impact of climate change (Brown & McLeman 2009, 300). In other words, the human factor in providing safety, security and less vulnerability in times of climate change should not be forgotten.

Further research could, therefore, refrain from solely researching whether or not climate change leads to conflict. Rather, a renewed debate on adaptation and mitigation is needed.[34] Further research could focus on communities in which cooperation, conflict or prevention has occurred when dealing with climate risks. These studies could offer best-practice scenarios – or warnings – on how best to deal with environmental change (Boas 2016). Moreover, in line with Boas and Ruthe's research, more attention could be given to ways to increase resilience.[35] In that way, the political will, which is not always present, is less necessary, because the responsibility to boost resilience lies with communities and individuals. Whereas defence strategies are short-term solutions, resilience is more concerned with long-term thinking (Boas & Ruthe 2016, 622-28).

The Syrian conflict has proven to be but one example of the role of human agency in causing human misery. The war has caused far greater water and food insecurity than the drought ever has. On the other hand, the impact of conflict on the world's climate tends to be neglected. It takes a lot of natural resources and greenhouse gasses in the atmosphere to wage war. Perhaps a new emphasis could therefore also be directed on the reverse connection between climate change and conflict. While climate change *could* hurt the planet and all living beings, conflicts *always* hurt them, and, *in reverse*, increase further climate change. With this renewed shift in attention, war will not be regarded as an inevitable and unstoppable phenomenon as the planet increases to experience climate change. Rather, it could bring societies together and lead to constructive engagement between states with the exchange of technologies and experience. Shared responsibility could enhance peace instead of war. In this way, a new climate discourse of international cooperation, equity and justice is possible.

[34] For example, vulnerability could be tackled in two ways: minimizing the negative impact climate change has on rural communities and enhancing the capacity of cities to absorb an increasing number of people (Campbell & Goddard 2015). For example, in the case of Syria, when stability returns it is important that the regime focuses on sustainable water management, implementing long-term agricultural reforms and modern irrigation techniques (Gleick 2014, 338).

[35] Resilience "refers to the capability of systems or communities to 'bounce back', i.e. to recover after external shocks (e.g. natural disasters), and to adapt to changing environmental conditions" (Boas & Ruthe 2016, 616).

Conclusion

Climate change, conflict and migration are interlinked. The drought in Syria has demonstrated how climate change could disrupt people's livelihoods. Climate change can, therefore, indirectly cause migration. But the word 'cause' should be used carefully. Syria has demonstrated that political and economic factors play a significant part in the eruption of conflict and they determine to what extent any environmental change will affect humans. It is true that the drought affected human security by diminishing crops and livestock. This led to a migration from rural to urban areas. Even though it seems self-evident that this might result in tensions among the people, this is not supported by evidence. Rather, people started to work together, joined forces and united in their shared grievances. They turned their discontent towards the state, which was more likely to result in a peaceful uprising thanks to the overall context of the 2011 Arab Spring. To answer the first sub question of chapter one, climate change played a role, but was not the most important factor leading up to the conflict. Indeed, climate change would never result in conflict on its own. The political and economic context of a country is more important.

There is no doubt that climate change could impact migration. Sudden natural disasters are the most obvious examples of this. Even slow-onset disasters potentially affect migration. In Syria, this resulted in the rural-urban migration. Contrary to popular believe, most of such migration is temporarily and takes place over a short distance. We could ask ourselves: would I move to a country 5000 miles away if my town is flooded? Or would I go to the nearest safe place, look for relatives in the nearby areas? And would I want to come back? Evidence has shown that most environmental migration is internal migration. Moreover, not everyone is able to move, which leaves a lot of people trapped in place rather than becoming a 'climate refugee'. The external migration of many Syrians is therefore not the result of the drought or climate change in general. This migration is the result of conflict, which was indirectly 'caused' by environmental change. To call the refugees fleeing Syria and coming to Europe 'climate refugees' is, however, incorrect. They are fleeing because of the continued violence, their destroyed homes and fear for their lives. Climate change thus has played a small role in the migration of Syrians, but not in the way that is commonly thought. Even if one could detect a climate refugee - someone solely fleeing because of environmental change - this person will not be found in Europe but still as close to his or her home as possible.

It is not strange that most people have made this connection between climate change, conflict and migration. It is based on simplistic Malthusian thinking, disregarding the importance of human agency and politics when it comes to our relationship with the environment. As this thesis has demonstrated, the simplistic notion of 'population growth, tensions, scarcity and conflict' is not based on solid evidence. However, in the media, among scholars and in policy circles, this connection has gotten most attention. It speaks to people's most feared scenarios: the apocalypse and the end of the world as we know it. The Syrian Civil War and the Syrian refugees have been portrayed in a similar manner in the media. Fears of 'Europe being drowned by climate refugees', 'climate change causing conflicts' and 'a warming world will result in the Syrian refugee crisis times 100', have been expressed in multiple media outlets. Climate change and refugees have become the centre of a threat that must be dealt with at a governmental level.

The most important question remains. Why is the Syrian Civil War explained like it was? In whose interest is it to frame the war and the refugees in this manner? As this thesis has shown, the alarming narrative regarding Syria really took root after the Kelley et al. (2015) research. While the securitization of climate change had started to take place several years before its publication, this research seemingly was the last piece of 'evidence' politicians and the media needed. It offered an appealing discourse for many. Climate advocates warned against the dangers of a heating world, therefore trying to raise awareness for the need to combat climate change. Some politicians probably had the same intentions. However, others used the discourse in order to further securitize immigration. While simultaneously acknowledging the indirect link between climate change and conflict - climate change is 'merely' a threat multiplier - it enabled a strong state response against the coming anarchy and chaos from the South to the North. Even though this should imply the risks of climate change, the focus is derived from strategies of mitigation and adaptation to depoliticizing the causes of conflict and migration, leaving politicians without responsibility to deal with the root causes. The complexity of war is diminished to one dimension, exonerating moral responsibility from the agents of conflict *and* the international community from solving the conflict and dealing with its consequences.

My own outlook – as demonstrated in this thesis - is a sceptic one in accordance with political ecology thinking. There is a connection between environmental change and politics that should not be overlooked. The security discourse leads to short-term solutions and solely focuses on measures to ensure national security. In other words, state-interests are deemed more important than combating climate change and its actual consequences. Climate change

has become a tool in promoting one's own interests. This is understandable. Focusing on mitigation and adaptation likewise promotes our own interests: protecting the planet we live on and to making sure future generations can enjoy it too. However, to a greater extent, climate change has been used as a shield to promote other interests as well. Interests that have little to do with the environment. The securitization of climate change has politicized the environment, which might actually do more harm than good.

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