INTRODUCTION

Environmental Security in Transnational Contexts: What Relevance for Regional Human Security Regimes?

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ABSTRACT The year 2015 was meant to be a seminal year in global geopolitics due to the transition from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This transition was significant because the MDGs, even though they raised global consciousness around the need to combat poverty, remained indicator-based, and thus, they did not adequately address socio-economic inequalities and power imbalances in global affairs. For this reason, much of the discussion surrounding the definition of the SDGs and the post-2015 global development agenda contextualized sustainable development within the framework of ‘transformation’, specifically prioritizing concepts such as equity, security, justice, and rights. While these debates correctly discussed power imbalances and relational obstacles to human development they remained abstract because they focused only on the international level. In this regard, discussions did not adequately examine mechanisms that facilitate or block the emergence of sustainable development as a political priority, nor did they address specific policy proposals to link environmental justice to human development strategies. Thus, this special issue introduction argues that human and environmental security should be framed in terms of transnational discussions rather than being limited to international debates. The special issue undertakes an examination of the interactions between human and environmental security, border studies, and comparative regional integration; and interactions between competing globalizations. The articles in the special issue address the relationships between international norms, transnational human and environmental security issues, and the regionalization of governance.

Keywords: environmental security, human security, transnationalism, region-building, sustainable development

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Introduction

The year 2015 was meant to be a seminal year in global geopolitics due to the transition from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In short, this transition is significant because the MDGs, even though they raised global consciousness around the need to combat poverty, remained indicator-based, and thus, they did not adequately address socio-economic inequalities and power imbalances in global affairs. Conversely, the proposed SDGs are expanding the proposed number of objectives to be addressed in the post-2015 global development agenda from 8 to 17 and they include both sector-specific objectives such as SDG 6 (‘Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all’) to be addressed within nation-states and norm-based goals such as SDG 10 (‘Reduce inequality within and among countries’) and SDG 16 (‘Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels’) that also address relations between nation-states.

Much discussion has already taken place in international affairs in relation to the definition of the SDGs and the post-2015 global development agenda. Building on criticisms of the MDGs’ focus on indicators, many observers have contextualized sustainable development within the framework of ‘transformation’, specifically prioritizing concepts such as equity, security, justice, and rights (see Institute of Development Studies, 2015). For example, Jeffrey Sachs, Special UN Advisor on the MDGs has identified the need to move beyond poverty-reduction to a ‘triple bottom line’ approach that includes economic development, environmental sustainability, and social inclusion (Sachs, 2012). This approach has been echoed by other observers, such as Battacharya, Khan and Salma (2014) who included in their comment on the report of the UN Open Working Group on SDGs their opinion that the document has not significantly addressed ‘a consensus on transformative development’ that identifies which aspects of the SDGs are ‘universal’ and which ones are ‘national’. Martens (2015) has also indicated that the SDGs must embrace a ‘universal’ approach to development in order to promote real change in development cooperation relationships that address power imbalances in international economic and financial systems.

While these debates correctly identify power imbalances and obstacles to human development, defined as development aimed at maximizing human capabilities (see United Nations Human Development Report, 1994), they remain abstract because they focus only on the international level. In this regard, discussions do not adequately examine mechanisms that facilitate or block the emergence of sustainable development as a political priority, nor do they address specific policy proposals to link environmental justice to human development strategies.

This special issue, which results from a writers’ workshop sponsored by the Consortium for Comparative Research on Regional Integration and Social Cohesion (RISC) and the University of Luxembourg funded HUMENITY (Human and Environmental Security in Border Regions: Cross-regional Perspectives) research project, contends that international approaches to sustainable development strategies, linking environmental, and human security discussions need to be grounded in transnational contexts defined as local frameworks that cross nation-state borders. It makes these arguments for two reasons: (1) threats to environmental security often cross borders and for this reason, domestic policies are no longer sufficient to address these threats. Bilateral and multilateral cooperation is a necessity today in transnational environmental governance aimed at resolving specific environmental problems. Moreover, inter-state competition can contribute to the exacerbation of threats to environmental security; (2) throughout the world, the proliferation of regional integration has added an important level of governance in the field of
human security which is often ignored. Even though degrees of region-building vary significantly, every world region has witnessed in one way or another, the cession of sovereignty by nation-states to regional bodies in determined policy arenas that affect human security.

For these reasons, this special issue argues that human and environmental security should be framed in terms of transnational discussions rather than being limited to international debates in response to the research question ‘How does cross-border environmental security relate to international discussions of human security, such as those that characterize the 2015 SDG debates?’

