

“Our Way of Life is not up for Negotiation!”: Climate Interventions in the Shadow of ‘Societal Security’

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‘Climate security’ conventionally refers to climate change being a multiplier of threats to national security, international peace and stability, or human security. Here we identify a hitherto overlooked inverted climate security discourse in which climate responses (rather than climate impacts) are held to pose an existential threat to dominant fossil fuel-dependent ‘ways of life’, justifying extraordinary measures—societal climate security. In doing so, we seek to make three novel contributions. First, we set out how societal securitization applies beyond a national frame and in relation to transnational threats like climate change, arguing it promotes not just exceptional measures but also palliative ones that avoid challenging incumbent identities. Second, we draw on recent evidence and extant literatures to show that ‘societal climate security’ already has substantial material emanations in the form of exceptional measures, deployed domestically against climate protestors and externally against climate migrants, in the name of societal order and cohesion. Third, we turn to wider climate policy implications, arguing that societal securitization tilts policy agendas further away from rapid mitigation pathways and toward promissory measures such as ‘geoengineering’—schemes for future, large-scale technological interventions in the climate system—that may appear less threatening to established societal identities. While there are sound ecological and humanitarian rationales to research such technologies, in the context of societal securitization these can be appropriated to defend dominant ‘ways of life’ instead. To conclude, we reflect on how, were it attempted, deployment of solar geoengineering for societal security would affect security politics more widely.

Traditionnellement, la “sécurité climatique” fait référence au changement climatique comme multiplicateur de menaces pour la sécurité nationale, la paix et la stabilité internationales, ou la sécurité humaine. Ici, nous identifions un discours inverse sur la sécurité climatique, jusqu’à maintenant ignoré. Dans celui-ci, les réponses au changement climatique (plutôt que les impacts du changement climatique) sont considérées comme des menaces existentielles aux modes de vie dominants dépendants des énergies fossiles, ce qui justifie des mesures extraordinaires – la sécurité climatique sociétale. Ce faisant, nous souhaitons apporter trois nouvelles contributions. D’abord, nous présentons la manière dont la sécuritisation sociétale s’applique au-delà d’un cadre national et en relation avec des menaces transnationales comme le changement climatique. Nous formulons l’argument que cette dernière encourage des mesures exceptionnelles, mais aussi des mesures palliatives, qui évitent de remettre en question les identités établies. Ensuite, nous nous appuyons sur des éléments récents et les littératures existantes pour montrer que la sécurité climatique sociétale se traduit déjà de façon importante sur le plan matériel au travers de mesures exceptionnelles, déployées nationalement contre les manifestants pour le climat et à l’étranger, contre les migrants climatiques, au nom de la cohésion et de l’ordre sociétal. Enfin, nous nous intéressons aux implications plus larges de la politique climatique, et affirmons que la sécuritisation sociétale détourne les programmes politiques des trajectoires d’atténuation rapide pour les orienter vers des mesures prometteuses, comme la géo-ingénierie - projet de future intervention technologique à grande échelle sur le système climatique - pouvant paraître moins menaçante pour les identités sociétales établies. Bien qu’il existe des justifications sur le plan écologique et humanitaire de mener des recherches sur de telles technologies, dans le contexte de la sécuritisation sociétale, celles-ci peuvent servir à défendre les “modes de vie” dominants. Pour conclure, nous réfléchissons à comment le déploiement de la géo-ingénierie solaire, s’il se concrétisait un jour, affecterait plus largement les politiques de sécurité.

El término «Seguridad climática» se refiere, convencionalmente, al cambio climático como un multiplicador de amenazas a la seguridad nacional, a la paz y la estabilidad internacionales y a la seguridad humana. En este artículo identificamos un discurso de seguridad climática invertida, que hasta ahora se había pasado por alto, en el que se considera que las respuestas climáticas (en lugar de los impactos climáticos) representan una amenaza existencial para las «formas de vida» dominantes, lo que denominaríamos seguridad social, que justifica el uso de medidas extraordinarias. Con ello, buscamos hacer tres contribuciones novedosas. En primer lugar, exponemos cómo la securitización social se aplica más allá de un marco nacional y en relación con amenazas transnacionales como el cambio climático, argumentando que esta promueve, no solo medidas excepcionales, sino también medidas paliativas que evitan desafiar las identidades establecidas. En segundo lugar, nos basamos en pruebas recientes y en la bibliografía existente con el fin de demostrar que la «seguridad climática social» ya posee emanaciones materiales sustanciales en forma de medidas excepcionales, desplegadas a nivel nacional contra los manifestantes climáticos y a nivel externo contra los migrantes climáticos, en nombre del orden y la cohesión social. En tercer lugar, nos ocupamos de las implicaciones que tiene la política climática a una escala más amplia, argumentando que la securitización social conlleva que las agendas políticas se alejen de aquellas vías de mitigación rápida y se acerquen a medidas promisorias como la «geoingeniería» (planes para futuras intervenciones tecnológicas a gran escala en el sistema climático) que pueden parecer menos amenazantes para las identidades sociales establecidas. Si bien existen razones ecológicas y humanitarias sólidas

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McLaren, Duncan, and Olaf Corry. (2023) “Our Way of Life is not up for Negotiation!”: Climate Interventions in the Shadow of ‘Societal Security’. *Global Studies Quarterly*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/isagsq/ksad037>

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para investigar tales tecnologías, en el contexto de la securitización social estas pueden resultar apropiadas para defender las «formas de vida» dominantes. Para concluir, reflexionamos acerca de cómo afectaría el despliegue de la geoingeniería solar para la seguridad social, si se intentara llevar a cabo, sobre las políticas de seguridad en un sentido más amplio.

Introduction

In recent years, invocations of ‘climate security’ have circulated at the highest levels. Addressing the UN Security Council in 2021 then British Prime Minister Boris Johnson described climate change as a trigger for radicalization, and as a source of ‘huddled masses’ arriving at ‘our borders’.¹ The founder of the ‘Planetary Security Initiative’, **Alexandre Verbeek (2019)** describes climate change as “a new enemy. It has no flag, no leader ... But it is a killer ... operating worldwide to destabilize societies.” And according to President Biden’s Climate Envoy, John Kerry, America will now treat “the climate crisis as the urgent national security threat it is.”²

Such declarations can be seen as attempts at ‘securitization’, involving the identification and declaration of an existential threat to a valued referent object, by an actor with the standing to make such a declaration convincing and effective (**Buzan, Wæver, and De Wilde 1998**). Past securitizing moves have primarily positioned climate change as a threat to either *national sovereignty* or *human security* goals or both (**Campbell and Parthemore 2008; Madrueno-Aguilar 2016**). **McDonald (2021)** proposes seeking ‘ecological security’ instead, mobilizing emergency measures in defense of Earth systems and populations vulnerable to ecological disruption. All such declarative efforts aim to stimulate more vigorous climate action and have often sought to justify exceptional interventions of some kind. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres calls for ‘climate action on all fronts—everything, everywhere, all at once’ necessary to ‘diffuse the climate time bomb’.³

Yet past securitizing moves involving climate change have thus far failed to restrain ever-rising carbon emissions (**Corry 2012; McDonald 2012**). The limited extent of successful securitization of the harms of climate change itself stands in stark contrast to the successful securitization of global terrorism, for example, which helped justify far-reaching extraordinary measures such as elevated policing, surveillance, and sanctions within state borders, substantial reinforcement of measures to prevent unregulated mobility across state borders, and even military interventions beyond borders (**Vultee 2010**). In comparison, there has been no mobilization of extraordinary climate *mitigation* in the form of, for example, enforced carbon rationing at home or cyber-warfare interventions to close down emissions-intensive activities abroad in line with globally agreed climate goals.⁴ Neither has climate yet experienced the degree of multi-lateral ‘macro-securitization’

(**Buzan and Wæver 2009**) found in biosecurity measures (**Lo and Thomas 2018**), and nor has it triggered emergency measures akin to those imposed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The absence of emergency measures has partly been explained by the lack of an obvious enemy or ‘other’ (**Corry 2017, 305**), although the COVID example suggests this may not be necessary. Instead, as we argue later, other security dynamics that turn the tables and pit radical climate action and migration as the threats to be dealt with warrant attention.

