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Global Governance: Political Authority in Transition

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Political Geoecology for the Anthropocene

WB63: Wednesday, 16 March, 10:30 AM - 12:15 PM

**Panel: Coping with Global Environmental Change, Disasters
and Security: Threats, Challenges, Vulnerabilities and Risks**

Sponsor: Environmental Section



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1. Political Geoeology for the Anthropocene

- **Thesis: Fundamental change in earth history requires a rethinking of the relationship between humankind and nature, including the political realm and international relations, that makes geopolitical approaches in the Hobbesian tradition obsolete.**
- During Anthropocene our thinking on peace and security must change. The Anthropocene period of Earth history is influenced by human interventions into the earth system.
- In **Anthropocene**: nature of threat for survival of humankind is changing from **'them' to 'us'**, to our lifestyle & consumption of fossil energy that has resulted in **major increases of greenhouse gases since 1750 and 2/3 of increases occurred during past 50 years**
- If 'we' are the threat it is impossible to fight a war against ourselves. To cope with this threat to human well-being, survival and security **a radical change in our thinking on international relations and security is needed**. This new threat is global in nature and does not respect national borders or political systems, nor does it discriminate between the 'good' and 'bad'.

2. Components of a Political Geoecology

Political geoecology: combines 4 components:

- A sensitivity for Braudel's three historical times or for three temporal dimensions of events, cycles, structures
- Three features of the notion of 'policy' (field), 'politics' (process) and 'polity' (legal structures, institutional framework):
- Reference to 'geo' specific spatialization that is **delinked from the Hobbesian tradition of notions of 'geopolitics', 'geo-strategy' and 'geo-economics'**;
- Reflecting research on the environment from
 - physical geography (*geoecology*),
 - natural sciences on *earth systems science*,
 - from a wider & holistic *social* and *human ecology* approaches.

3. 'Geo' Approaches to the Spatial Effects of GEC

- Both the old and the new approaches of geopolitics & related issue areas of **geo-strategy, geo-economics, and geo-culture** have addressed issues of international politics from a perspective of **political geography** where spatial categories are essential. Since the end of the Cold War, geo-political considerations within geography in particular experienced a renaissance with the emergence of new scholarly journals.
- **Several phases of geopolitical thinking can be distinguished:**
 - old primarily German and Swedish school of *Geopolitik* and the British and American approaches to *geopolitics* and *geo-strategy*,
 - recent revival of geopolitics in the UK and the US, of ***géopolitique in France*** and its impact on the renewed thinking on ***Geopolitica in Italy*** & Spain, as well as in Cuba, Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, and other countries in Latin America in the 1990's, of *Geopolitik* in Germany, and in Israel
 - **postmodern approaches to critical geopolitics in the tradition of the deconstructivist schools and other new approaches partly provoked as a geopolitical response to the globalization challenge.**
- **Hobbesian obsession of geopolitics (in terms of its power orientation) makes it obsolete for Anthropocene.**

4. Bringing the Environment into the Geopolitical Discourse

- Debate on GEC & climate change triggered new proposals for a spatialization of environmental issues: *ecological geopolitics & political geoecology*.
- While **Dalby** approached *eco-geopolitics* from critical geopolitics to challenge the framing of environmental matters in terms of national security, **Brauch** argued that a *political geoecology* is needed that combines the regional implications of GEC and its potential outcomes: disasters, environmentally-induced migration, crises, and conflicts.
- New geopolitical context of the Anthropocene requires a **forward looking, anticipatory understanding of security**, not the old one that emphasizes monitoring borders, providing insurance or cleaning up after a disaster.
- Both **geoecology & Anthropocene** suggest that old assumptions of environment determining human fate are no longer tenable, because carbon fuel use has already changed environmental conditions.
- **Old geopolitics diverts attention from new circumstances, refers to an inappropriate geography to suggest inevitability of conflict when large scale cooperation is needed to deal with the changes that are in motion due to use of carbon fuels & numerous other changes.**

5. Political Geoecology vs. Traditional Geopolitics

- **Political geoecology** suggests a more explicit focus on **ecology** and also a clear indication that **human choices** are shaping the future world.
- Recognition of **significance of our actions** as the debate about climate change suggests to people the profound **choices our predecessors & we** made in **shaping the future condition of the biosphere**.
- The most important theme for all concerned about security in the 21st century, the **inapplicability of traditional geopolitical notions of an external environment for discussions of human security**.