The special issue focuses on the emergence of the human and environmental security paradigms internationally and above all, their application (or lack thereof) at the local, cross-border level. Specifically, the special issue identifies regional human security regimes as important vehicles for the transmission of international norms to transnational environmental security strategies. In doing so, its originality is the comparative examination of the interactions between human and environmental security, border studies, and comparative regional integration, three fields of research which have rarely been linked despite their relevance to each other. These connections are significant because human and environmental security are not only objective measures of risks/threats to human well-being, they are subjective policy concepts that are socially/politically constructed through competing globalizations (e.g. international organizations, transnational social movements, cross-border institutions, etc.). The interconnections between these globalizations are the focus of this special issue.

**The Emergence of Human and Environmental Security**

Security politics have changed radically since the end of the Cold War. Previously, this concept had been defined in state-terms as the national security paradigm placed countries squarely at the center of analyses and threats were viewed militarily. Since the end of the Cold War, however, our frameworks of analysis have changed significantly as two new security paradigms emerged which focused on individuals rather than states: Human Security and Environmental Security. These concepts, which derive from the United Nations Development Programme’s (UNDP) milestone 1994 Human Development Report and the 1987 Brundtland Report, famously discuss ‘freedom from want’ and ‘freedom from fear’ as benchmarks for human security and ‘development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’ as the basis for environmental security (as well as the definition of sustainable development). While the declaration of these concepts indicated an important paradigm shift, critics rightfully argue that the vagueness of these ideas has hindered their effectiveness. Moreover, important debates have arisen focusing on whether/how environmental security should be embedded in human security approaches. These questions are central to the post-2015 SDG Agenda where leaders aim to strike a delicate balance between security, economic development, environmental conservation, social justice and governance.

**Security from What? Security for Whom? … It is all in the Definitions**

Politics, of course is about agenda-setting and conceptual definitions significantly affect policy strategies. In this regard, the emergence of human security and environmental security represent important developments in global affairs. First and foremost, these concepts broke state monopolies on security issues. Threats were no longer defined in state-terms and the protection of citizens was no longer assigned only to governments.
Classical theories of state-formation (see Tilly, 1993) have contended that citizens expect two things from their states: (1) protection and (2) the just provision of common goods and services. It is also accurate to note that in international relations, we have traditionally defined nation-states institutionally (see Grieco, 1988) as governments have been charged with providing the aforementioned protection and services when discussing global security. Instead, the human security and environmental security paradigms return security debates to classical political science definitions of the ‘State’ which is viewed as an organized political community that lives under a system of government (including identifiable rights and responsibilities) within an identifiable territory (see Almond, 1988). Under this definition, the focus of security shifts away from governments and reintroduces citizens as both the agents and subjects of security politics (see Gomez, 2015).

Of course, ‘bringing the people back in’ to security debates has democratized discussions and led to more representative processes. This explains the differences between the government negotiations that led to the more restrictive MDGs and the participative consultation process known as ‘The World We Want’ which has preceded the proposed SDGs and indicated that they will be more transformative in nature. However, this conceptual strength of human security and environmental security paradigms has also been its weakness: international policy-making in these fields has rarely surpassed the stage of summity.

‘Sustainable Development’, ‘Human Security’, and ‘Environmental Security’ are all concepts that gained prominence in the 1980s through international summits. During this period, international organizations such as the United Nations (UN) and the European Union (EU) began breaking with traditional notions of development that focused on financial transfers between rich and poor countries. Many development treaties, such as the European Union’s Lomé Conventions directly resulted from colonial traditions (the Lomé Conventions were championed in the European agenda by the French). In a break from this approach, The International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) presented sustainable development as the objective of its World Conservation Strategy. The position that was forwarded shifted the focus of development from economics to ecology and ‘Environmental Security’ emerged.

In 1987, the aforementioned Brundtland Report was published under the title *Our Common Future* which oriented security debates toward the future rather than the (colonial) past. This was followed in 1992 by the UN Conference on Environment and Development’s Earth Charter which highlighted the need to build a just, sustainable, and peaceful society. This document, and the ensuing *Agenda 21* action plan, infused the notion of sustainable development with important socio-political themes. The concept of ‘sustainability’ was broadened and linked to the notions of human rights, human security, environmental conservation, the protection of indigenous peoples, etc. It has become virtually impossible to politically oppose sustainable development because of its multifaceted, complex nature which includes attractive themes for a diverse group of proponents.