More readily visible is a ‘climatization’ of traditional security, where security actors increasingly adopt climate change as a strategic parameter and source of legitimization (**Trombetta 2008; Oels 2012**). In this respect, securitization of climate change has so far stimulated an interest in lowering carbon emissions but also provided further justifications for existing patterns of military planning, supporting sustained military mobility and their extension into new arenas such as cyberspace, and even outer space (**Brzoska 2015**), following the interventionist model of liberal imperialism (**Ryan 2012**). Military bases and operations are being made resilient in the face of climate impacts, and when emissions reductions are sought, this tends to be in ways that do not impact military effectiveness or defense industry profitability (**Gilbert 2012; Bigger et al. 2021**).⁵ ‘Climatization’ of security may be seen also in the militarization of disaster relief and the normalization of militarism (**Grove 2012; McCormack and Gilbert 2021**) through proposals for ‘climate peace-keeping’, defending against ‘ecocide’, and the extension of human rights doctrines of ‘responsibilities to prevent or protect’ to environmental or climate interventions (**Eckersley 2007; King, Werrell, and Femia 2021**).

This paper instead explores securitization of the climate in terms of *societal security*, in which the valued referent object—the entity whose survival is deemed imperative—is the identity or espoused core values of dominant social groupings: ‘society’. Societal security was central to early formulations of securitization theorists who noticed that notions of “the ability of a society to persist in its essential character under changing conditions and possible or actual threats” had begun appearing within a security logic positing the necessity of emergency, state-led measures (**Wæver et al. 1993, 23**). Although neither the societal security lens nor securitization theory are novel, curiously, they have not yet been turned on to the question of climate security. Here we suggest that if revised to account for changes in societal identities, they offer a useful and novel explanatory framework for current trends in the securitization of climate and provide some predictive value in terms of societal securitization’s likely impact on the direction of future climate policy choices. Drawing on recent legislation, public databases of litigation against climate protesters, and investigative journalism, as well as extant scholarly studies of the politics of climate migration and climate protests, we show that what

¹Official record online available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-boris-johnsons-address-to-the-un-security-council-on-climate-and-security-23-february-2021> (last accessed 6 July 2023).

²Reported in the Guardian, 23 Nov 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/nov/23/john-kerry-biden-climate-envoy-appointment> (last accessed 6 July 2023).

³Documented online at <https://press.un.org/en/2023/sgsm21730.doc.htm> (last accessed 6 July 2023).

⁴Perhaps the most securitized measures so far are climate-motivated land grabs in the global South, enforced by state violence (**Dunlap and Fairhead 2014**). These, however, share a distinctive characteristic with the measures described in the third section “Emerging Societal Climate Securitizations”: They promise climate benefits without disturbing the way of life in high-emitting countries.

⁵As US presidential candidate Elizabeth Warren said in 2019 “We don’t have to choose between a green military and an effective one.” Documented online at <https://elizabethwarren.com/plans/military-combat-climate-change> (last accessed 6 July 2023).

we term *societal climate securitization* has already begun casting identities and lifestyles that rely on high (fossil) energy consumption as the referent object of security. These must be secured involving appeals to exceptionality and necessity, perhaps most famously articulated in the Bush Senior doctrine from the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio, that “the American way of life is not up for negotiation. Period.”⁶ Meanwhile, radical climate action and protest along with climate-induced migration are being cast as security problems that threaten ‘society’. We also explore how the logic of societal climate securitization points not to rapid acceleration of climate mitigation measures, but sooner to promissory climate technologies that appear to deal with climate change but leave incumbent societal identities intact.

The following first introduces societal securitization, identifying a gap in existing climate security theory. The second section revises securitization theory’s understanding of ‘societal’ beyond the national frame in the light of contemporary trends toward both transnationalization and national reinforcement of societal identities. A third section then gathers and reinterprets evidence of climate migration and climate protest being securitized using the lens of societal security and then identifies both underlying logics of ‘societal climate security’ as conserving existing orders, as well as their internal contradictions via placebo policies and othering. In the fourth section ‘Societal Security and Intensifying Climate Crisis’, we discuss the implications of these logics for climate policy, in a world of intensifying climate impacts, with particular attention to the implications for climate geoengineering. Finally, we offer conclusions and reflect on the broader security dynamics associated with solar geoengineering. Our aim here is not to offer deterministic predictions of security-related responses to climate change, but to expand the range of plausible futures with ‘climate security’ in order to encourage precautionary responses to societal security dynamics and flag the risk of a security-driven ‘slippery slope’ to palliative technological solutions to climate change (Muiderman et al. 2020).

‘Societal Security’ and Climate Change

While the term ‘societal security’ originally referred to European examples of “the nation as a security unit” (Buzan et al. 1998, 96), securitization theorists aimed to capture a more historically varied notion of threats to any “large self-sustaining identity groups” (ibid.) justifying extraordinary measures, such as anti-immigration crackdowns or exclusionary cultural or language policies. Societies—or societal identities—are of course dynamic, negotiated, and necessarily unstable constructs and therefore, arguably, not suitable referent objects for security (McSweeney 1996). Yet this was the point behind societal securitization: Dominant identities can become sedimented, and with its friend-enemy logic, securitization can contribute to a (temporarily) fixed societal object in whose name security *can* be spoken, despite inevitable tensions and contradictions in the construction of any group identity (Buzan and Wæver 1997, 244; Williams 2003).

In some respects, societal security can be understood as a collective version of individual ‘ontological security’ which applies to an actor’s sense of self and identity, sustained by a stable concept of social relations (Mitzen 2006). Threats to societal security may also imply threats to both peoples’ and states’ stable *senses of self* (Steele 2008), but the value added

by the concept of ‘societal security’ lies precisely in being distinct from a state-centric security logic that was classically geared to protecting the state or its core interests (Wæver et al. 1993). Unlike individual or state ‘ontological security’, the object of security in a societal securitization is a (usually dominant) representation or construction of a particular social identity or way of life, invoked to justify extraordinary measures.

Coming to prominence in the context of post-Cold War European stoking of fears that immigration and European integration threatened societal identities (Wæver et al. 1993), societal securitizations accelerated further in the post-9/11 era, legitimating military interventions abroad and stricter policing of terrorism at home (Amoore and De Goede 2008). Algorithmic security regimes that exploited and exacerbated public fears extended surveillance and intrusive policing, especially of minority groups, while enabling continued mobility for capital and elites (Amoore 2013). These policies were often rhetorically justified as defending ‘freedom’ or a ‘threatened’ Western ‘way of life’ from enemies existentially opposed to them. George W. Bush, for example, in the aftermath of 9/11, declared “(t)hese terrorists kill not merely to end lives, but to disrupt and end a way of life.”⁷

Anti-terror measures not only illustrate the mobilization of societal identities as referents for security, but also highlight the common disconnect between the idealized, ideologically mobilized, discursive societal referent objects, and the complex practicalities of lives for many in such societies. As we will see later, this gap contributes an external ‘facilitating condition’ (Buzan, Wæver, and De Wilde 1998, 31-33) for a Janus-faced societal securitization drawing on ethno-nationalism on the one hand, and liberal internationalism on the other. Migrants are a staple ‘other’ in anti-terror securitization, and waves of future ‘climate migrants’ are routinely invoked as a security concern, mainly as a threat to nation-states or human security (Bettini 2013; Brzoska and Fröhlich 2016).

Curiously, societal securitization has not been discussed in relation to climate change.⁸ This omission is problematic because if applied to climate issues, the extraordinary responses justified by climate securitization need not be directed at reducing causes of climate change or its impacts on human or ecological systems, but primarily at defending (politically dominant groups’) values, identities or ‘ways of life’. From this perspective, responses such as climate migration and activism, or even rapid emissions mitigation in general are potentially ‘threats’ themselves warranting exceptional measures. Mirumachi, Sawas, and Workman (2020) do highlight ways in which mitigation or adaptation responses might stimulate conflict or otherwise threaten human or national security, but do not consider them being mobilized as inherently threatening to a societal referent object. Societal climate securitization still demands urgent responses, but only ones that do not threaten dominant lifestyles, incumbent societal identities, or valorized constructions of ‘world order’ (e.g. The CNA Corporation 2007; Verbeek 2019).

