The security of water in Asia and the Pacific

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Introduction

Is water a security problem? If so, in whose name does emancipation derive from regular access to clean, drinkable water? For most of us, access to a daily supply of clean water is an indisputable public good. And yet about 450 million people in 29 countries face severe water shortages, and about twenty per cent more water than is now available will be needed to feed the additional three billion people on the planet by 2025. Indeed, up to two thirds of the world's population could be water-stressed by that year (COHRE 2007). From climate change to the mismanagement of water courses, from industrial and urban pollution, to changes in agricultural production, and from rapid and dramatic population growth (with an estimated global population likely to hit nine billion by 2050), to an insatiable need for energy derived from water, the challenges related to water are increasing every day (Hanjra 2010).

In reality, understanding water as a security concern has come to involve a complex array of disciplines; as Pahl-Wostl *et al*. observe, water security has relevance to the local community, municipality, subnational, national and supranational bodies, as well as crossing both political and hydrologic boundaries (2016: 22). In many ways, the work of Critical Security (CS) scholars has begun to address this complexity by, amongst other things, introducing new subject fields of inquiry, questioning the state as the principal security referent, and locating security interests within our own reflections and perceptions of the world around us (Peoples and Vaughan Williams 2010: 4). Most compellingly, CS works have opened debates interrogating the links between social oppression and environmental degradation, questioning for example the impact of patriarchy and colonialism on the construction of contemporary approaches to security (see MacGregor 2017). This article seeks to expand those debates by moving away from overly rigid vertical/horizontal definitions of space, in order to identify emancipatory practices at differentiated levels of interaction, and to locate significant points of influence and intervention for today's security concerns. By drawing lessons from Human Geography and illustrating the 'space' of regions, it proposes that we need to question more frequently the nature of the spaces inhabited by security.

Opening new possibilities for understanding the spaces within which security is articulated, I take the example of the 'region' as a potentially inclusive vehicle for tackling concerns associated with water security, for two main reasons. First, I previously attempted to locate key security sites within East Asia, and noted that environmental degradation was likely to

impact on the political, economic and social futures of a number of states in the region (Author). It focused at that stage on the region *per se* as a potential site for redress, and it seemed likely that the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) would be pushed to play a central role in securing future environmental security. Over a decade later, despite the fact that the environmental agenda is still more pressing and occupies a range of political spaces, the region *per se* is regarded as a secondary route for finding solutions to contemporary collective security problems. Second, this waning of emphasis on regionalism has not diminished the continued rise in advocacy directed at the regional space, making it a relevant but contested space created by interactive practices.

The studies of hydropower in the Mekong and the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) presented here offer contrasting examples of security within 'regional' spaces in a broad geographical area beset by water crises. In both instances, non-state actors seek access and influence within a range of spaces, including at the regional level. In the case of the Mekong, the framing of the region offers a tool for reinforcing the political centrality of the state, whereas within the PIF the nascent 'nexus politics' reflect the importance of a multi-spatial approach to the complex security concerns over water. This article examines the different ways of accessing and framing the issues, which result in such differentiated approaches to the regional space. It begins by outlining the ways in which Human Geography can influence the study of CS to examine new sites of securitisation, and by justifying the regional space as a case study, before exploring how these regional cases map onto different interpretations of the security space.

Defining the Spaces of Water Security

Water security is often encompassed by the broader literature on environmental security, which has many applications (Barnett *et al*. 2010). Much of the recent scholarly literature focuses on the damaging threat posed by humans and their behaviour to the survival of the natural world, and the diminishing stock of natural resources (Vörösmarty *et al*. 2010). A number of commentators examine the ways in which inter-state conflicts form around claims over natural resources, or about the ways in which resources are affected by such conflicts (Le Billon 2013). In addition, non-traditional security threats have been couched within a 'broader umbrella that brings together emerging threats facing both states and individuals as objects of security' (Caballero-Antony 2008: 510). Similarly, the study of Human Security opened the opportunity to enable researchers to examine the socio-political, economic and

cultural impacts of human interaction upon the natural world they inhabit (Adger *et al*. 2014). For McDonald, the very meaning of security is still to be determined (2013), and in work examining the concept of emancipation from an ethical standpoint, he formulates ecological security as a means of turning 'towards the resilience of ecosystems themselves, with this in turn enabling the protection of the most vulnerable across time, space and species' (2015). In his search for the ability to speak truth to power, he accepts that there is no 'truth,' other than that which is constructed through articulation and practice.