6. New Spatial Approaches in the Anthropocene: Geoecology & Earth Systems Analysis or Science

Combining Human, Social, and Geoecology:

- Analysis of security impacts of GEC in the Anthropocene requires knowledge produced by **geoecology in physical geography, earth system science and by social and human ecology approaches.**
- **A proactive security policy in the Anthropocene** must be knowledge-based, and requires a **different knowledge** from what intelligence agencies offer policy-makers, and traditional security experts trained in the Hobbesian tradition of security studies can offer.
- **A new security policy in and for the Anthropocene** necessitates for the new security dangers posed by GEC a **new policy framework** that integrates **experience of past nature-human interactions** as well as the **scenario- and model-based projections of the probable societal outcomes of future trends.**
- New security policy requires a **new peace policy** in the 21st century that combines **'sustainable development'** with **'sustainable peace'**.

7. From „Ecological“ Geopolitics to Political Geoecology

- **Both discourses on spatialization of IR and security & on the nature-human interactions have 2 major deficits:**
 - the discourse on **geopolitics, geostrategy and geoeconomics in the social sciences has been dominated by the Hobbesian pessimism and ignoring environmental concerns and issues of global environmental change** as dangers for security and survival;
 - the newly emerging research in the natural sciences on Lovelock’s **Gaia hypothesis, geoecology in geography, and *Earth Systems Analysis* (ESA) or *Earth Systems Science* (ESS)** has ignored the political dimension of transforming this new systemic knowledge into proactive policy initiatives
- **Bringing the Environment into the Security Discourse**
- **Introducing the Political Dimension into the Research on Nature-Human Interactions in ESS .**

8. Towards an Integrative Concept of a Political Geoecology

- *Political geoecology* should, by bringing the environment into spatializations of international politics and security & by introducing a political and economic dimension into the discourses on geoecology and earth systems analyses (ESA) or science (ESS), overcome these dangers.
- **Thus, *political geoecology* combines three components:**
 - ‘***political***’ dimension of the transformation of complex knowledge into innovative and proactive action;
 - spatial of ‘***geo***’ **contextualization** of this new knowledge and action;
 - ***ecological focus on the human-nature interface*** during Anthropocene that combines approaches of geo-, social, human and political ecology.
- ***A political geoecology* will be used in a wider sense than the narrow approach of geoecologists in phys. geography.**

9. Political Geoecology: New Field of Research & Education

- Political geoecology focuses on linkages or transmitters of **translating knowledge into action**.
- It aims at a conceptual integration of 2 research approaches in the social and natural sciences that requires an **integrative approach to address the biophysical & societal causes & impacts of nature-human interaction in the Anthropocene**.
- The most important point of all is the simple one implicit in the use of the term **Anthropocene**; the **context for thinking about security has been changed by our actions**.
- **Knowledge must be recontextualized if it is to be useful for policy, research, education & political action.**

10. Research on Political Geoecology

- The new security dangers posed by GEC in the Anthropocene pose a dual challenge for scientific endeavours and political action.
- In science transdisciplinary approaches are needed that address the linkage themes of several disciplines both
 - within the natural (geoecology, ESA, ESS) and the
 - social sciences (political science, law, economics, anthropology, sociology, psychology) and
 - between both reflecting Wilson's (1998) call for 'consilience'.

11. Anticipatory Learning

- In Anthropocene, past experiences may be of limited relevance & policy guidance, especially with regard to the security dangers posed by GEC & by the unpredictable potential tipping points in the global environmental system.
- Traditional worldviews often filter out new information, especially from other schools of thought & disciplines, and may thus be resistant to learning. Booth argued that 'old mindsets' often have distorted the assessment of 'new challenges'.
- Thus, *anticipatory learning* requires that both analysts & policymakers foresee the negative impacts and the socio-economic consequences of the global environmental change that can pose a *survival dilemma* in the decades to come.
- *Anticipatory learning* is the domain of long-range & interdisciplinary discourses, & to a limited extent of foreign policy planning staffs of national governments. As long-term *structural challenges* do not require urgent responses, sufficient time exists for the establishment of conceptually focused and policy-oriented *epistemic communities* with gender and regional balances.