⁷Quoted in the Washington Post, 20 September 2001. https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/nation/specials/attacked/transcripts/bushaddress_092001.html (last accessed 6 July 2023).

⁸A ‘functional’ notion of societal security has been taken up by Nordic security practitioners including the Nordic Council and NATO General Secretary Jens Stoltenberg, to denote a comprehensive security doctrine that also deals with hybrid and non-military threats. This is different from the securitization-theory-inspired idea of securitizing an *identity* (Rhinar 2020: 5) which is applied here.

⁶Quoted in IPS News, 1 May 2012. <http://www.ipsnews.net/2012/05/us-lifestyle-is-not-up-for-negotiation/> (last accessed 6 July 2023).

In contrast to ‘radical’ measures that seek to tackle root causes of climate change, causes which tend to be “deeply embedded in existing societal structures, practices and values at multiple scales” (Morrison et al. 2022, 1101), climate geoengineering techniques have been categorized as “palliative ... placebos that distract attention from systemic problems” (ibid., 1102). ‘Climate geoengineering’ refers to emerging and imagined technologies for direct intervention into the climate, falling into two broad categories: carbon dioxide removal techniques (CDR) which might enable after-the-fact rectification of continued fossil fuel use by subsequently reducing the levels of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere; and solar radiation modification (SRM) which promises to ameliorate the effects of increasing temperatures independently of the rates of emissions reduction or levels of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, by screening out some incoming energy from the sun, for example by dispersing reflective particulates in the stratosphere (Royal Society 2009; National Research Council 2015). SRM interventions are described as ‘cheap, fast, and imperfect’ (e.g. Wagner 2021, 8) substitutes for emissions reduction, and thus scientists advocate only for considering them as a supplementary or temporary measure.

That climate engineering is ‘palliative’ does not mean it would have no impact. Climate models suggest SRM in the form of injection of aerosols into the stratosphere might reduce global average temperatures rapidly, but also result in novel and potentially disruptive reconfigurations of climatic conditions, leaving ocean acidification from elevated levels of atmospheric carbon dioxide untouched, and adding new risks of extremely rapid impacts if deployment of aerosol injection were terminated abruptly for any reason. And because all geoengineering interventions appear to impose lower financial costs in the present, they potentially encourage continued reliance on, or a slower transition away from, fossil fuels—so-called mitigation deterrence (McLaren 2016b)—and may even establish new spaces for capital accumulation (Surprise and Sapinski 2022).

Existing ‘climate security’ literature has mostly focused on physical or material climatic changes as threats to national, international, or human security (McDonald 2013; von Lucke, Wellmann, and Diez 2014), including the ways climate impacts might threaten the legitimacy of the state (Mittiga 2022); destabilize fragile states, and even the international order (White 2011). Meanwhile, literature on climate delay from prospective technologies has not registered security logics, despite identifying discourses that refer to the ‘impossibility’ of changing ‘ways of life’ (Lamb et al. 2020). Climate security scholars have asked whether casting climate as a national security problem advances or undermines environmental causes (Warner and Boas 2019) and point to ways in which traditional security including rearmament and conflict can exacerbate climatic changes and divert resources away from climate mitigation (Dalby 2014; Egeland 2022). Less well studied are the ways in which both the *impacts* of, and *responses* to climate change might be construed as threatening ‘ways of life’ or societal identities, legitimating extraordinary measures in defense of them that suppress mobilizations for, or delay or redirect, radical climate action. Michaelowa (2021) concludes that SRM might well appeal to populist and authoritarian governments and other scholars have debated whether centralized planetary cooling via injection of atmospheric aerosols is compatible with democratic principles of consent and pluralism (Szerszynski et al. 2013; Horton et al. 2018). We, however, focus on a wider potential susceptibility to the attractions of SRM amongst Western administrations whose politics we

show are beginning to be framed in terms of societal security prioritizing protection of emissions-intense ways of life, and how this makes for a hitherto overlooked security-based slippery slope toward SRM development or deployment.

Contemporary ‘Societal’ Security

At least since the end of the Cold War, it has been less than straightforward to identify the boundaries of ‘societal’ identities, especially when it comes to transboundary challenges like climate change. ‘Society’ has probably never been co-extensive with ‘the nation’, but with the transition from the Cold War, to the War on Terror and a growing focus on non-military risks, security broadened and repositioned as something increasingly pertaining to sub- and trans-national entities, to be achieved both within and beyond national borders (Kaldor 2013; Wæver 2008, 108). In the post-9/11 era, states regularly invoked shared values, constructing these in opposition to a threatening transnational ‘other’. Climate as a security threat arguably reinforces that trend, reviving previous notions of planetary threats such as nuclear winter or asteroid impacts (Mellor 2007; Deudney 2018). However, articulations of *global* societal identity groups are limited as referents for securitizing moves, despite the emergence of mobile transnational capitalist elites (Robinson 2011) and processes of economic globalization driven by ideologies of (neo)liberal globalism (Brodie 2003). Moreover, appeals to regional and particularistic identities have been resurgent of late in populist political movements in many countries (Lazaridis and Campani 2017; Kinnvall and Svensson 2022). The concept of the different and threatening ‘other’ remains central in establishing both group identity and security (Amoore 2013) at sub- and trans-national levels of analysis.

Such continued divisions leave little reason to expect the near-term emergence of a singular ‘planetary’ identity—imagined by some (e.g. Eckersley 2004; Chakrabarty 2009) as the potential referent for ‘planetary security’. This would embody an understanding that all humans are a shared community of fate yet also our own ‘enemy’.⁹ The nascent field of Existential Risk Studies that has humanity as the notional referent object, in the end, reflects a particular set of concerns or notions of ‘civilization’ (Beard and Torres 2020). Instead environmental and climate security discourses have tended to invoke a ‘coming anarchy’ (Kaplan 1994) of ‘burgeoning populations’ of typically black and brown people made increasingly mobile (Campbell 2009; Ahuja 2021; Malm and The Zetkin Collective 2021)—all consequent on the idea that particular ways of life must not be surrendered.

Societal securitizing moves purporting to protect those ‘ways of life’ simultaneously evoke ethnic nationalist and liberal internationalist tropes and narratives to preserve national and ‘global’-Western identities. In terms of security, societal identities are simultaneously *divided* between cultural and ethnic communities, and *shared* across transnational spaces (e.g., ‘The West’), despite vast inequalities and schisms within such groupings (Giddens 1991; Bauman 2013). In this context, societal referent objects of securitization move fluidly and ambiguously from identities based on the national/ethnic society to those founded on the interlinked liberal/global political economy. To sustain ‘societal’ security in this setting, two apparently competing yet practically complementary political narratives are therefore

⁹For a popular culture illustration of this, see Walt Kelly’s Earth Day Pogo Cartoon at <https://library.osu.edu/site/40stories/2020/01/05/we-have-met-the-enemy/> (last accessed 6 July 2023).

widely deployed. Narratives of opportunity and competition construct on the one hand globalization (Higgott 2004) and innovation (McCarthy 2021) as valued objects to be secured, while discourses of nationalism identify threatened local or domestic societal identities. In this way, liberal internationalism and ethnic nationalism can be understood as reciprocal discourses in Western societal securitizations. As Beate Jahn (2018) has argued, such tensions have in fact been integral to liberalism since its emergence in colonial times, but the recent globalization of liberalism has driven illiberalism domestically.

In the next section, we examine how—in the context of these ‘facilitating conditions’—societal securitization is being applied to climate concerns. We focus empirically on ‘Western liberal’ societies as the predominant locus of conventional national and military power and the primary source of climate securitizing moves and framings.