Building on that premise, the current article offers not an ethical alternative like his, but rather aims to expose the ways in which we investigate the interactive experiences of enacting securitisation; reconfiguring our way of understanding the very spaces of security, and thereby removing the default to hierarchical security structures reified a specified unit, most frequently the state. Thus, concerns over water are now central to many debates about the securitisation of the environment. Securitisation is regarded as the utterance of security, whereby security is no more, or less, than a speech act. Importantly for the current project, securitisation came to be seen as a snapshot of performative politics; in essence dealing with the ways in which pre-defined spaces for interaction are brought into relief through the performance of speech act politics, and enabling us to question how issues of space impact upon the framing of the 'security problem' and the ways in which responses are shaped by different stakeholders (Floyd 2010).

Human Geography has made significant strides in challenging bounded spaces of authority and interaction (see Gruby and Campbell 2013: 2047). In particular, de Sousa Santos' idea of an abyssal approach to spatial justice offers a way to examine the 'radical denial of co-presence' and redresses the problem of ignoring a range of experiences by dividing 'human' from 'subhuman' or 'Old World' from 'New' (2007). Such 'global cognitive injustice' is then written into the fabric of the structures through which redress is sought, and only by removing the wall of presumed incompatibility between different systems of knowledge can a universal agenda be pursued (de Sousa Santos 2007). Thus, a 'new spatial grammar of environmental governance must be sensitive to both the politics of scale and the politics of networks' as we move away from the 'territorial trap' (Bulkeley 2005: 875 and 877; see Agnew 1994), and come to regard social processes within the 'dense webs of relations to other scales and spaces' they inhabit (Brenner 2001: 606). The ways in which scale is conceived, then, influences the articulation and identification of injustices and the

relationship between scale and power. With this in mind, there are issues of complexity related to understanding tensions within and among levels of engagement and claims; not only do we need to break down the sense of an imagined global scale, but we need to see how to encapsulate a multi-scalar set of processes in the first place (see Bulkeley 2005: 879). Thus, for example, even within transnational advocacy networks advocating for water security, they may be doing so in order to secure human rights, or to eradicate child poverty. The engagement with the 'environment' or 'water,' in other words, may be expedient and political, rather than heralding a new era of a collective will to secure the future of a sustainable environment.

Activists are still often regarded by commentators and political elites as 'substate' or 'nonstate' actors, further endorsing 'existing conceptions, agents and referents of security' (McDonald, Introduction to this special issue). Speech acts underpinning securitising moves implicitly or explicitly locate the spaces for action and access through the articulation of the 'audience,' the 'global' or 'local' framing of the issue, and thereby enact the means through which to tackle the problem. In addition, the perception of an issue is linked to expertise and the type of narrative it engages, whilst the 'agenda-setting process is concerned with how problems are identified and solutions or alternatives are specified' (Jeon and Haider-Markel 2001: 215). Thus, the very ways in which an issue is defined and located within an institutional framework will influence the level of policy approach towards it (Sheingate 2000).

In essence, focus on space facilitates an interrogation of sites of contestation, where ideas and institutions are formed and challenged. Devine-Wright also problematises this notion of place, by observing that such 'attachments' contradicts novel 'localist' discourses. He asks how public engagement is affected by the ways in which climate change is framed (as 'global', 'local', 'national' or other) and thereby hints here, too, at the issue of access to the shaping of the discourse and the means to address the perceived problems. He goes on, rightly in my view, to note the need to 'problematise the reification of spatial terms as entities that are singular, hierarchical or separate' (2013: 61, 64). Similarly, Hameiri and Wilson assert that 'shifting governance between spatial scales carries not only economic distributional effects, but also privileges particular societal interests, normative agendas and values' (2015: 117).

Why Regions?

The very idea of 'region' enacts one important locus of this multi-scalar politics in the cases before us here, and presents one snapshot of the ways in which water security is framed beyond state spaces. As part of that reproduction of the struggles between 'globality and localness [which] are evident at all scales' (Margulis and Porter 2013: 77), a focus on regional strategies and structures emphasises a 'unique kind of territorial politics,' as that territory is (re)produced through an ongoing process (Hameiri 2013: 315). Of course, problems related to water security can also be identified at other geographical (local, city, community, global) levels. The important point is to note how spaces are enacted through the framing of issue and access and re-defined over time (Paasi 2004: 536). This article is not seeking to replace the reification of the state with the reification of the region, but rather to demonstrate that a fixed gaze on the state prevents the observer from identifying other potentially significant nodes of influence and impact.

