

## **Let them Eat War\*: Climate Change, Food Insecurity and Conflict**

According to the FAO (2013), 842 million people, 12 percent of the world population, were undernourished in 2011-2013. The Heidelberg Conflict Barometer (HIK 2014) counts war in 16 countries and limited war in another 9 countries. The International Panel on Climate Change (2007) predicts serious repercussions of climate change on agricultural production; the most vulnerable countries are located in the Global South. The dynamics of food insecurity, climate change and conflict are not random or unrelated. They are closely connected to geopolitics and the world system of globalized capitalism.

The debate on the social consequences of climate change is increasingly concentrated on security concerns (WBGU 2007; Busby 2007; CDA 2007; Dyer 2010; Stern 2014). Despite scepticism in the scientific community regarding the empirical basis (Gledditsch 2012), “climate wars” are framed as conflicts over dwindling water resources, arable land and grazing grounds. This public discourse concentrates on civil conflict in the Global South; it draws on Afropessimistic and Orientalistic caricatures. It is informed by an older “environmental security” debate on scarcity of natural resources, population pressure and conflict (Homer-Dixon 1999; Baechler 1999; for a critique, Dalby 2009).

Food insecurity as a consequence of adverse climatic change is one of the main variables that are prone to destabilize societies, according to proponents of this discourse: The Darfur conflict (Faris 2007; Ban 2007), the 2011 Revolution in Egypt (Brown 2011; Sternberg 2013), the Syrian Uprising (Femia and Werrell 2013) have all been connected to climate change and its negative impact on food systems.

However, it is necessary to analyse the root causes of food insecurity in the context of an instable, growth-based capitalist world system. The received truth that mismanagement of resources and overpopulation are responsible for food insecurity crises is highly problematic. Climatic extremes have a potential to compromise food security, but volatile markets, government neglect, and violence also contribute to the problem.

The paper is an attempt to deconstruct the neo-Malthusian argument that food insecurity as a consequence of climatic change and population growth is a root cause of conflict. The political ecology approach (e.g. Robbins 2012) asks for the economic conditions that produce hunger and malnutrition, it looks at winners and losers of ecologic change. In the context of climate change, it can be observed that discourses of scarce resources can reinforce conflict. Large-scale land acquisitions in poor countries (Anseeuw et al 2012), for example, are motivated by a double incentive to invest in land for energy and food production. These incentives are closely connected to the debates on climate change and resource scarcity. Accordingly, there is an indirect but powerful relation between climate change discourses and conflict over land.

The motives of people that engage in conflicts over food prizes, land enclosures, or water rights are complex. Ultimately, there is a strong sense of injustice that leads to a loss of legitimacy on the side of the people in power. If central government or local rulers fail to acknowledge grievances over basic needs, there is an erosion of authority.

This notion has been conceptualized as moral economy (Thompson 1971; Scott 1976); however, it hardly features in the debate on climate change, resource scarcity and conflict.

There is a tendency to “solve” ecologic and social crises through militarization and financialization (Keucheyan 2014). The paper shows that these tendencies apply to the dynamics of climate change and food security. It argues for a strategy of food sovereignty and enhancing local resilience to counter the securization of the misery which is chronic food insecurity.

\* The title is borrowed from a song of US punk band Bad Religion