This process culminated in the establishment of the MDGs in 2000. In many ways, the Millennium Development Summit, held at the United Nations in New York, represents the apex of global affairs. Following the establishment of eight MDGs, all 189 United Nations member states at the time committed to help achieve these goals. This historical moment represents the first declared global commitment to the eradication of poverty and it signified the inclusion of environmental security and human security into the universal global political consciousness on development.

Since 2000, however, sustainable development discussions have been faced with considerable difficulties. The summits that were championed as political endorsements of sustainability and
progressive steps forward in the 1990s, often ended in frustration in the 2000s. For example (and most visibly), the 2009 United Nations Climate Change Conference (the Copenhagen Conference) was characterized by disarray, in-fighting, and political disagreement between the United States and its allies and the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, South Africa, India, and China). Similarly, the 2012 Rio + 20 Summit illustrated the limits of consensus in global sustainable development debates. The summit achieved renewed support from world leaders for sustainable development as a political objective. However, many participants were frustrated by the lack of operationalized commitments toward sustainability. While ‘sustainable development’ is not synonymous with ‘human security’ and ‘environmental security’, it does encompass these concepts in a vision of development. For this reason, one could say that the SDGs are premised by human and environmental security. While the declaration of these goals does represent a step forward in defining human and environmental security, it is yet to be seen whether it will actually lead to operationalized policy strategies. Given this inherent weakness in international discussions of human and environmental security, this special issue contends that transnational approaches should be examined as a means to implement these norms.

**Human and Environmental Security in Transnational Contexts**

Threats to security have become one of the most prominent themes in border politics throughout the world. Issues such as unauthorized migration, drug trafficking, human trafficking, arms trafficking, etc. have all become associated with contemporary border debates. In fact, scholars such as Andreas (2000), Brunet-Jailly (2007), and Sabet (2013) have noted that borders now occupy center stage in most national security discussions. This is also evident in the important increases in the budgets of border control agencies such as FRONTEX (European Union) and Homeland Security (United States). This scholarship also notes that globalizations have re-defined security threats from issues concerning the protection of the integrity of territories to questions related to the management of globalized flows.

These flows, in fact, are the forces that led to the emergence of human and environmental security in localized transnational security discussions. Whereas previous security paradigms aimed at ‘securing a country’s borders’, the presence of flows have forced local authorities to collaborate with their counterparts on the other side of national divides in order to combat common security threats. Cornelius (2004), Koff (2008), and Ceballos (2011) have empirically demonstrated that the incentive structures of local authorities in regard to security issues often contradict those of national officials. Stated more directly, local border communities are often the victims of collateral damage of centralized decision-making in the field of security (see Cortez-Lara, 2012; Maganda, 2005). When central governments close and or militarize borders, the socio-economic and environmental costs of these decisions are often quite high for border populations.

Consequently, whereas international security debates often remain conceptual and normative in nature, transnational security discussions are generally issue-based. The rich literature on borderlands studies has noted that threats related to human and environmental security have emerged as political priorities for cross-border communities where the impacts are felt on a daily basis. These include issues such as: water security, environmental risk and disasters, land and air pollution, organized crime, unauthorized migration, contraband and trafficking of illegal goods, etc. Moreover, much scholarship in the fields of borderlands studies (see Bruns et al., 2013; Kopinak, 2004; Peberdy, 2000; Staudt, 1998) has posited that the liberalization of regional markets through economic globalization has contributed to social marginalization
and the rise of informal economies as threats to human and environmental security in many cross-border areas (see Koff & Maganda, 2014). Moreover, these socio-economic forces have contributed to social unrest and citizen dissatisfaction in many border regions. For this reason, scholars such as Staudt (2008), Simpson (2013), etc. have documented increased social mobilization amongst citizens of border communities against national authorities on human and environmental security issues. In parts of the world where government representatives and state structures are weak or illegitimate, these forms of social mobilization have been converted into rebellion which has further exacerbated transnational security problems in those areas (see Syria/Iraq; Mali; Pakistan/Afghanistan, etc.). These border regions are in fact, often characterized by informal structures of authority that are more powerful and sometimes more legitimate locally than formal state structures.

This specific trait of transnational human and environmental security discussions is also a defining characteristic: because representative cross-border security structures are rare, most discussions in this field are informal in nature. While decision-making structures do exist in some policy arenas, such as cross-border water councils or economic development and planning bodies, etc. security is only one policy issue discussed within broader governance systems and as such, it is not prioritized. For this reason, observers such as Payan (2006) have noted that cross-border security discussions are defined by an inherent democratic deficit. Paradoxically, whereas international security debates are becoming more consultative, localized cross-border security discussions are evolving in the opposite direction as decisions are being made behind closed doors. This is leading to political tensions within border communities where human and environmental security are serious political issues that affect the quality of life of local inhabitants. What could be an answer to this paradox? Some observers (see Kirchner & Dominguez, 2011; van Langenhove et al., 2009) have proposed regional responses to human and environmental security problems. This is the subject of the following section.