With this in mind, Human Geography enables us to regard a given space as a *mille-feuille* of interpenetrating actors and interests, in which space is (re)constructed through the simultaneous production of institutional and cognitive frames (Lefebvre 2009: 86). As issues come into contact with these frames, they are adopted, adapted or rejected within the space formed by those interactions, with the result that regions are not only the outcome of historically contingent social practices … but, more specifically, tools of a scalar politics' (Gruby and Campbell 2013: 2047). Thus, 'region' represents one enactment of the multiple ways in which water security has to date been framed, accessed and contested and presents one space in which nominally differentiated stakeholders are likely to shape security practices and outcomes.

Framing the Problem

Methodologically, in order to uncover the 'social product' created at the crossroads of activities, we need to look at the ways in which issues are accessed and framed. In the regional context explored here, when framing an issue in terms of the space it inhabits, what often occurs is that the global is 'naturalized,' leading to a process that 'serves to disembody the causes and consequences of such problems, and their construction as such, from practices and politics taking place at a multitude of sites and scales of governance' (Bulkeley 2005: 879). Framing refers to the 'processes by which actors produce frames of meaning to

mobilize support for their respective positions,' and enables us to see how meaning is shaped by 'larger economic and political structures' (Fiss and Hirsch 2005: 30).

In order to critique that framing process effectively, we need to interpret scale through the lens of 'processes, political agendas, and power relationships' (Gruby and Campbell 2013). In so doing, we begin to uncover the obstacles preventing the access of certain would-be participants in the debate. That access is not prevented or facilitated by extant power structures alone, but also by the dominant narratives embedded in securitising moves. Thus, even in the examination of transnational advocacy networks, for example, their authority and access are 'tied to traditional political arenas, primarily the nation-state' (Bulkeley 2005: 880). The social context of an institution shapes 'identities and interests' and provides the normative 'standard of appropriate behavior for actors with a given identity' (see Wünderlich 2012: 656). In essence, then, framing access refers to the ways in which particular structures and political interests facilitate or impede access for a range of actors to engage with the security problem at hand; whilst framing issues refers to the discursive boundaries drawn around a set of issues and the ways in which they are both sustained and challenged. The very concept of the 'regional' space embodies the conjuncture of these processes. The following section examines these processes of access and issue framing through illustrations around water security in Asia and the Pacific.

Water security in Asia and the Pacific

In East Asia and the Pacific issues pertaining to water are multi-layered, and with almost two-thirds of the world's population growth and an estimated sixty per cent increase in the urban population, Asia faces a serious crisis as early as 2025. At the same time, the exploitation of water for hydropower is regarded as a sustainable form of power to fire the engines of regional economic growth, thereby benefiting the lives of millions of people. These populations gain through the increased security that accompanies a raised standard of living, through infrastructural investment, reliable energy supply and regular sources of food. But who ensures the security of those millions of people who are uprooted and displaced in the process of economic growth and the liberalisation of markets? And who is responsible for the future generations who will experience the exacerbated environmental conditions arising from these development projects? In many cases, the populations are one and the same, both beneficiaries and victims of a global pursuit of water. The Asia Society Group concludes that over time, 'these effects will have a profound impact on security throughout the region'

(2009). To achieve a satisfactory equilibrium, it will be imperative to overcome a multitude of structural constraints through collective endeavours and a 'more co-ordinated approach to water crises' (Hanjra 2010: 374). In reality, however, the Asia Pacific is currently witnessing an increase in inter-state rivalry, as the project of 'regionalism' has become increasingly fragmented, and potential conflict over natural resources, along with the increasing commodification of water, are matched by few attempts to regard a healthy water supply as a common good, or to engage in meaningful region-wide measures for conservation and education (see Emmers 2010).

If regional response structures are becoming less effective than ever, the routes for redress for non-state actors are increasingly blocked. Where they had previously seen some significant inroads into participation in regional structures such as the Asian Development Bank and Asia-Europe Meeting, a lack of access to the means of redress is matched by the increasing marginalisation of socio-economically and politically isolated societal groups, with the result that the causes of 'environmental injustice' have become more prominent globally as well as in the Asia Pacific (Middleton *et al*. 2015: 628). The two illustrations that follow demonstrate the nature of the issues at stake and the ways in which state and non-state actors engage at a regional level to address collective security problems related to water. They have been chosen because both are located in a geographically challenging terrain, in which contests over water security are becoming ever more prevalent. Both offer insights into the ways in which activists lobby for redress and change within a range of spaces. And both demonstrate the ways in which access and issue framing is constructed differentially even within the same geographical area, illustrating the complexities of constructing security and the fluidity of space. They each represent different configurations of water security and different conceptions of the region, and involve a variety of actors who call on different levels of representation and redress.

