The issue of climate change-induced migration is fiercely debated in academic, political and public media discourses. These debates have long been dominated by alarmist threat images and projections of looming waves of hundreds of millions of climate refugees in the near future. Recently, such alarmist voices have been replaced by a more modest discourse, which revolves around the notion of resilience. In line with resilience thinking this discourse has stressed the complexity and multi-causality of climate-induced migration. Most importantly, climate migration has been normatively reevaluated – from posing a threat to (inter)national security to being a potential adaptation measure that might reduce the vulnerability of communities in climate hot-spot regions (see Scheffran et al., 2012). In the academic literature, there is a heated normative debate about this discursive shift. Some have welcomed the rise of resilience for its openness and departure from a defense-oriented approach to security (Corry, 2014). Others have condemned resilience as yet another expression of a neoliberal hegemony, which is shifting the burden of protection from state agencies to the vulnerable communities themselves (Bettini, 2014; Methmann and Oels, 2015).

The present article seeks to contribute to this ongoing debate by bringing in a fresh perspective on this debate that has so far been neglected: the perspective of gender discourse. It asks how we can evaluate the recent shift in discourses of climate-induced migration, when they are read through the lens of gender. Drawing on a poststructuralist understanding of gender, the article seeks to reveal the gendered subject positions and narratives in resilience thinking. For this, the first section very shortly introduces the poststructuralist understanding of gender and its operationalization. Section 2 distinguishes between two ideal-typical discourses of climate change, migration and security: a discourse that focuses on the linkages of climate change, conflict and migration revolving around a narrow concept of security, and a discourse of climate change, migration and adaptation, drawing upon the broader concept of resilience. Section 3 asks how we can explain the rise of the resilience concept when we read it through a lens of gender discourse. Section 4 uses this perspective to discuss the merits, problems and pitfalls of a resilience discourse as opposed to a narrow security discourse.

1 A poststructuralist perspective on gender and the environment

The discourse theoretical approach to gender applied in this study is based on three core ideas: anti-essentialism, post-foundationalism and the intrinsic relation between gender discourses and political power.

First, a poststructuralist take on gender opposes the idea that differences between the sexes are naturally given. In doing so, this perspective poses a challenge to essentialist feminist approaches including radical- or eco-feminism, which held that women would generally behave more peacefully or environmentally sustainable than men (Mies and Shiva, 1993; Tickner, 1992). A poststructuralist perspective does not deny that biological and material differences between the sexes exist but assumes these do not have any meaning unless they become discursively mediated (Butler, 1990). Following Hajer (1995, p. 44) discourses can be understood as historically specific ensembles of ideas, concepts and categorisation that are produced, reproduced and transformed in a particular set of practices and through which meaning is given to physical and social realities’. Gender discourses produce historically specific gendered subject positions, related attributions and behavioral norms, that are
embedded within and structured by broader discursive narratives and storylines.

Second, postfoundationalism means that these discursive structures are considered to be unstable and in constant flux as there is no ahistorical ground, no universal center of any discourse. Hence, the meaning of reality is contingent and gender discourses as well as related gendered subject positions, norms, and stereotypes shift over time (Nightingale, 2006, p. 165). However, by acting in accord with existing subject positions and by rearticulating dominant gender narratives, individuals also constantly reproduce discourses.

Third, discourses are intrinsically linked to (political) power (Foucault, 1991). By framing social and political problems in particular ways, discourses create a field of possibility for certain political instruments — or put more simply: they define which policy measures appear possible and appropriate to cope with the identified problems.

Following the assumption that environmental discourses are often highly gendered discourses (Arora-Jonsson, 2011; Leach, 2007; MacGregor, 2010) I apply the outlined perspective to reveal the gendered subjectivities, myths, and stereotypes in discourses on the relation between climate change, migration and security. The aim is to show how these discourses essentialize and naturalize gendered categories such as ‘women in the Global South’ as well as related vulnerabilities and to study the political implications of these essentialisms.

For this, the article draws on a variety of empirical sources, which each fulfill different tasks in the analytical process. Earlier research of the author (Boas and Rothe, 2016; Rothe, 2016) and additional secondary literature is used to identify two ideal-typical discourses on climate change, migration and security (see section 2). On the basis of this typology, the most recent resilience discourse on climate change and migration is re-read through the gender lens outlined above.