Regional Integration and Human and Environmental Security: Caught Between a Rock and a Hard Place?

Harlan Koff’s contribution to this special issue has cited the emergence of the literature on regional security regimes and their relationship to both human and environmental security issues. Fawcett (2013) has noted that ‘security regionalisms’ have become prominent in specific security fields (e.g. border controls, migration policies, anti-terrorism, etc.) but that, in general, these organizations have not developed strong regional security institutions. Similarly, van Langenhove et al. (2009) have recognized the significant contributions that numerous regional organizations have made to the protection of human security in different world regions. They too, however, have contended that the successful implementation of human security policies depends on multilevel governance and coordinated actions at the supranational, national, and sub-national levels.

These studies, amongst others, provide clues as to why environmental security has not figured prominently in regional security regimes. They have indicated that unlike other policy arenas where regions have taken leading roles in policy implementation, security has remained an issue dominated by member states which are hesitant to cede authority to regional organizations over hard security questions. This is evident in the European Union where Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) has been one of the policy arenas in which supranationalism has been slowest to develop (see Hix & Hoyland, 2011).
The most complete comparative study in this field has been conducted by Kirchner and Dominguez (2013). These authors examined the relationship between regional security performance and the domestic economic and political conditions of 14 regional organizations’ member states. In general, the authors of this study noted that member states have readily supported regional organizations in the definition of regional security policies. However, their support has waned through the policy coordination and implementation stages. Consequently, member states supported regional security discourse without necessarily supporting operationalized regional security policies.

These studies, amongst other, have documented institutionalized difficulties for the implementation of human and environmental security at the regional level. In fact, despite the fact that regional organizations seem to be well placed in the international system of governance to address both international and transnational human and environmental security questions, these bodies suffer from important strategic weaknesses that limit their actions in these fields. First, it must be noted that most regional organizations do not participate in the UN system where human and environmental security norms are defined. The EU was invited to participate in the 2015 SDG Summit as an observer but non-UN regional bodies generally cannot actively participate in the discussions that define international human and environmental security norms. Borrowing from the literature on policy coherence for development, defined as policy measures that aim to assure that development policies are not undermined by actions in non-development policy spheres, this situation can be considered an important inter-institutional incoherence because, by excluding regional organizations from the definitions of norms, the international system is blocking an important policy exchange mechanism. Regional organizations have less incentive to implement human and environmental security policies because they do not appropriate them as their own from the beginning.

Of course, the member states of these regional bodies are present at international summits where human and environmental security norms are defined. In theory, they would upload these norms to the regional level. However, this process is too closely related to power-sharing issues in regionalism. Scholars such as Kuhnhardt (2010) have noted that states are reluctant to cede sovereignty to regional bodies. Even though regions are well placed to link international human and environmental security norms to concrete transnational security strategies, the cession of sovereignty in ‘soft’ security domains could be viewed as a threat to sovereignty on ‘hard’ security issues (such as national defense) through policy spillover. For this reason, member states are reluctant to reinforce regional architectures in this policy arena and commitments to human and environmental security remain discursive in nature.

Finally, it must be noted that human and environmental security strategies are not necessarily implemented by regional organizations because of the important democratic deficits that characterize many of these bodies. This introduction has already indicated that human security and environmental security are policy objectives that have been championed by non-governmental organizations and they have emerged in a policy-making process in the field of international development that is increasingly becoming characterized by public consultation and civil society representation. Unfortunately, this process has not yet been replicated by many regional organizations. On one hand, many regional bodies are not inclusive as effective environmental governance structures are lacking and policy-making is characterized by a dearth of public information on the access to natural resources (see Maganda, 2008). However, it is also true that many member states do not foster public participation in regional policy-making because this indirectly weakens the position of nation-states within regions by directly legitimizing the authority of regional bodies in specific policy arenas, such as security. Consequently, even though
regions are well placed structurally to reconcile the international and transnational components of human and environmental security, these deficiencies that presently characterize regional governance in many parts of the world must be addressed before regional organizations can realize their policy-making potential. The articles included in this special issue address these relationships between international norms, transnational issues, and regional governance.