Emerging Societal Climate Securitizations

Security scholarship generally holds that efforts at climate securitization have failed to generate exceptional climate responses (Corry 2012), with consistent resistance to emergency measures, even at the United Nations (UN) Security Council and the UN General Assembly (Oels 2012; Hardt and Viehoff 2020). Here we suggest that by contrast, if one takes a societal referent object for securitization, there are identifiable exceptional climate security measures already in operation. In particular, we argue that an *inverted* climate security discourse—in which *responses* to the problem (rather than climate impacts) can represent a threat to ‘ways of life’ constructed as emblematic of particular societies—is already helping to justify exceptional measures deployed externally against migrants, and internally against climate protesters. We draw on recent legislation, public databases of litigation against climate protesters, and investigative journalism, as well as extant scholarly studies of the politics of climate migration and climate protests, interpreting these within a framework of ‘societal securitization’. We then draw out underlying logics of ‘societal climate securitization’ in whose shadow climate policy would be made.

Migration Control

Migration features prominently in climate security discourse. Projected displacement of hundreds of millions of people by 2050 and maybe even billions by 2100, as a result of rising seas, extreme events, heat, and food and water scarcity, are cited as threats to state stability in countries of both origin and destination, and to the sustainability of borders (White 2011).¹⁰ Western security reports identify particular migrant flows as threats to social cohesion, such as through growing Muslim populations in Europe (Campbell 2009; Telford 2018).¹¹ Related discourses also cite climate change as a threat to ‘human security’ but promote better adaptation to mitigate the need to migrate (supported by multi-lateral finance). State-sovereignty approaches tend to emphasize deterrence (Lieven 2020), adopting and re-

purposing anti-migrant measures that were themselves extended in the war on terror (Saux 2007), including border patrols, walls, internment, and deportation, in part justified with references to “the mounting likelihood of mass, climate change-induced human migration across international borders” (Jones and Johnson 2016, 195). The intense efforts to control and prevent migration around the US–Mexico border, in the English Channel, and in the Timor Sea, for example, already in part rely on climate-oriented societal securitizations: in response to a declared ‘migrant crisis’ the Mediterranean has been militarized with converging military, security and humanitarian interventions in part justified by a ‘climate security’ mantra (Greenhill 2016; Garelli, Sciurba, and Tazzioli 2018). ‘Ecobordering’ through which far-right parties “are forcefully articulating a ‘green’ case for insular political communities, anti-immigration, nationalism, and restrictive border regimes as mitigation strategies” (Turner and Bailey 2021, 115) serves increasingly to “rationalise border restrictions and violence in the midst of increasing climate migration” (Ibid, 112). Media and official narratives regarding climate migration not only provide an occasion for far-right rhetoric about ‘terrorists amongst refugees’, strategic ‘Islamification’, and a ‘great replacement’ (Kundnani 2012) in which black and brown bodies, in particular, are constructed as threats (Bayoumi 2022; Shab 2022) but also for more mainstream claims about climate migration as a conflict multiplier (Bettini 2013), e.g., in Syria or Sudan, even where proximate political causes are more significant (Selby et al. 2017; Ahuja 2021).

Recent academic case studies of Western responses to ‘climate migration’ show how powerful stakeholders exploit climate change to justify coercive infrastructures and practices (Thomas & Warner, 2019:2) and have shown how even approaches to climate adaptation that promote resilience can weaponize vulnerability, portraying the mobility of those most at risk from climate impacts as the threat justifying securitization, rather than the impacts themselves. Once the threat is embodied in the persons of the ‘other’, “coercion is justified and safeguards against human rights abuses are circumvented ... In the name of security, powerful groups may then pursue extreme structural, institutional, and linguistic measures to protect themselves from other, more vulnerable groups of people” (Ibid, 2). Thus, resilience narratives have been found to be ambiguous and display a messiness that enables their adoption by both development and military actors (Boas and Rothe 2016) allowing them to “extend the project of earlier environmental security discourses, specifically, the attempt to secure Western ways of life against the effects of environmental change” (Grove 2010, 539). Thus, a discourse of climate change as a threat-multiplier via migration relies heavily on casting mobile populations as a threat to societal identity and/or associated economic well-being and the sustainability of public services (Ahuja 2021) while downplaying other structural reasons for migration. Accordingly, the world’s biggest emitters of greenhouse gases spend, “on average, 2.3 times as much on arming their borders as ... on climate finance” (Miller, Buxton, and Akkerman 2021, 12).

Suppressing Protest

The second example of societal climate securitization is apparent in the suppression of climate protest, turning and often intensifying anti-terror and anti-extremism measures against environmental activism. While climate activists are not the only targets, and the fossil fuel industries have long been associated with militarized and securitized interven-

¹⁰For a further example of migration as a national security threat, see The White House (2021) report on climate impacts on migration. Online available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Report-on-the-Impact-of-Climate-Change-on-Migration.pdf> (last accessed 6 July 2023).

¹¹The volume features numerous warnings from high-ranking US security personalities such as former Clinton administration Chief of Staff John Podesta, former director of the CIA James Woolsey, and National Security Advisor to vice-president Al Gore, Leon Fuerth about climate change increasing threats from mobile, particularly Muslim, populations.

tions to enable and sustain production in countries like Nigeria (Manby 1999), recent years have seen an intensification and spread of security measures defending both *production and consumption* of fossil fuels in western states in the face of ‘disruptive’ climate protests. Stricter legal penalties, more forceful policing, enhanced surveillance and retaliatory lawsuits have all been justified as defense of societies’ valued ‘ways of life’—specifically those based on freedoms to drive, fly, eat meat and generally consume regardless of the climate consequences (Nosek 2020).

For example, in the United States, in just the first three months of 2021, more than 30 bills to constrain protest were proposed in state legislatures, many of them with direct support from the oil and gas industries.¹² Measures are typically justified as ‘protecting critical infrastructure’ (Halliday and Hanna 2021), but notably impact on indigenous resistance to proposed pipelines, further undermining first nations’ sovereignty (Estes 2019; Archambault 2020). Some bills have threatened to further chill protest on roads with provisions specifically “protecting motorists from the negligent killing of protesters” if striking them with their vehicles (Nosek 2020, 66). Nosek (2020) highlights the alliance in the United States between states and fossil industry to heighten penalties for climate protesters, and legitimate “the use of violence and surveillance against climate protesters by both state and non-state actors” (p. 53), supported by retaliatory lawsuits and “a rhetorical and legal push to label protesters as extremists and terrorists” (p. 53).

In the United Kingdom casting climate protest as a threat to societally lauded ways of life has been even more explicit. In response to protests by Extinction Rebellion and Insulate Britain, but also Black Lives Matter, and following the quashing of convictions under anti-terror laws for fifteen anti-deportation protesters,¹³ the Home Secretary introduced wide-ranging security measures in 2021, describing environmental protesters as eco-terrorists bent on bringing “our democracy to a grinding halt ... undermining our way of life and our freedoms.”¹⁴ Her successor, Suella Braverman, vowed not to “bend to [climate] protesters attempting to hold the British public to ransom” introducing “a new criminal offence of interfering with businesses such as oil refineries, airports, railways and printing presses.”¹⁵

The United Kingdom measures criminalizing ‘planning to protest’ are pre-emptive in nature and effect, echoing anti-terror securitizations (De Goede 2008), but selectively target tactics used in recent climate protests. The UK Public Order Act of 2023¹⁶ criminalizes persons “attaching themselves to another person, to an object or to land”, and lists ‘locking on’ and ‘tunneling’ (or the intention of using such tactics) when these “interfere with the use or operation of any key national infrastructure”. The latter are defined as “(a) road transport infrastructure, (b) rail infrastructure, (c) air transport infrastructure, (d) harbour infrastructure, (e) downstream oil infrastructure, (f) downstream gas in-

frastructure, (g) onshore oil and gas exploration and production infrastructure, (h) onshore electricity generation infrastructure, or (i) newspaper printing infrastructure.” (Ibid). Such legislation was preceded by pressure from newspapers and lobby groups for the government to crack down on climate protests with *Policy Exchange*, partly funded by fossil fuel producers (Bychawski 2022), producing an influential report entitled *Extremism Rebellion* arguing that climate protest “seeks to break down the established civil order and liberal democracy in the UK” (Wilson and Walton 2019, 5).¹⁷ Corporate injunctions banning climate activists from approaching fossil fuel installations, motorways and other infrastructures are increasingly widespread.¹⁸ Some climate protesters have been designated as “national security threats”¹⁹ and several have been imprisoned for contempt of court, having defied the judge’s order not to mention ‘climate change’ during trial proceedings.²⁰