The study of the Mekong focuses in particular on the contentious issue of dam building and the ways in which economic and political-decision making in one state impacts upon trans-border resources, welfare and security. In the case of the Pacific Rim, the focus is on the differentiated approaches to security among the various claimants of the region, and upon the underpinning narrative of development. Both cases demonstrate the interplay between state-led initiatives and changing discourses of security, showing power relationships that lie within and among relevant state and non-state groups involved in addressing water security.

The ways in which the security challenges are framed, who has access to the framing of the problem and the redress it should entail, and the interaction among nominally differentiated stakeholders, are likely to shape security practices and outcomes in the future.

Water Security and Hydropower in the Mekong

The Mekong River epitomises many of the challenges outlined above. It offers drinking water, agricultural water, energy, fishing waters, navigable trade routes, a source of valuable minerals, tourism, and provides the backbone for many of the communities residing alongside it. It is already susceptible to the impact of climate change and to regular flooding and – given its transborder movement – requires joined-up approaches to address these complex realities.[1] The Lower Mekong is home to 60 million people, of whom more than two thirds derive their livelihoods and survival from agriculture and fishing, thus making them dependent on water. Despite the fact that dams are being built along the entire river, the inhabitants of the Lower Mekong are disproportionately affected by the impact of water diversion, unforeseen dry periods and flooding, the loss of minerals and fishing stocks, and the direct impact on riparian habitats. Activists campaigning against these incursions also point to the dramatic loss of biodiversity as well as the impact on food security, and to the growing tensions among those bearing the costs and those reaping the profits.[2] Dam building along the Mekong, then, is changing the nature and space in which issues of concern for fundamental environmental and human security are being addressed.

Issue access

China sits at the headwater of the Mekong, occupying a powerful geographical, economic and political position in relation to other riparian states, rendering cooperation difficult and uneven. As a result, Lower Mekong states retain little power to contest Chinese developments along the river (Keskinen *et al*. 2008: 93). Chinese officials insist that development of the Upper Mekong will not affect the rest of the region negatively, and frame the building of new dams in Yunnan as a unilateral means of enhancing China's 'Go West' strategy into Southeast Asia (Ho 2014). The view of China as a benign factor is strongly contested by residents of the Lower Mekong, who fear that the consequences of China's actions could be disastrous. Not only are Chinese dams expected to reduce important silt reserves (upon which

[1] See www.giz.de/en/worldwide/14435.html, accessed on 2 September 2017.
[2] See www.internationalrivers.org/resources/the-lower-mekong-dams-a-transboundary-water-crisis-7900, accessed on 2 September 2017.

fish feed) by 50 per cent, but other downstream costs of dam building include a reduction in dissolved oxygen, the erosion of river banks and a serious decline in fisheries, since dams prevent fish migration and change natural flood cycles (Stone 2016). Non-state actors raise concerns at the number of dams which are built with many problems, including inadequate impact assessments and insufficient compensation and support for relocated people (Molle *et al*. 2009). They also note how wild fisheries (accounting for 47 to 80 per cent of total animal protein intake) are particularly at risk (Hortle 2007). To date, however, NGOs have struggled to gain access to the institutional initiatives and to obtain information about their outcomes through a transparent dialogue.[3] Major protests have taken place around large dam building projects, such as the Pak Mun and Rasi Salai dams in Northeast Thailand. But as Middleton *et al*. observe, '"procedural justice" is not the only precondition to accessing environmental justice,' as unequal power relations, exacerbated by economic and political contexts, continue to exclude many claimants from making a case for those injustices (2015: 637).

Other state actors also hold disproportionate power. For example, in Thailand the state-owned Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT) is involved in the funding of dams and is the primary purchaser and sole distributor of electricity within the country, and within Laos. Matthews shows that EGAT has an organisational structure favouring investment over alternatives, politically challenging options such as energy savings (2012). Against the protests at dam building in Thailand, they have simply turned to a state (Laos) where such protests cannot take place with impunity.

There have been several attempts to coordinate responses to different elements of water management along the Mekong. The Mekong River Commission was established in 1995 and involved the four Lower Mekong states. Other institutions within the Mekong include the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) Program, ASEAN, and other water-related frameworks including the UN's Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), and the UN's Development Programme's Regional Environmental Governance Programme for Asia-Pacific (Keskinen *et al*. 2008: 86). In reality, the main inter-state mechanisms for address some of these major challenges – the three Mekong River organisations – privilege the central role played by China, which represents its own actions in non-geographical terms (Phillips *et al*. 2006). More recently we see new processes for collaboration, and access for

[3] See www.sumernet.org/content/effective-policy-advocacy-mekong-relationships-and-information-flows-needed-across-national, accessed on 2 September 2017.