12. Political Initiatives on Political Geoeology and Organized Civil Society

- In the political realm, a horizontal interdepartmental or interministerial cooperation within governments & between different international organizations must overcome lack of coordination.
- Initiatives for action on the security dimension of the nature-human interface are needed on behalf of the state as well as by societal and economic actors to set up the political agenda-setting, with a prioritization of goals and the allocation of resources for adaptation, mitigation, and resilience-building.
- New socially constructed knowledge that has emerged during the past three decades affects all three features of the political dimension of *policy*, *politics*, and *polity* that are outlined below.
- Socially constructed knowledge of ESS on the nature-human interface of GEC issues may create basis for proactive policies if the societal forces overcome the interest-based and ideology-driven worldviews and mindsets that are often determined by past experiences and short-term political and profit interests.

13. Requirements of Political Geoecology

- A strategy for a political geoecology requires scholars & policy-makers to shift from **looking backward to looking forward**, to move from **confrontative or power-focused & national interest-based to global cooperative negotiation-focused concepts**, & from **reactive to proactive concepts of action**, from **aid to justice, equity and solidarity**.
- In the context of Anthropocene, security can no longer be understood in the traditional geopolitical thinking of using force to prevent external depredations.
- Ecological thinking, and the recognition that we are making our future, requires us to look to **vulnerabilities**, and to the multiple causes and reinforcing processes of these vulnerabilities in particular places.
- Security must be thought of in terms of what we are making.

14. Overcoming the Hobbesian Obsession of Geopolitics

- Thinking on and conceptualizing a new ‘political geology for the Anthropocene’ is a contribution to the change in prevailing worldviews & mindsets in intern. relations focused on ‘international peace & security’.
- The Anthropocene makes the point about establishing conditions of respect for treaties and laws ever more important, because these conditions are now increasingly of our own making, in both the infrastructure that powers society and, on the large scale, shapes the condition of the biosphere for future generations.

15. Security Policy in the Anthropocene

- The proposed **political geocology** combines the *political orientation*, with a *spatial focus* that connects different scales by implementing the many visions, perspectives and programmes for a sustainable development into action to prevent that both the linear projections of ‘dangerous climate change’ and the possible tipping points in the earth system become reality.
- **Securitization implies that policy-makers upgrade the dangers posed by global environmental change to issues ‘of utmost importance’ that ‘require extraordinary measures’.**
- **This new securitization must overcome** the narrow focus on ‘national security’. If humans pose these new security dangers, then **the traditional military strategies, policies, measures, and tools will gradually become obsolete**. These new security dangers do not distinguish among countries and they cannot be countered by military superiority, they cannot be addressed by weapons of mass destruction.
- **The new security policy in the Anthropocene** to cope with the dangers posed by GEC requires **primarily non-military instruments**. It requires a gradual reallocation of scarce resources for technological innovations for strategies of adaptation and mitigation with the impacts of GEC & global & regional climate change. This requires foremost a change of thinking of nationalist and fundamentalist ideologies in order “to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war” but also “to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom”, and finally “to establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained”.
- **Technical solutions are bound to fail if a comprehensive political strategy for a progressive global green economy, but also a change in human lifestyles and social responsibility, is lacking.**

16. Towards a Sustainable Peace in the Anthropocene

For the transition to the Anthropocene Era of Earth History we need for the 21st century

- A Copernican Revolution in thinking for sustainability**
- A Fourth Sustainable Revolution**
- A Strategy for a sustainability transition**
- A New Nonmilitary Security Agenda**
- New realistic conceptual visions as guidelines for action**
 - Vision of a sustainability transition (John Grin/Rotmans/Schot 2010)**
 - Vision of a decarbonization of the economy**
 - Vision of efficiency revolution: Ernst Ulrich von Weizsäcker: Factor 4**
 - Vision of an energetic imperative: Hermann Scheer (2010)**

Political Geoeology for the Anthropocene: A scientific agenda to bring security into Earth Systems Science