In Australia, following the jailing of a climate activist under new powers to prevent traffic disruption, New South Wales Premier Dominic Perrottet declared, “If protesters want to put our way of life at risk they should have the book thrown at them.”²¹ A recent study of legislative, ‘expansionary’ (deployment or wider interpretations of existing legal powers) and rhetorical criminalization of climate protest in Australia found that all three types had continued apace in the decade up to 2020, “as some state and corporate actors strive to delegitimize climate protest voices and discourses” (Gulliver et al. 2023, 45). After an Extinction Rebellion protest in 2019, senators in Queensland put forward a motion condemning extremist protesters and the state Premier promised “new laws to combat extremist protesters” whose tactics she called “sinister” (quoted in Irwin et al. 2022, 78). The Minister for Policy commented that the protests were “contrary to the shared values of our democratic society” (Ibid, 79). The *Summary Offences Act’s* depiction of “protestors as posing a danger is linked to the ability to block the flow of fossil fuel infrastructure, and singles them out as a group deserving of increased surveillance” (Ibid, 81). As seen in the United States, extractive industry bodies were involved in shaping legislation: The Queensland Resource Council supported the bill and called for harsher penalties and a wider range of offenses (Ibid, 82). At the highest political level, climate protests against extractive industries in Australia were subject to societal securitization, then Prime

¹⁷One of the two authors, Richard Walton, is detailed as “A former Head of the Metropolitan Police Counter Terrorism Command (SO15) from 2011–2016” (ibid. p. 2) and research is credited to Alexander Gray, a former British Army Officer Cadet.

¹⁸Shell has repeatedly obtained injunctions against protesters. For example, in 2015 in Oregon, recorded at the University of Columbia’s Sabin Center database of climate litigation records (online available at <http://climatecasechart.com/case/shell-offshore-inc-v-greenpeace-inc/>) and in London in 2022 (reported by City AM, 6 May 2022, here <https://www.cityam.com/shell-gets-injunctions-against-climate-activists-citing-safety-of-its-employees-during-direct-action/>). A generic injunction against ‘persons unknown’ blocking the M25 motorway in the United Kingdom, granted to the National Highways Agency in 2021 can be seen at <https://nationalhighways.co.uk/media/wcufac5/national-highways-limited-v-persons-unknown-approved-order-21-09-21.pdf> (all last accessed 6 July 2023).

¹⁹Some individual protesters appear to have been officially designated as ‘national security threats’. See, for example, Sam Knights’ experience reported on Twitter on 29 March 2022. <https://twitter.com/samjknights/status/1508746178183192580?s=27&t=tlpTQqLs-sXgny8-Vuewg> (last accessed 6 July 2023).

²⁰Reported in the *Guardian*, 8 March 2023. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/mar/08/court-restrictions-on-climate-protesters-deeply-concerning-say-leading-lawyers> (last accessed 6 July 2023).

²¹Reported in *The Canberra Times*, 5 December 2022. <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/8007958/throw-book-at-climate-activists-perrottet/> (last accessed 6 July 2023).

¹²Reported on the *Citations Needed* Podcast ep.132 (March 2021). <https://citationsneeded.libsyn.com/episode-132-the-house-always-wins-how-every-crisis-narrative-enriches-the-security-and-carceralstate> (last accessed 6 July 2023).

¹³Reported on *BBC News*, 29 January 2021. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-esssex-55859455> (last accessed 6 July 2023).

¹⁴Priti Patel, then Home Secretary, cited in *The Express* Newspaper, 8 May 2021. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/1433432/Priti-patel-exclusive-interview-crime-latest> (last accessed 6 July 2023).

¹⁵Reported on *Sky News*, 16 October 2022. <https://news.sky.com/story/home-secretary-unveils-major-crackdown-to-stop-climate-protesters-holding-the-public-to-ransom-12721772> (last accessed 6 July 2023).

¹⁶Official document online available at <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2023/15/enacted> (last accessed 6 July 2023).

Minister Scott Morrison calling mining “the backbone of so many communities in regional Australia, the source of jobs, economic livelihoods, and dignity—dignity for thousands of hard-working Queenslanders” and asking “is this the kind of country we want to be?” (cited in Irwin et al., 2022, 83). The authors conclude that “the Australian and Queensland governments have linked the health of Australian democracy—and their ability to govern—with the interests of extractive industries such as coal mining” (Ibid, 85). Matt McDonald (2012) argues that the ‘failed securitization’ of climate change in an Australian context, where opposition successfully defeats climate mitigation policies, casts doubt on securitization theory and its emphasis on discourse. However, taking societal climate securitization into account suggests a form of climate securitization that tallies closely with the outcome of continued emissions and weakened mitigation policies.

The Logics of Societal Climate Securitization

Domestic securitization is nothing new for indigenous groups and people of color (Wang 2018; Estes 2019), but the extension of such policing, surveillance, and incarceration to climate protestors not only adds *new identities* to the category of ‘threatening other’—in the form of the dangerous climate protester and climate migrant—but also reveals a *new logic* of societal climate security, consisting of several related elements.

Firstly, this is not the offensive logic of dispossession (to take land and resources from indigenous sovereignty by securitizing it as critical infrastructure, and putting it into use in the settler or wider capitalist system [Pasternak and Dafnos 2018]), but a *defensive logic* of defusing a threat to an established ‘society’. Societal security dynamics are conservative in that they reify and then defend established societal identities. Western states could in theory make effective, collective, international climate mitigation central to a societal referent object identity if the latter were construed in terms of climate care and global responsibility. However, if radical climate measures involve, by definition, systemic societal changes (Morrison et al., 2022), this is unlikely. Many states including the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia are still developing new supplies of fossil fuels, regardless of their climate policies and net zero pledges (SEI et al. 2021). Even in the context of international conflict, climate mitigation measures have not been deployed as exceptional security measures: There has been no petrol rationing, no mobilization of ‘insulation’ armies, nor other measures effective at delivering ‘energy saving in a hurry’ (International Energy Agency 2005b, 2005a). Rather there have been duty and tax cuts on fossil fuels and incentives for expanding ‘domestic’ exploration and supply—measures to secure the societal referent object embodied in a particular identity or way of life.²²

Secondly, societal securitizations necessarily bridge *tensions* within the referent object ‘society’. This can involve either grafting together liberal internationalist and ethnonationalist discourse, or mobilizing a “them against us” dynamic (McHugh, Lemos, and Morrison 2021, 9), or both. Societal securitization, therefore, permits the suspension of liberal rights from particular groups (protestors, migrants, etc.), in the interests of lifestyle and livelihood concerns for

both elements of Western liberal society, but this is carefully framed as exceptional (Irwin et al., 2022). Measures to deter migrants are framed as targeting criminals and those arriving ‘illegally’ or with “values at odds with our country.”²³ Genuine refugees and asylum seekers who deserve our ‘compassion’ are distinguished from those who threaten to “cannibalise the compassion that marks out the British people,”²⁴ for example. Similarly, while protests are increasingly tightly and pre-emptively policed, ‘free speech’ is vociferously defended against efforts to de-platform offensive views and ideas (Letsas 2022; Smith 2020).