To do so, a corpus of 20 policy reports and publications on the relation between climate change, migration and resilience have been compiled. These include reports by three types of discursive actors; (1) academic institutions; (2) international organizations and government agencies; as well as (3) major NGOs and think tanks. These organizations have been selected as part of what Hartmann et al. (2016) call a ‘population-environment-development triangle’ (Hartmann et al., 2016): i.e. a growing cooperation of NGOs, think-tanks, international organizations, and academics working in the fields of development aid, environmental protection, population control and peacebuilding (see Figure 1). As this discourse is particularly strong in the Anglo-Saxon world only English sources have been included.

The theoretical perspective outlined above has been used to develop an analytical heuristic including categories such as gendered subject-positions and relating attributions, metaphors, as well as gender narratives and storylines. This heuristic has been used to code the empirical materials. Subsequently, the coded text parts have been interpreted and systematized to identify broader gender narratives and stereotypical patterns as well as to discuss their political implications.

2 Discourses of climate change, conflict and migration

Climate change-induced migration is a remarkable phenomenon: although clear causal links between climate...
change and migratory decisions cannot be established and research has proven many of the projected numbers of future ‘climate migrants’ wrong, the trope received considerable attention in Western public and political discourses (see Boas and Rothe 2016). In the following, two dominant discourses of climate change, migration and security linkages are described and read through a lens of gender.3

The hyper-masculinized discourse of climate change, conflict and migration

A first of these discourses that focus on climate-induced migration is a narrow security discourse informed by storylines that construct a nexus between climate change, resource scarcity, conflict and migration.4 Such storylines can be traced back to the ‘Limits of Growth’ report published by the Club of Rome in 1972, which painted a bleak scenario of a collapse of human and earth systems in the 21st century due to population growth and environmental degradation (Meadows et al., 1972). This rationale was rearticulated in prominent environmentalist publications of the late 20th century including, for example, the 1987 report ‘our common future’ of the so-called Brundtland Commission (Hartmann et al., 2016). At the same time, it strongly influenced scientific inquiries into the links between population growth, natural resource scarcity, violent conflict and migration (Homer-Dixon, 1991; Myers, 2002). In the 2000s, such ideas then became connected to the notion of climate conflicts (Burke et al., 2009). Arguments that linked environmental change to violent conflict were accompanied by alarmist projections of large numbers of environmental or climate refugees in the near future. Most famously Myers (2002, pp. 609–611) anticipated that 200 million people could be fleeing from sea-level rise and other negative effects of global warming in 2050. Different scholars have criticized the early climate change, conflict and migration discourse for its alarmist tone that constructs the vulnerability of the poor as a danger for the industrialized world – since climate-induced instabilities might spillover to the Global North through processes of international migration or regional conflicts (e.g. Bettini, 2014; Hartmann, 2014; Oels, 2013).

This discourse on climate change, conflict and migration is a highly gendered one. MacGregor (2010, p. 231), for example, holds that: ‘By securitising and militarising it, the environmental crisis becomes a problem that requires technical, diplomatic and military solutions, entirely consistent with hegemonic (hyper)masculinity’. The alarmist climate security discourse was embedded in a broader project of masculine-coded scientific rationalization of climate change related threats driven by a network of largely male, white scientists (MacGregor, 2010, p. 225). The aim was to measure, calculate, and visualize security risks – thereby making them ‘controllable’ and ‘manageable’. This masculinized image of global scientific control was then opposed to the gendered image of ‘women’s day-to-day work and knowledge’ (Leach, 2007, p. 80).

The masculine-coded discourse of rationalization is accompanied by a strong call for global scientific management and control of the global threat of climate change (Agarwal, 1992, pp. 191–192). Whereas the discourse positions men as the scientific and political managers of global security problems, women (in the so-called Global South) are framed as part of the problem (see Table 1). The key link that holds the causal chain between environmental change and migration together is the one between population growth and resource scarcity (Hartmann et al., 2016). The rationale of this ‘neo-Malthusian’ narrative is that environmental conflicts in the so-called Global South result from environmental change, paired with the problem of overpopulation and resulting overgrazing and over-farming of already deteriorating land. Along with these neo-Malthusian narratives comes thus a problematization of the fertility and reproductive behavior of women in the so-called Global South (Hartmann, 2014, p. 772). This neo-Malthusian degradation narrative produces a strong demand for paternalistic forms of control. During European imperialism, it supported political colonial interventions into domestic affairs such as the restructuring of agricultural systems. In the climate security discourse of the 2000s it supported calls for the development of governance mechanisms to manage and control climate-induced migration globally (Methmann and Oels, 2015, p. 56).