**Presentation of the Special Issue**

As stated above, this special issue examines the complex relationships between international norms, transnational human and environmental security debates, and the regionalization of governance. The articles presented here aim to contribute to human and environmental security debates by examining these different elements of security politics as well as the mechanisms that link them. Another added value of the special issue is its focus on different world regions. The articles that follow include comparative regional analysis as well as case studies on human and environmental security issues in Europe, Asia, and the Americas. By varying the regional cases, the special issue accounts for how human, and environmental security norms are contextualized differently in distinct parts of the world within the framework of comparative analysis. This is one of the originalities of the research promoted by the RISC Consortium (www.risc.lu).

The first part of the special issue directly addresses international norms in the fields of human security and environmental security. The lead article, by Harlan Koff, comparatively examines environmental security regimes in 16 regional organizations and asks whether regions can effectively implement international environmental security norms. The article highlights the differences between international and transnational approaches to human and environmental security and it discusses how policy implementation amongst regional organizations reflects the character of their own regional security architectures more than normative commitments to environmental justice. The article contends that the emergence of regional environmental security regimes should be fostered by reinforcing regional security architectures through public participation mechanisms.

This is followed by a contribution from Carmen Maganda that questions the meaning of international norms in the field of environmental security. Maganda asks, ‘Why is it relevant to discuss water security issues in cases where water availability and accessibility do not seem to be a problem?’ In her response to this query, the author contends that international norms, in order to be universal, must be supported in states where they may not directly benefit from those norms. This human rights logic asks: What value do human rights have if they are not implemented universally? Empirically, Maganda operationalizes this conceptual approach through the study of the Human Right to Water and Sanitation in the European Union and particularly, in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, a small, wealthy state that is characterized by water surplus. The article questions whether environmental security has indeed emerged as an international norm given that resistance has characterized the responses of EU and Luxembourgish water officials to human rights approaches to water management.

The second grouping of articles included in this special issue focuses specifically on policy relationships between regional governance and environmental security. The contribution by Stephen Mumme examines the politics of water allocation on the United States-Mexico border since the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994. The article contends that while NAFTA reforms have modestly changed the water allocation regime, they have not altered longstanding power relationships governing the allocation
of water resources between the two countries. The case evidence suggests that theoretical constructs related to environmental security and regional governance, such as multilevel governance and collaborative watershed management, etc., are often overshadowed/undermined by more comprehensive power-sharing relationships within regional regimes.

The article by Andrea Gerlak and Farhad Mukhtarov also opens the black box of regional governance in the field of environmental security. This contribution examines how security is framed in the context of international river basin organizations (RBOs). RBOs are key regional organizations in transboundary water governance and operate in many international river basins around the world. As an example of cross-border governance, RBOs can promote joint cooperation and information sharing, and serve as a forum to bring together diverse stakeholders, thus reinforcing environmental security. The article examines how diverse actors frame security in the context of RBOs and at various scales and around certain management actions in a case study of the Mekong River Commission. Particular attention is paid to the links between water security, food security, and energy security in the broader water and development discourse, thus linking environmental security to human security issue arenas.

These transnational security issue arenas are the focus of the third grouping of articles included in this special issue. Jeroen Warner’s contribution discusses whether linkage promotes transnational cooperation and political integration in cross-border water management. Linkage is conceptualized through a juxtaposition that is highlighted by the author through a typology that asks whether linkages between actors or issues are simply (but irrevocably) there, such as geographical proximity, or if they need to be deliberatively, artificially connected through an intervention to establish linkage that previously was not there. Warner applies this idea to the transboundary lower river Meuse and ‘finds its history of integration to be a tortuous one’ that is not linear and at various times has been characterized by cooperation and conflict which has affected both linkages and de-linkages. The author contends that transnational linkages in water security have not established broader regional integration in the field of environmental security through spillover.

The final article presented here, by Bastien Sepulveda and Sylvain Guyot, focuses on the management of protected areas in transboundary contexts and empirically examines the contemporaneous evolution of the border between Chile and Argentina in Northern Patagonia, which is a region that has witnessed the creation of numerous protected areas that are currently claimed by Mapuche organizations and communities as part of their customary territory. In response to these claims, both states have progressively integrated Mapuche communities into the management of protected areas through specific agreements. A new environmental governance model that includes the protection of indigenous peoples’ rights is under construction not only along but also across the border between Chile and Argentina. Therefore, the authors contend that participatory management could be viewed as a tool for redefining borders through policy spillover by linking environmental security in protected areas to human security issues, such as the protection of ethnic groups’ rights. Such cross-border participative approaches, of course, ground the international norms described above related to human security and environmental security in tangible transnational policy strategies and they also strengthen the institutional bases for regional governance, thus closing the analytical circle presented in this special issue and suggesting potential avenues for future progress.

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