NGOs. In particular, efforts through the MRC have included attempts to implement an Integrated Water Resource Management systems for the Lower Mekong, as part of a Basin Development Plan (BDP) to promote the coordinated development and management of water and related resources (Öjendal *et al*. 2012). Its first phase (2001–2006) established processes and planning, and phase two (2007–2010) sought to create a shared understanding of development options in the Lower Mekong (Costanza *et al*. 2011: 4). This has engendered a 'nexus' approach to include a diversity of participating groups, and to address power inequalities, signifying that a shift in the issue framing may influence access to decision-making, in favour of including a diverse number of actors.

Issue framing

Throughout the Mekong region, economic security – encompassing energy security and food security – is paramount. Energy consumption in the sub-region is destined to rise by seven per cent per year until 2030 and clean and plentiful hydropower has been signalled as an important means of meeting this need. In particular, the dominant narrative around the development of dams along the length of the Mekong is framed in terms of ensuring energy for the people of the states of the region, in the face of the imperative brought about by climate change to reduce fossil fuels. Much of the complexity surrounding the issues pertaining to water security along the Mekong derives from this tension between state-based economic development and the need to address the increasingly visible negative consequences resulting directly from attempts at dam building. For the latter to be achieved, water has to be regarded as a collective good for all inhabitants, whereas the former imposes artificial (and real) barriers, posing a threat to neighbours and downstream communities. The way in which the discourse has been framed to date ensures that the narrative of energy security and economic well-being eclipses concerns about the prospects for real water shortage and an existential threat to the survival of all creatures dependent upon the river (see Goh 2007; Vaidyanathan 2011). These political agendas frame economic security in the region, but they are not without their critics. For example, Costanza *et al*. point to the need to reflect on the 'distribution of benefits and costs among current stakeholders and among generations' (2011: 5-6). Lebel *et al*. (2007) and Molle *et al*. (2009) have all been critical of hydropower development in the basin, arguing that without proper planning and consideration of social, engineering and environmental costs hydropower will be devastating for local people and the environment.

An interesting recent set of interlinkages has led to the highlighting of nexus relationships, particularly linking food, water, energy and climate. The growth in popularity of the nexus approach is based on a growing belief that the very relationship with water needs to be recast and that the 'multidimensional nature of water management' needs to be addressed. This belief was honed in the form of the IWRM, to emphasise above all 'environmental protection, participation, efficiency and equity' (Benson *et al*. 2015: 758). However, as Middleton *et al*. demonstrate, those nexus groups in the Mekong fail to represent the interests of those communities directly affected by dam building, finding that 'only a limited number of international NGOs and policy think tanks have been drawn to the nexus in the region to date' (2015: 630, 633). They also conclude that multiple framings of that nexus render the concept less influential. Thus, the 'nexus' may refer, *inter alia*, to a 'water-food-energy-climate nexus,' a 'water-energy nexus,' or a 'land use-climate change-energy nexus' and it will reflect the political agendas and inter-relationships of those who act in its name. This nexus approach, then, has the potential to bring together a range of diverse actors and to frame the issues pertaining to dam building and the Mekong in a more complex and interlinked way. At present, however, access to nexus activities have been limited to states, and the MRC itself has relatively little power to influence agendas (Keskinen *et al*. 2008: 79, 93). States themselves, given the ways in which political agendas remain focused, have limited capacity – and often limited incentive – to collaborate in the joint management of the Mekong. Matthews summarises:

> The MRC's donor-driven priorities, mainly focused on participation and IWRM, operate regardless of national government's development plans and their interest in the MRC's programmes. This disconnect allows governments to implement policies of self-interest development because the MRC lacks power to direct transboundary water governance issues in the region. (2012: 404)

One further problem within the power relationships among the many complex and diverse stakeholders is the fact that the very nature of the issue is framed around the geographical space of this 4350km river. For Foster and Ait-Kadi, this means that 'scale is subjectively defined and scientifically ignored,' where hydrogeological criteria need to be foregrounded (2012: 416). In contrast, NGOs making social claims about the impact of dam building on the wider communities and cross-border transactions are also ignored. This situation is rendered still more complex by a set of environmental lobbies for which different discourses of

sustainability do not always come together with ease. Indeed, some critics regard these discourses as 'too readily acceding to the status quo of market-led development, technical eco-modernisation solutions and power asymmetry,' and they 'doubt that environmental justice is seriously considered' (Walker 2012: 37). In summary, dominant actors and discourses continue to thwart attempts to implement a more joined up approach to water management, based simultaneously on both a micro and macro reading of the spatiality of the Mekong and on a more inclusive framing of both the access and issues involved.