Some of the policy proposals even went beyond this paternalistic form of control and openly promoted population control to reduce climate related threats (Søsser, 2012, p. 35). An emerging ‘population-environment-development

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<th>Table 1. Discourses on climate-induced migration and underlying gender stereotypes</th>
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<td><strong>Discourse</strong></td>
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<td>Security concept</td>
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<td>Gendered rationalities/forms of knowledge</td>
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triangle’ (Hartmann et al., 2016) comprising Western defense actors, women’s rights activists and environmental NGOs promoted family planning measures in developing countries as a solution to problems like environmental degradation (MacGregor, 2010, p. 234; Sasser, 2012, p. 111). This adds a win-win spin to the neo-Malthusian narrative outlined above: reducing women’s fertility helps mitigate climate change related security risks, but at the same time empowers women in vulnerable regions. What this win-win narrative masks is that forms of population control in the name of the environment can take very violent forms. Reid (2014), for example, describes how the problematization of the rural illiterate poor in the Indian regions of Bihar and Madhya Pradesh as possible climate migrants by the UK Department of International Development (DFID) as well as Greenpeace India has helped legitimizing forced sterilization programs in these regions (Reid, 2014, p. 200). The link was first revealed by an article in The Observer, which points to a 2010 DFID report, in which the fight against climate change is cited as one of the ‘key reasons for pressing ahead with such [sterilization] programmes’ (Chamberlain, 2012).

The gender-sensitive discourse on climate, migration and resilience

Resilience discourse, on the contrary, has its roots in ecosystems thinking and psychology and has recently been made prominent by a range of international think tanks and networks such as the Resilience Alliance or the Stockholm Resilience Center (Corry, 2014; Methmann and Oels, 2015).\(^5\) Loosely defined as the capability of individuals, communities or systems to bounce back after external shocks and to adapt to changing environmental conditions, resilience has become a dominant governance paradigm in fields including development, security and environmental governance. In the field of climate change and security, resilience thinking stresses complexity and challenges any linear linkages between climate change, conflict and migration. Furthermore, resilience discourse shifts the focus from external threats to the immanent risks and the vulnerabilities of socio-ecological systems (Corry, 2014, p. 269). Against this backdrop, climate migration is considered not a security threat, but a possible adaptation measure of local communities to enhance their social resilience against climate shocks (Bettini, 2014; Methmann and Oels, 2015). This rationale was first brought up in the academic literature on climate-induced migration (McLeman and Smit, 2006; Black et al., 2011) and then soon spilled over to think tank and policy debates (e.g. Government Office for Science, 2011). The storyline is that the temporary and cyclical migrants from highly vulnerable regions help to increase the resilience of their home communities. They would do so by sending remittances and accumulating economic and cultural capital, which both can be used to raise the adaptive capabilities of the home communities (Schefran et al., 2012). But also planned, proactive resettlements of whole communities are being discussed as adaptation measures (Government Office for Science, 2011, p. 10).

With the rise of resilience thinking, also the gender roles and stereotypes underlying the discourse on climate change, security and migration have been turned upside down (see table 1). The masculinized discourse on global threats and managerial solutions is replaced with a focus on livelihoods and vulnerabilities of local communities (Hunter, 2016). Resilience is often perceived as a ‘softer’, more positive approach to security focusing on societies, households and livelihoods (see Corry, 2014). Along with this shifting focus on livelihoods and households comes a new sensitivity for the gendered experiences of climate change, and the unequal gender relations that lead to different vulnerabilities of men, women, boys, girls in specific local contexts (Chindarkar, 2012, p. 1; World Bank, 2011, p. 4). Women are now seen as particularly endangered by the negative impacts of climate change but at the same time, given their central positions in local households, seen as important agents of change (Annecke, 2014; Swarup et al., 2011, p. 5; UNISDR, 2012, p. 3).

3 Explaining the rise of resilience

A gendered perspective on discourses of climate change, security and migration can help explaining the swift rise of resilience thinking in this field. While not being the sole reason, part of the success story of resilience can be explained by its discursive ambiguity (Simon and Randalls, 2016; Rothe, 2017) and its resulting ability to create resonances between development, gender, environment and security discourses.