17. Policy Vision & Perspective:

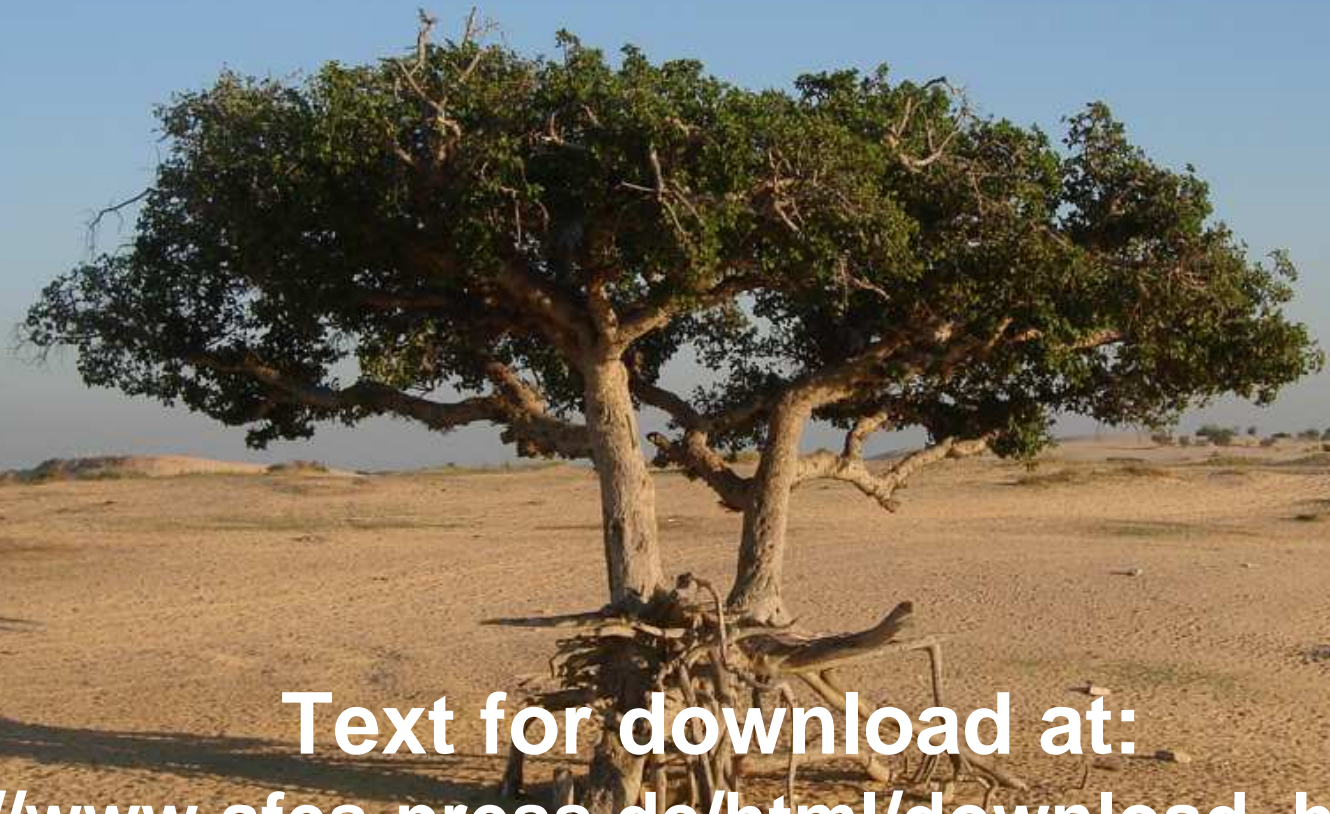
Towards Sustainable Peace & Fourth Sustainable Revolution

- **Goal: stabilization of temperature increase at 2°C in global average temperature by 2100:**
 - -50% global reduction of GHG, or 80% for OECD countries
 - Major transformation and de-carbonization of the economy
- **Combination of sustainable development strategy & peace policy: sustainable peace to prevent that GEC issues pose a threat to international peace.**
- **Fundamental transformation & demilitarization of security is needed not a militarization of the environment, as we are the threat & solution.**

18. Conclusions

- In traditional security, violence is used to control spaces, & not only borders. ESA suggests that this is simply inappropriate for dealing with GEC & human security.
- The assumption that security is a spatial strategy of dominating & controlling an external environment, is inappropriate.
- We are not on the Earth; we are part of the earth, once one thinks in ecological terms.
- Security is common for all of us because we are all connected.
- And if fellow humans are forced to migrate in search of a livelihood, whether because of slow environmental changes or rapid onset disasters, our security is involved. How that response happens is crucial.
- International aid efforts are frequent in the face of disaster, but in terms of their ability to prevent and cope they are frequently inadequate, mostly absent, and often too late.

**Thank you
for your attention
and patience.**



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Global Environmental and Human Security Handbook for the Anthropocene (GEHSHA)