Pacific Islands

The second illustration highlights the international claims made by the Pacific Island Forum (PIF) and its rivals. Oceania as a region has the lowest proportion of population (56 per cent) with improved drinking water, with over 30 per cent relying on raw surface water, and with little progress in sanitation between 1990 and 2012.[4] The regional average for sanitation cover is 46 per cent, but in the Solomon Islands this figure is at only 32 per cent, where only two per cent of urban dwellers in Honiara have access to flushing toilets.[5] In spite of aid support, for example from Japan's International Co-operation Agency (JICA), no regional efforts are engaged at enhancing infrastructural support for water supplies. At the same time, the effects of climate change in this region are dramatic, leading to floods, droughts, and a rise in sea levels.[6]

Issue Access

In terms of access, significant states demonstrate specific interests and concerns in the security of the Pacific Islands. Much of the interest, however, revolves around a desire to ensure geopolitical gains for the security of the dominant states in the region. Notably, the Australian government has sought to utilise the islands of the region as part of a cordon for its own security (Fry and Tarte 2015), and since Prime Minister Howard's concept of 'pooled regional governance' for the PIF in 2003, there have been calls for closer policy work to be done between the PIF and Australia. Australia examined explicitly the ways in which participation in the region served its non-traditional security concerns (Hameiri 2015: 634).

[4] See www.scidev.net/asia-pacific/water/news/saving-pacific-islands-water-resources.html, accessed on 2 September 2017.
[5] See www.ipsnews.net/2013/04/water-shortage-hits-pacific-women, accessed on 2 September 2017.
[6] See www.scidev.net/asia-pacific/water/news/saving-pacific-islands-water-resources.html, accessed on 2 September 2017.

However, the ‘hegemonic style of Australia’s regional community building’ alongside the particular advocacy of ‘the way the community should live’ took little account of local voices and rests on the framing of Australian security, against the interests of the environmental (and other) security of the region (Fry and Tarte 2015: 101).

Today, that Australian position is being challenged by the growing presence of China in the region, particularly as a result of its aid disbursements (Hameiri 2015). At the first China-Pacific Island Countries Economic Development and Cooperation Forum in 2006, China announced three billion renminbi (US$492 million) in concessional loans to the region (Dornan and Brandt 2014: 349), alongside additional investments by Chinese state-owned enterprises and other businesses (Hameiri 2015: 632). Indeed, in recent years, the governments of the PIF have taken advantage of this situation to court a number of major donors and encouraged competition among them (Dornan and Brandt 2014: 361). As Hameiri notes:

> Suspicion of simmering great-power competition appeared to be confirmed when [Hilary] Clinton became the first-ever US Secretary of State to attend the 2012 PIF Leaders Meeting, apparently in response to the PRC also sending a large delegation. (2015: 632)

A number of observers are concerned about these overtures, and read within them an attempt by China to control the regional agenda. As the most developed economy in the region, Fiji’s government has ‘promoted the view that Chinese power is on the rise in the Pacific and Australia’s on the wane’ (Hameiri 2015: 649). Hameiri, however, is more circumspect and regards most Chinese activities as being driven by individual commercial interests (2015: 633). More importantly, perhaps, recent developments like the Australian-China Development Cooperation Memorandum (2013) signal increased support in areas of regional health and water resource management and may begin to signal a ‘higher degree of trust between Australia and China in the region and a more significant drive towards solving regional environmental security problems’ (Hayward Jones 2013). These overtures may also be influenced by changes in the issue framing within the region, as will be shown below.

As is the case in the Mekong, regionally dominant local actors also play a part in rendering cooperation difficult. In the case of the PIF, the role of Fiji sets a tension between those who

favour a more inclusive regional governance structures and those wishing to retain the 'state-centric community' (Fry and Tarte 2015: 103). Fiji was suspended from the PIF in 2009, which led to the establishment of competing regional fora, including the now-influential Pacific Small Island Developing States Group at the United Nations, and the Fiji-led Pacific Islands Development Forum (PIDF), established in 2013. Interestingly, in the spirit of the 'nexus' approach outlined above, the PIDF was designed to include non-state actors, business representatives, governments and international organisations, and framed its message around its 'green' credentials (Fry and Tarte 2015: 8).