As Methmann and Oels (2015, p. 52) note, the discourse on climate migration as an adaptation measure draws on an understanding of resilience as transformation. Accordingly, resilience requires more than the adaptation of a system to changing environmental conditions: ‘Transformational resilience refers to the emergent transformation of these very systems into something new’ (Methmann and Oels, 2015, p. 54). Indeed, several of the analyzed empirical sources point to the fact that temporary migration might help vulnerable communities to transform themselves, for example by providing additional economic and cultural capital that could be used to transform infrastructures or local economic structures (e.g. Matthe, 2016; Mercy Corps, 2015; Swarup et al., 2011). For example, it is argued that migration might help transforming ingrained gender structures and traditional mores (Mercy Corps, 2015, pp. ii–iii). The underlying argument is that ‘male migration may leave women and girls behind to take on new roles (e.g., managing food stocks), which can create opportunities to challenge discriminatory social norms’ (Mercy Corps, 2015, p. 6). This notion of transformation resonates strongly with the dominant idea of gender mainstreaming — that is ‘the transformation of discriminatory social institutions such as laws, cultural norms and practices that limit women’s access to rights and opportunities’ (UNFCCC, 2016, p. 5).

The close marriage of strategic thinking and gender mainstreaming discourse becomes even more obvious when one considers another key concept in resilience discourse: the
4 Gender myths: problematizing climate, migration and resilience discourse

From a gendered perspective, the climate resilience discourse seems to be normatively superior to the older, climate, conflict and migration discourse: it did away with simplistic links between climate change and violent conflict and it turned away from the problematization of women’s fertility as a source of resource scarcity (see also Corry, 2014). At closer inspection, however, it becomes apparent that by overcoming certain gendered subject positions and related stereotypes, resilience discourse (re-)produces others.

First, the transformational understanding of resilience and the related notion of empowerment outlined in the previous section is problematic. The notion of empowerment in resilience thinking differs considerably from its meaning in feminist discourse. The notion of empowerment in resilience discourse can be traced back to a neoliberal/neoconservative restructuring of social work in the UK/US in the 1980s (see Pease, 2002; on the close marriage of resilience and neoliberal thought see Walker and Cooper, 2011). At that time, the notion of empowerment met with the critique of central government and paternalistic policies that characterized the welfare state – and instead stressed the importance of ‘self-organization of members of the community in order to gain control over their lives’ (Osborne, 1994, p. 59). Given this neoliberal legacy of the notion of empowerment, climate resilience practices in developing countries risk placing responsibility on women, without providing them with the material means to actually meet these responsibilities (see Batiwala and Dhanraj, 2004). Practices of resilience promotion here produces new kinds of gendered, neoliberal subject positions in the developing world: women who ‘exercise leadership within their communities’ (Mercy Corps, 2015, p. 10); men who migrate to accumulate economic and social capital (PCCM, 2014); girls who start working to take care of their families and the whole community (Annecke, 2014). This excludes everyone who is incapable or unwilling to become a self-reliant, entrepreneurial ‘change-agent’ (see also Hartmann et al., 2016).

Furthermore, a transformational understanding of resilience reframes the suffering of people in developing countries as a chance for the transformation of unequal gender relations. Several empirical sources argue that climate shocks could be seen as such a chance, as they would force ‘men and women […] to take on new roles and responsibilities, and to work together in different ways’ (Webb, 2015, p. 17). This is perfectly expressed in the following quote: ‘Although shocks and stresses can cause terrible destruction, in some instances they open up opportunities for positive change, enabling women and men to take on new and more progressive gender roles’ (Mercy Corps, 2015, p. 10). As Chandler and Reid (2016) argue, resilience crucially teaches vulnerable populations to adapt to suffering in the world, rather than to resist or overcome it. Taking into account that it is often people of color who are most vulnerable to climate change, climate resilience thinking thereby risks reproducing a racialized discourse around the ‘heroic narrative of black sufferers’ (Leary, 2015).

Second, although almost all reports that make up the climate, migration and resilience discourse draw upon the terminology of gender, in the end it comes down to a focus on women and girls. The vulnerability of boys, men, transgender and transgender people is never considered (see also Myrttinen in this issue). The following empirical examples are illustrative of this tendency: ‘Research suggests that women are disproportionately affected by climate change’ (PCCM, 2015, p. 3); ‘Women tend to be poorer, less educated than men and have fewer vocational skills’ (Chindarkar, 2012, p. 4); ‘Women are often in the forefront in respect to the impacts of a changing climate’ (Nellemann et al., 2011, p. 5); ‘women, as a group, are poorer and less powerful than men’ (Brown, 2008, p. 34, emphasis added).