To bridge such contradictions, societal securitizations utilize and extend established security playbooks including those related to the effects of economic globalization and geopolitics. Thus, although ‘disorder’ and ‘aliens’ are familiar placeholders for threats to societal referent objects such as ‘cohesion’, ‘order’, or ‘our values’, the climate is becoming an additional one. Extraordinary measures against immigration and protest are not just conventional biopolitical resistance to ‘contamination’ from within and without, but in practice increasingly central to managing ‘climate change’ as a societal threat. With inherent tensions and ambiguities in the referent object ‘society’ comes a tendency to slide between different ‘others’ including attributing responsibility for climate change to other states like China or more widely growing emissions in the global South,²⁵ as a way to deflect blame being allotted to Western consumers or colonial legacies (Kashwan and Ribot 2021). Such othering is discursively linked to continued or expanded exploitation of ‘our’ fossil reserves, parleying threats to elite economic (fossil) interests into threats to insecure workers.²⁶ Malm and the Zetkin collective (2021) document how right-wing discourses of climate change portray ambitious emissions reduction measures as external ‘globalist’ threats to the ethnic nation, in turn advocating continued exploitation of domestic fossil fuel reserves—even by transnational corporations—as intrinsically patriotic and nation-building.²⁷

Thirdly, societal securitizations favor not just extraordinary measures but *promissory* ones. Where powerful actors perceive climate change as generating “a threat to political or policy preferences,” intensified climate impacts and concern tend to generate ‘*placebo policies*’ framed as solutions, to reduce political pressure, diffuse blame, and defend the status quo (McHugh, Lemos, and Morrison 2021, 10). For example, the United Kingdom not only represses protests against air travel but recently deployed promises of future decarbonization through still-to-be-developed technologies and unspecified carbon offsets to justify expansion of air travel—an activity dominated by the wealthiest segments of the population—and with the aim of facilitating ‘guilt-free’

²³For example, as claimed by the Home Secretary, reported in the *Guardian*, on 26 April 2023, (<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/apr/26/suella-braverman-small-boat-arrivals-have-values-at-odds-with-our-country>) and in the *Spectator*, 1 May 2023 (Online at <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/why-dont-the-tories-want-to-help-genuine-asylum-seekers/>). Both were last accessed on 6 July 2023.

²⁴As claimed by the Immigration Minister Robert Jenrick. Reported in the *Guardian*, 25 April 2023. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/apr/25/values-and-lifestyles-of-small-boat-refugees-threaten-social-cohesion-says-jenrick> (last accessed 6 July 2023).

²⁵Such discourses are identified by Lamb et al. (2022) under the headings of ‘whataboutery’ and ‘free riders’.

²⁶An example of such reframing by Donald Trump is reported in *Politico* magazine, 15 October 2017. <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/10/15/trumps-love-affair-with-coal-215710/> (last accessed 6 July 2023).

²⁷For a UK example, see Nigel Farage’s claims that Net Zero policies will just ‘send jobs and money overseas’, reported in the *Mail* on Sunday, 5 March 2022. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10581529/Nigel-Farage-campaign-Net-Zero-policy-referendum.html> (last accessed 6 July 2023).

²²The UK’s version of this strategy was outlined by the then Business and Energy Secretary, Kwasi Kwarteng, on 5 April 2022 at Harvard. Official report online at <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/delivering-great-britains-energy-security> (last accessed 6 July 2023).

aviation lifestyles.²⁸ Strikingly, promissory measures dominate even when dependence upon fossil fuels is recognized as a threat to national security.²⁹ Many of the measures taken in response to the Ukraine war and dependence upon Russian gas are promissory in nature: new LNG terminals in 2–3 years, new gas production in 3–5 years, and new nuclear plant in 10–15 years. These are not urgent remedies to energy or climate insecurities but promises for the future—which avoid conflicts with societal security in the present.

Extraordinary measures against migration and protest thus highlight the intersection of climate securitization with conventional biopolitical responses to aliens and disorder. They are *defensive* of economic and elite interests, *internally bridging*, yet *externally dividing*, i.e. managing tensions within the referent ‘society’ by grafting together internal interests and/or deploying ‘them against us’ dynamics. Finally, they preferentially support *palliative* or placebo interventions. In the next section, we discuss how climate policy might evolve given this particular version of societal climate securitization, and explore in more detail why climate geoengineering (and particularly solar geoengineering) could be a favored promissory ‘exceptional measure’ response in contrast to radical measures such as dramatically intensified mitigation of emissions.

Societal Security and Intensifying Climate Crisis

So far we have established a societal security lens that reveals an additional and distinctive feature of climate security emerging in certain Western polities. From this perspective, resistance to migration and suppression of protest coexist with ‘climatization’ moves toward ‘greening’ and readying the military for climate breakdown, and building resilience. In addition, the promotion of promissory ‘net-zero’ climate goals heavily reliant on novel technologies for carbon removal (Fankhauser et al. 2022) coexists alongside continuing fossil fuel development and exploitation. In this context, societal climate securitization relies on the construction of threatened identities and a (series) of threatening others “prompting a range of new response measures [to climate change] aimed at protecting relatively secure populations” (Thomas & Warner, 2019, 9). The very flexibility with which Western states have moved, over time, between different representations of a threatening other (as communism, terrorists, migrants, financial collapse, climate change, China and Russia etc., (Srikanth 2014)), helps divert attention from the possibility that the source of climate insecurity is Western society itself, but also potentially undermines the prospect of effective global collaborative action with those others. In this light, how might climate measures evolve, given continued rising temperatures, emissions and increased societal securitization, as climate impacts—and responses to them—intensify?³⁰

²⁸As seen in the UK’s ‘jet-zero strategy’ documented online at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/jet-zero-strategy-delivering-net-zero-aviation-by-2050> (last accessed 6 July 2023).

²⁹In this context promises typically involve technologies that capture and store carbon from fossil fuel combustion, or remove carbon dioxide from the air, offsetting continued ‘residual’ emissions (a central promise in ‘net-zero’ discourse).

³⁰Climate impacts can be expected to intensify even if countries fully deliver existing promises under the Paris Agreement and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. A further 0.7–1.3°C global temperature rise can be anticipated, according to the Climate Action Tracker at <https://climateactiontracker.org/global/cat-thermometer/> (last accessed 1 March 2023).

Emergency Mitigation?

Could societal climate securitization result in the acceleration of extraordinary mitigation measures such as rationing of emissions domestically; or forcible mitigation of emissions abroad, in line with the history of other kinds of interventions to promote Western societal models and notions of global order (Ryan 2012)? Several factors related to societal climate securitization make this, we suggest, unlikely.

First is the political potential to construct radical (as in addressing root causes) domestic mitigation measures as existential threats to dominant ways of life. Even if many Westerners might support stronger collective state interventions such as compulsory home retrofits or scrapping of petrol vehicles, imposing changes—whether referencing a ‘war footing’ (Delina and Diesendorf 2013) or a ‘green new deal’ (Fremstad and Paul 2022)—would be contested under societal climate securitization, both by those with global liberal or ethnonationalist sympathies. Recent resistance and disinformation concerning gas stoves provide a possible preview.³¹ To be sure, at a collective level, security measures justified by the ‘war on terror’ often overrode such societal concerns compromising important elements of Western social identities and values (e.g., human rights, privacy, and freedom of movement). While introduced as emergency measures, constraints on freedoms have even become permanent. However, similar constraints might seem less palatable in a ‘war on climate’: Strict climate mitigation appears to threaten many more freedoms of consumption beyond freedom of movement, challenging identities rooted in ‘opportunity and growth’ but also ideas about the economic underpinnings of the state’s ability to ensure well-being for citizens (and thus even its legitimacy). And in response, corporate and financial actors could use investor-state dispute mechanisms, for example, to block infringement of core interests such as lost profits (Galey 2021). This would have a chilling effect even if states were enthusiastic about climate action, driving a quest for alternatives to stronger mitigation.³²

Second, ‘emergency’ mitigation in one country alone would not plausibly offer significant leverage on the global climate as a threat, and proposals for enforced emergency mitigation of emissions abroad, e.g., through foreign intervention or trade measures, have yet to surface and could be constructed as a threat to the liberal economic order (Chaturvedi and Doyle 2015). Again, the war on terror demonstrated that borders are permeable when it comes to certain security—especially ‘global’—threats to the West, and it extended the arena of security operations, but in that case the threat and responses remained spatially ‘located’ in particular ‘zones of local disorder’ (McNeill 2023). In comparison, both climate threat and mitigation response are more diffuse. Deploying conventional military or cyber interventions to close down fossil fuel facilities in multiple other countries, for example, even if materially similar to foreign drone strikes against terror suspects, would appear disproportionate. Hybrid tools, such as economic and trade sanctions, embargoes on financial transactions, or travel bans on company executives, might carry less risk of military reprisal, but enforcing rapid mitigation from afar with such

³¹Discussed in the *Guardian*, 18 January 2023 (online available at <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/jan/18/how-did-gas-stoves-ignite-a-culture-war-in-the-us>), or, for similar contestation on 15-minute cities see the *Guardian*, 16 February 2023 (online available at <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/feb/16/15-minute-city-planning-theory-conspiracists>). Both were last accessed on 6 July 2023.