With regard to non-state actors, the PIF has enabled the participation of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), but international NGOs have gained greater leverage than their local counterparts – particularly due to their influence in the UN Universal Periodic Review of Pacific Island states - to the extent that Baird warns of the 'risk of diluting the Pacific civil society voice in Geneva and perhaps even contributing to a distorted human rights "picture" of a particular state' (2015: 2). In addition, the PIF lacks the appropriate mechanisms for ensuring dialogue between NGOs and the regional body, as organised cooperation among NGOs in the Pacific is localised, and NGOs tend to be focused on matters of national urgency, seeking to reinforce their 'local power narrative' and to resist any 'dominant global technical narrative,' as explored below (Denton 2017: 70). What is more, where that narrative gains currency there remain limited technical, resource and governance capacity to address complex infrastructure challenges and implement development strategies.

The concept of region in the PIF – like that of the broader trends within East Asia – is a fragmented one, historically framed by the interests of powerful states. In the face of this trend, groups like the Pacific Islands Association of NGOs (PIANGO) and the Te Ipukarea Society seek to strengthen civil society through key investment initiatives and through targeted initiatives like the attempt to coordinate pressure and create a 'boomerang' effect on states, also by linking with the UN, to address the huge problem of plastic in the waters.[7]

Issue framing

Where economic development and advancement are the watchwords in the Mekong region, a fundamental reading of development – in which basic needs for living are still to be met –

[7] See www.pireport.org/articles/2017/03/05/cooks-ngo-huge-task-tackle-plastic-waste-pacific-waters, accessed on 2 September 2017.

places human security at the heart of the Pacific (Overmars and Woodruff 2011: 61). Thus, poverty creates the underlying narrative for comparing individual island development dynamics, and it is underpinned by decades of issue framing by external agents, particularly by colonial masters, 'setting them up for outcomes not of their making' (Fry 1997: 307).

Like the various Mekong institutions, the PIF is an intergovernmental group designed to foster state-to-state cooperation in order to improve the socio-economic standards of the people it represents. The PIF offers the most comprehensive means of creating a joined-up set of issues related to security. It defines security as a stable, safe, human, environmental and political set of conditions, recognising explicitly the human security agendas that lie at the heart of policy in practice.[8] The PIF also aims to link together 'member countries, territories, regional and international organisations and Non-State Actors,'[9] aiming both to strengthen the regional level cooperation among different constituencies, as well as to facilitate capacity building among NGOs.

Much of the issue framing by Forum members is conducted through the lens of guaranteeing the security of small states, which are disproportionately affected by climate change (Gillespie 2003). This approach set in train the 'scaling of the Pacific Region as a united social and geographical space,' a frame of reference which – through interactions with international NGOs and the regional forum – ensured that a 'particular version of the Pacific Region was strategically brought into existence on the global environmental governance stage' (Gruby and Campbell 2013: 2047). The PIF has established a Framework for Pacific Regionalism, which includes a multi-stakeholder approach, in terms of both issue access and framing. It also maintains a Civil Society-Forum Troika Dialogue.[10] Thus, the PIF plays a role in defining the terms of a coordinated regional voice in environmental and human security, in spite of the many obstacles to its full development. This approach moves away from a one-size-fits-all approach to development and acknowledges some of the spatial complexity of the region, as it faces severe challenges from globalisation (Brown 2006: 3).

[8] See www.forumsec.org/resources/uploads/attachments/documents/what-is-the-framework-for-pacific-regionalism.pdf, accessed on 2 September 2017.
[9] See www.forumsec.org/pages.cfm/strategic-partnerships-coordination/nsa-engagement, accessed on 2 September 2017.
[10] See www.forumsec.org/resources/uploads/attachments/documents/what-is-the-framework-for-pacific-regionalism.pdf, accessed on 2 September 2017.

