



The water-energy-food-security nexus – Securitising Sustainability and its Implications for Governance

Understanding the water-energy-food nexus and its implications for
governance

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Securitising Sustainability? Questioning the 'Water, Energy and Food-Security Nexus'

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ABSTRACT: The water, energy and food-security nexus approach put forward by the Bonn2011 Conference highlights the need for an integrative approach towards issues of water, energy and food, and puts them under a general framework of security. While acknowledging the need for urgent solutions in terms of sustainability, the nexus approach, at the same time, makes a normative claim to tackle the needs of the poorest parts of the world population. A closer look at the underlying rationales and proposed policy instruments, however, suggests that the primary scope of the conference proceedings is not a normative one, but one that reframes the conflict between distributional justice and the needs of the world economy under the paradigm of security. Reading this slightly shifted perspective through a Foucauldian lens, we propose that security is now put forward as the key mechanism to foster a new 'green' economy, and that the needs of the poorest are, if anything at all, a secondary effect of the proposed nexus approach.

KEYWORDS: sustainability, nexus, securitisation, green economy, development



The water energy food security nexus

- The nexus approach is still a immature concept.
- It claims that water, energy and food are intrinsically interconnected and must thus be governed as such.
- Its emergence was very much driven by the water sector.
- It builds on a global crises narrative.
- The business sector promotes this narrative.
- Its solutions are to be found within the green economy.
- It comes with a post-political attitude.
- It securitises sustainability.



Schools of Security Studies

Shared characteristics		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflections on the concept of security as such, i.e. as interesting in itself and not only a matter of delineation or pre-analytical definition. • Concern with the issue of possible widening as contradictory and political. • Security as practice. • Self-reflection: one's own practice as security analyst is implicated in the politics of security, and as such one face hard ethical dilemmas as security actor. 		
Specific characteristics		
<i>Welsh school</i>	<i>Copenhagen school</i>	<i>Paris school</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Widening, Deepening • Emancipation • Social construction of threats; self/other relations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Securitisation • Desecuritisation • Distinguish between securitising actors and referent objects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal and external security merge. • Security agencies. • Praxis over discourse

(Waeber 2004)



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Securitising Sustainability? (Leese & Meisch, 2015)

1. By reframing global resource scarcity as an existential threat, the nexus introduces an element of emergency.
 2. Proposed instruments cling to a neoliberal agenda – propelled through the green rationale that appears crucial for our survival as mankind.
- Foucauldian interpretation of security, which is strongly linked to the management of de-territorialised, boundary-less and global flows of people and goods. Security, conceived through this lens, produces freedom and openness, and empowers modern economic principles.
 - “[W]e have to produce security through the economy, and as such the survival of the economy must no longer be questioned.” (Leese & Meisch, 2015: 705)
 - We doubt that in its present form the nexus is really about the poorest of the poor.



Some Implications for Governance

- ***Problematize securitization:***
 - When, why and how do global elites label water, energy and food as 'security' issues? Does the reference object deserve to continue?
- ***Aim for desecurisation (or repoliticisation):***
 - How can nexus governance unfold according to procedures of normal politics?
- ***Allow for emancipation:***
 - How can people be freed from those physical and human constraints which stop them carrying out what they would freely choose to do?
- ***Be self-reflexive:***
 - What are disciplinary or repressive means of achieving which security? What is the role of nexus scientists as securitising agents?