³²In some polities, dominant fossil interests are pushing to restrict market access for companies that adopt mitigation efforts: For example, ‘sanctions’ by Texas on financial institutions that ‘divest’ from fossil fuels (Hernandez 2022).

measures would still likely be seen as hostile interference in the target states. Moreover, economic and trade measures against emissions could be construed as threatening the processes of economic globalization treasured by liberal states as the means to spread market values and freedoms, and the associated narratives of liberal internationalism.

On the other hand, given societal climate securitization there would be no reason to expect hostility to migrants or protests to dissipate, despite worsening climate impacts (or intensified climate responses and policy measures). Rather, more deliberate political othering and division to defend fossil-based identities and ways of life could be expected, with more effort dedicated to defending activities such as meat-eating, driving, and flying than to stimulating exceptional energy efficiency and decarbonization. At the same time, insufficient mitigation and growing climate impacts could also intensify declarations of a ‘climate emergency’ adding to those already coming from NGOs, local authorities, and international institutions³³ and even some security actors (Patrick 2022).

Promissory Geoengineering?

One way in which political elites are already responding to growing impacts, growing calls for action, and obstructive corporate and political interest groups involves a search for technological or financial options that promise to act on the threat of climate change but avoid premature losses from economic investments. Net-zero discourses have been rapidly adopted in recent years, superseding emissions reductions targets (Van Coppenolle, Blondeel, and Van de Graaf 2023), and have stimulated widespread promises regarding large-scale carbon removal (and related efforts to establish financial tools or derivatives to commoditize carbon removal and natural carbon sinks) (Armstrong and McLaren 2022). However, as impacts and the tensions of societal securitization grow, other responses that are currently considered too extreme or exceptional may rise further up the political agenda. Radical emissions cuts would be closed off if they were perceived to threaten the securitized high-carbon societal referent objects. On the other hand, more extreme and speculative forms of adaptation such as outdoor air conditioning in wealthy cities and neighbourhoods,³⁴ or the promotion of solar geoengineering technologies to mask the effects of rising greenhouse gas levels, would not suffer from this impediment.

In the United States consideration of solar geoengineering is obtaining increasing attention in scientific, political, and security circles (e.g., National Academy of Sciences 2021; Patrick 2022). While controversial, as a promise or practice, geoengineering appears potentially less threatening to established ways of life than radical mitigation. Though scientific proponents usually declare it should not be used as a substitute for emissions cuts, it offers powerful financial and political interests a potential tool to sustain or prolong energy-intensive (fossil-fueled) lifestyles (and profits) in the face of threats to them from rapid climate mitigation (Surprise and Sapinski 2022). Geoengineering technologies promise not only a defense of sunk costs and (as in the defense sector) public subsidies for private-sector technology manufacturers, but also prospects of intensified financialization of climate change through markets in risk in-

surance, carbon removals, or even radiative forcing credits (Grove 2012; Mikulka 2019). In this respect, geoengineering resembles border security and policing as both defensive investment and new opportunity for financial accumulation.

Despite it offering some material potential to reduce temperatures, solar geoengineering is in many respects both promissory and a placebo: It represents a future possibility, but one which does not address the underlying cause of climate change in rising concentrations of greenhouse gases, and the forms of knowledge producing it tend to divert attention from the uneven distribution of responsibility for past and current emissions (McLaren 2016a). As a tool for climate security, solar geoengineering—regardless of consistent scientific advice that it should only supplement mitigation (e.g., National Academy of Sciences 2021)—appears to promise an alluringly fast—even if temporary—alternative to immediate, elevated efforts to cut emissions. While there are sound reasons to research such techniques given the extent of climate procrastination so far, the risk that such research may be appropriated in the interests of societal security, instead of for human or ecological security (as most of the literature presumes it would be used for), must also be considered.

Geoengineering as a Security Measure?

In the context of a societal climate securitization, we would expect solar geoengineering to become more than a purely ‘environmental’ measure. It would also be conceived and understood as a flexible or hybrid ‘security technology’ (though not as a weapon), promised or deployed to defuse climate threats to ‘security’ both in terms of deflecting from policies that ‘threaten’ societal referent objects and in terms of lessening material impacts from greenhouse gases.

In this context, if geoengineering appeared to reduce pressures for mass climate migration, could it help defuse securitizations of migration? That is, if ‘society’ is rendered ‘safe’ from migration by geoengineering, could migration be dealt with in a non-security mode, for example, as a humanitarian or welfare problem? Some scholarship on solar geoengineering argues that it might directly prevent the displacement of climate refugees by reducing climate impacts (Horton and Keith 2016; Felgenhauer et al. 2022). Politically this might seem to promise a swifter, more controllable and perhaps even more humanitarian response to a ‘migration crisis’ than local adaptation and resilience measures (Levitan 2022). Matt McDonald (2021) envisages a favorable scenario where solar geoengineering is used with humility, restraint, dialogue, and reflexivity, and for humanitarian purposes within an ecological security perspective where the referent object of security is the Earth system (and vulnerable populations). This would indeed appear much preferable to conventional securitization of migration.

However, the logic of societal climate securitization would work against this scenario. Neutralizing a threat with a security measure does not remove the issue from the figure of security—providing security measures is not the same as de-securitization (Wæver 1995)—and so migration would still occupy the ‘security threat’ position, with geoengineering functioning as an extraordinary societal security measure. Migrants, and protesters aligned with them and/or against solar geoengineering, would still represent security threats.

Humanitarian and anti-migration narratives could also be deployed in tandem in support of geoengineering (the former reinforcing liberal internationalist identity formulations, while the latter supports an ethno-nationalist notion of societal security). Humanitarian framings may be dis-

³³For example, UNEP. <https://www.unep.org/explore-topics/climate-action/facts-about-climate-emergency> (last accessed 1 March 2023).

³⁴Following the lead of Qatar as reported in GQ, 17 October 2019. <https://www.gq.com/story/qatar-outdoor-air-conditioning> (last accessed 6 July 2023).

cursively reinforced by an emerging concept of a ‘duty to protect’ vulnerable populations via geoengineering (King, Werrell, and Femia 2021), especially as prospects grow of directly life-threatening events where temperature and humidity combinations exceed human tolerances. In this context, climate engineering might be promoted both as a means of avoiding rebounding impacts (from migration) and of protecting vulnerable populations, also sustaining liberal humanitarian self-understandings.

Despite the historical connection of the ethno-nationalist right with outright climate denial, a societal climate securitization also provides fertile ground even for a ‘super-freak pivot’ (Morton 2015) in which past climate deniers/skeptics segue directly into advocacy for solar geoengineering,³⁵ deploying rhetorical claims that climate change is a problem caused by others, and that geoengineering “would require no government-imposed lifestyle changes.” (Lane 2006, 73).

Thus, if the United States continues to explicitly promote ‘climate security’ as a policy frame, and the wider rhetoric of a ‘climate emergency’ intensifies, and societal securitization also ramps up, this would facilitate support for (solar) geoengineering as a security measure. Moreover, in such an analysis societal security provides a domestic logic for solar geoengineering as an alternative to mitigation, complementing the geopolitical logic set out by Surprise (2020) in which the maintenance of US global financial and military primacy depends on continued flows of fossil fuels, making radical mitigation unpalatable.

These societal securitization dynamics would interact with other security logics including more traditional international security, especially if geoengineering were pursued in a mini-lateral or ‘climate club’ style of deployment (Victor 2006) by a Western ‘coalition of the willing’ or collaborating democracies (Keith and Irvine 2021). As with military interventions in the war on terror, this would imply a group of supporters, and tacit consent by others to stand aside. Compared to hypothetical imposed mitigation, any negative transborder impacts from solar geoengineering would be unintended and more difficult to attribute (McLaren and Corry 2021), while the technology potentially addresses climate threats through interventions at specific domestic or allied locations (e.g., injection sites for stratospheric aerosols), without targeting specific activities or facilities such as coal-fired power stations ‘out of area’. Importantly, as Young (2023) argues, solar geoengineering appears to be readily ‘intelligible’ to conventional security interests as an exceptional measure. Moreover, if geoengineering became established as a security measure averting climate threats, including if it is cast as holding back hypothesized migratory waves as outlined above, rejection of geoengineering as a ‘false solution’ by climate activists³⁶ might, ironically, provide a further reason to cast protestors as a security problem.