What is more, water management in the Pacific Islands is constrained by 'size, isolation, fragility, natural vulnerability, and a limited human, financial and natural resource base,' as outlined by the 2005 Mauritius Strategy (Overmars and Woodruff 2011: 57). The complex problems related to water security involve supply, infrastructural resources and governance, and yet there is a lack of joined-up framing within which to see the future of the waters around these islands as a collective set of concerns. Here, too, there is a need for novel thinking about the space occupied by water, as '[c]limate change adaptation and disaster risk management are crucial components of a holistic, locally-relevant and integrated water resource framework for the island countries in the Pacific.'[11]

A number of NGOs and networks seek to influence change to environmental security within the Pacific. Amid the Pacific Islands' Association of NGOs' (PIANGO's) principles, sits the promotion of environmental security, as it develops and implements priorities and approaches that foster environmental sustainability for present and future generations, including urgent responses to climate crises, with specific attention to the socio-economic, cultural and indigenous conditions for ecological integrity and justice.[12] Groups like the Pacific Network on Globalisation (PANG) try to engage with contemporary realities and they seek to make the most of e-networks, particularly where funding streams are diminished or unavailable.

However, in recent years a proliferation of new agents of knowledge – bringing international science of global warming and interconnections with scientific and non-governmental communities around the globe – offers for observers like Denton the chance to bring a 'global technical narrative' to local discussion within the PIF itself. Whilst this brings a new form of legitimacy to claims about environmental and human security, however, it also creates tension with those agents representing marginalised communities, who have started to raise their voices in the 2013-inaugurated Pacific Islands Development Forum as a counter-narrative (2017: 67). Its Charter focuses the work of this non-state forum on sustainable and inclusive development, and gives exclusive centrally to the significance of the green economy.[13] Despite its main function of offering an excluded Fiji a way back into the

[11] See www.scidev.net/asia-pacific/water/news/saving-pacific-islands-water-resources.html, accessed on 2 September 2017.
[12] See www.piango.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/PIANGO-Strategic-Plan-2013-2015.pdf, accessed on 2 September 2017.
[13] See http://pacificidf.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Charter.pdf, accessed on 2 September 2017.

regional architecture, it nevertheless created a distinct new brand of regionalism focusing on a partnership among state and non-state actors, a focus on sustainable development, and a rejection of outside interference (Fry and Tarte 2015: 8).

In summary, external sovereign states have significant power to shape the security of the Pacific and there has been a lack to date – despite the existence of the Pacific Islands Forum – of meaningful regional security dialogues through which to build a substantial reposte. More tellingly, security within the Pacific continues to be framed through the lens of the basic economic and infrastructural development of individual islands and the development-security nexus has yet to be formed in a broader and more inclusive way. What is starting to occur, however, is a rejection of global interference – in both access and issue framing – in favour of a shared expressed desire for bottom-up shaping of new environmental security moulds that go beyond traditional – post-colonial and globalising – confines.

Conclusion

The Mekong and Pacific offer different access and issue framings for understanding the complexities of environmental security today. In the Mekong, the regional security response through the MRC has ensured that short-term economic security concerns continue to prevail, and serve to override collective action vis-à-vis longer term approaches to broader conceptualisations of security. The framing of water security in the region privileges state-led interests in economic development, whilst non-state actors are marginalised within the institutions purporting to serve collective environmental security interests. The apparent erosion of regionalism within East Asia more broadly simply echoes the ways in which framing and access are problematised in the context of water management, and a lack of collective identification with the future of environmental concerns within the region as a whole signals a lost opportunity for reinforcing the need for ‘nexus’ politics and a joined up approach to framing and access. Nevertheless, despite their multifaceted definitions, such nexus approaches to security are starting to take root and are being championed at both state and non-state levels of engagement. It remains to be seen whether or not they can now take hold.

In the case of the Pacific, a new institutional development – set up through expediency rather than political intent to address environmental security – sees the nascent development of nexus politics here, too, and a multi-agency, multi-focused dialogue around the concept of the

green economy is beginning to grow. Nevertheless, its role is to undo decades of poverty and sovereign isolation from other regional allies, and it is obvious that stubborn resistance to change continues to pose an obstacle. Access continues to remain state-led, as civil society activists continue to lay claims to their own exclusion from key institutions, and as those activist debates themselves house tensions between globalising scientific discourses and local community claims. Overlying these factors is the significant role of key state actors from beyond the region; namely, China and Australia, which frame the geopolitical narrative within which water and environmental concerns rest.

These findings point to the need to render more complex our appreciation of the space within which security is enacted. The region in both illustrations offers one site of interaction and one conjuncture of fluid complex practices, rather than one fixed structure for well-rehearsed security performances. The emerging responses to crises over water demonstrate how non-rigid vertical/horizontal spatialisations are becoming not only possible but necessary, and they inherently challenge the fundamental assumptions upon which many CS studies rest. Lessons from Human Geography enable CS proponents to begin to identify emancipatory practices at differentiated levels of interaction. What is now needed is a reading at many other spatial levels to act as a corrective to fixed spatial premises in the framing of security.

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