The contradictory values exhibited in mini-lateral interventions in the War on Terror, or the paradox of the EU’s violent border regime coexisting with ‘its core identity as a defender of human rights and a “normative superpower”’ (Sajjad 2022, 2), indicate that using solar geoengineering to sustain fossil economies in the face of climate crisis would not necessarily be incompatible with increasingly ‘green’ self-images of the same liberal states. Similarly, a human security logic has already been rhetorically mobilized—casting

the global poor as the security referent object and solar geoengineering as the necessary security measure preventing harm to millions (Horton and Keith 2016; Maxey 2019), but this could simultaneously be used to defend the societal security of western liberal societies from a ‘migrant threat’. Analysts of liberal rule point out that liberal order is characterized, not by a rejection of war, violence, and interventions, but by justifications for these based on securing life and the human (Dillon and Reid 2009). This could be repeated in relation to climate threats.

Conclusions and Reflections

The field of ‘climate security’ already involves different referent objects—primarily national sovereignty, international stability, human welfare and ecological systems (McDonald 2013), but an overlooked category of ‘societal climate security’ discussed here identifies selective representations of core societal values and identities as the referent object of an ‘inverted’ form of climate security. We have shown how this is already crystallizing around threats to dominant ‘ways of life’ linked to fossil fuel production and consumption, most pithily expressed in Bush’s vow at the Rio Earth Summit, but recently manifested in crackdowns on climate protests and discourse posing ‘mass climate migration’ as a threat to societal order and cohesion. We identified logics of societal climate security that not only hinder societal transformations including those necessary to radically cut climate-changing emissions, but also potentially permit previously unacceptable climate measures, tilting preferences toward palliative ones that address (or appear to address) symptoms rather than root causes of the climate crisis. Further, societal securitization makes for a more marked us-and-them logic in climate politics and slippages are likely between different security referents (national, human, societal, etc.) as seen already in the War on Terror and elsewhere. As a societal climate securitization gains ground, the Western liberal states discussed here may be especially geared to the development of promissory measures such as solar geoengineering, discursively justified with reference to the preservation of a particular ‘way of life’, adding to the context of national security (continued fossil-reliant global primacy) as well as liberal humanitarian security logics of saving the global poor from climate change. With the possible exception of the United States where there is substantial dedicated funding for carbon removal, and additional federal funding for research into solar geoengineering, as well as rising levels of engagement in academic and security circles, there is little indication that states are rushing to adopt geoengineering. However, a pattern of societal securitization, largely unremarked on, provides many of the necessary conditions for this to change.

This contributes a new dimension to existing climate security literature, updates societal securitization theory in an age of transnational threats like climate change, and has clear implications for debates about whether geoengineering could be involved in delaying or deterring accelerated mitigation (McLaren 2016b). Rather than a false sense of security (or of insurance) generating a ‘moral hazard’ that saps motivation to decarbonize, here a discourse of *insecurity* does so.

Reflecting further on the above, in the move from suppression of migration and protest for societal security to legitimization of geoengineering as a climate security tool, despite the similar logics and narratives, our analysis suggests a potential shift in the underlying concept of security. The former remains primarily exercises in biopower, a

³⁵See, for example Ben Shapiro, here on *Twitter*, 23 July 2019. <https://twitter.com/benshapiro/status/1153702438731276293?s=20> (last accessed 6 July 2023).

³⁶See, for example, ETC Group’s manifesto. https://www.etcgroup.org/sites/www.etcgroup.org/files/files/home_manifesto_english_.pdf (last accessed 1 March 2023).

continued policing and self-policing of society. The latter, in contrast, becomes a structural securing of the conditions within which society continues, which might be described as ‘geopower’. As an emanation of geopower, solar geoengineering in particular pushes ‘security’ in two directions: it builds upon visions of the state as the bulwark against external anarchy (providing new climate tools to supplement military, intelligence, trade, and diplomatic interventions), and simultaneously provides license to continue deploying sovereign power internally against certain threats to societal security. However, as a security measure to defend societal referent objects, climate geoengineering also potentially inadvertently frames *the climate system* itself as a threat, something to be resisted and managed through forceful intervention. Solar geoengineering thus potentially boosts existing tendencies for militaries to be “charged with bringing nature under control” (Gilbert, 2012, 6) constituting the planet as the threatening ‘other’—the recalcitrant Earth as a hostile entity (Chaturvedi and Doyle 2015; Hamilton 2017). On the other side lies some kind of threatened societal referent object. This is the diametrical opposite of McDonald’s vision of geoengineering for ecological security where ecosystems themselves are the threatened object (McDonald 2022).

While it might be hoped that a climate societal referent would be a ‘common humanity’, ‘societies’ are almost by definition particularistic, and in any case as a *security* object humanity would not likely be a pluralistic planetary identity imbued with the richness of human and beyond-human identity, agency and multiplicity. The identity of the ‘human’ referent object in humanitarian emergencies is already constructed in particular ways and by privileged actors (Watson 2011). Societal securitizations imply the reification of dominant identities to be defended at all costs, and many populations have already faced existential threats from such security renderings—generated through the societal imaginaries of dominant internal groups or colonial powers (Danowski and Viveiros de Castro 2017). The repeated history of the destruction of diverse cultures across the planet in the interest of spreading and sustaining particular values and ways of life should be reason for caution before endorsing new interventions in the name of Western liberal societal security and the presumed universality of its values.

Our analysis has focused on Western societies in which climate policy is openly contested. Our sample is not exclusive, for example, Germany exhibits similar trends with respect to climate protest. Nonetheless, attention to developments elsewhere might reveal significant differences reflecting other societal identities. In India, economic development has been cast as a security referent object, threatened potentially by climate impacts and climate-induced migration, for example (Sahu 2019). However, despite different positionality with respect to migration flows, countries as diverse as Brazil, China, India, Russia, and Nigeria all exhibit aspects of both ethnonationalism and protest suppression, and are (to some extent) embroiled in similar tensions between capitalist globalization and ethnonationalist political economy. Not even the poorest and most climate-vulnerable nations are immune to drivers for societal securitization, but approaches to solar geoengineering generated in narratives based on post-colonial development and climate vulnerability may differ markedly from those identified here, and merit further investigation.

Before ending, it is important to acknowledge that even as an intervention motivated by societal security objectives, solar geoengineering, if it were politically and technically ever

feasible, could potentially deliver reduced climate impacts and may thereby contribute to other notions of ‘security’. However, as proposals to develop or deploy these security technologies emerge, it is crucial to ask what referent object is to be protected and in whose interests. That means keeping sight of power—both material and discursive. In the configurations considered here, by slowing decarbonization and helping deter migration, solar geoengineering would be deployed within a logic that sustains current inequalities and uneven power relations within and between societies that, in turn, perpetuate climate crisis. Perhaps it is time to begin to put current ways of life up for negotiation after all.³⁷

Acknowledgements

We would like to gratefully acknowledge the Independent Research Fund Denmark for funding ISPACE (International Security Politics and Climate Engineering) which helped make the research behind this possible. We are also grateful for comments from Nikolaj Kornbech and numerous participants at events at which earlier versions were presented including The Centre for Advanced Security Theory, on 11 May, 2022 at the University of Copenhagen; the workshop ‘Climate Security: Toward a Critical Conceptualization’ on 29 September, 2022 at the University of Hamburg; the panel ‘Securitizing the Planet in an Unequal and Crisis-ridden World’ at ISA Annual Convention, Montreal, 16 March 2023; and at the EJIS/CGSC conference ‘Security at a Time of Polycrisis’, 19 May, 2023 held at University of Leeds.

Conflict of Interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

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