Thereby, the climate, migration and resilience discourse reproduces a range of gendered subject positions and related narratives that already characterized the debate on ‘women and the environment’ in the 1980s and 1990s – in particular the essentialist idea that women had a special
relation with the environment (Fröhlich and Gioli, 2015, p. 144). In the 1980s ‘women and the environment’ discourse, women’s bodily embeddedness within nature was said to make them more vulnerable to environmental change but at the same time more attentive and caring for environmental problems (Agarwal, 1992, p. 121; Leach, 2007, pp. 67–68). The current climate, migration and resilience discourse clearly rejects such simple biologistic framings. The gendered impacts of climate change and the specialized knowledge of women on local ecosystems are instead linked to gender imbalances resulting from local cultures and socio-economic structures (e.g. Chindarkar, 2012; Swarup et al., 2011, p. 27; UNISDR, 2012). The problem is, however, that these locally specific observations are then used to make generalized statements about women in the so-called Global South as a unitary category. This is clearly illustrated in the following quote: ‘Women in the South are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of disasters due to skewed power relations and inequitable cultural and social norms’ (Nellemann et al., 2011, p. 6). This tendency of generalizing, over-simplifying and de-contextualizing feminist insights mirrors exactly what Batiwala and Dhanraj (2004) have described as the creation of ‘gender myths’. For example, while men are represented as the active temporary or cyclical migrants who send home remittances and thereby increase the adaptive capacity of communities, women are framed as the ones who are left behind and thus are represented as the passive receivers of remittances (Kunz, 2008). Furthermore, women who are left behind are said to face a higher vulnerability to ‘abuse and economic disempowerment’ (PCCM, 2015, p. 4). Even if women do migrate they are said to face gender-based discrimination (Brown, 2008, p. 35). The most dramatic picture is painted by a UNEP report on climate change and gender, which anticipates that climate change induced disasters could increase the risk of women and girls to become victims of organized trafficking (Nellemann et al., 2011, p. 7). The contrast could not be painted more starkly: men migrate voluntarily to increase their adaptive capacities whereas women are being trafficked. This is not to deny that these issues pose very real problems for many women at many places. Gender – in combination with other factors including class, race, sexual orientation, education, social status, etc. – plays a crucial role for the vulnerability of people. Yet, statements that problematize the vulnerability of women in the Global South void of any contextualization risks falling back to a re-essentialized understanding of gender, where ‘women are often portrayed as a homogenous, monolithic category’ (Fröhlich and Gioli, 2015, p. 140). Furthermore, the exclusive focus on unequal gender structures in developing countries completely blurs the fact that industrialized countries are marked by gender injustices, too: gender stereotypes and sexism become problems of ‘the others’.

Third, the empirical analysis of recent policy reports revealed that resilience thinking did not completely replace the older climate, conflict and migration storylines (see also Methmann and Oels, 2015, p. 61). Instead, the problematization of population growth, scarcity and conflicts often sits comfortably with the new resilience agenda. For example, the threat of scarcity-induced conflict is used to illustrate the gendered impacts of environmental change. The Mercy Corps (2015, p. 4) report ‘Rethinking Resilience’, for example argues, with regard to the Sahel region, that men are ‘at greater risk for exposure to conflict over resources and land’. Women, on the contrary, are presented as potential victims, as climate change induced conflict would increase the risk of sexual violence (Brody et al., 2008, p. 10). Climate resilience discourse also links up to the problematization of population growth in developing countries, for example to illustrate why migration could be seen as a successful adaptation measure: ‘migration can reduce population pressure and thus increasing environmental sustainability in climate change affected areas’ (PCCM, 2014, p. 4).

Conclusions
From a gender perspective, considerable differences exist between the two presented ideal-typical discourses on climate change-induced migration. While the older climate, conflict and migration discourse did not itself reflect or focus on the gendered impacts of climate change, it was nevertheless a highly gendered discourse. In particular, it problematized population growth and the fertility of poor women in the so-called Global South, and presented a male-coded scientific approach of managing and controlling climate change as a solution. Recent works on climate change, migration and resilience did not only tone down the alarmist threat image of waves of climate refugees with a more nuanced focus on livelihoods and the complexities of migratory movement. They also added gender – and the existence of unequal local gender structures and traditional mores – as an analytical category. At the same time, however, the climate, migration and resilience discourse risks reproducing stereotypical images about the special relation of women in the so-called Global South with nature. Statements that are abstracted from the local context present women – as a unitary group – as either victims of climate change or as ‘change agents’. Reflecting these gender myths in climate change, migration and resilience discourse is important because discourses have a considerable influence on policies by defining which measure appear possible and appropriate to cope with the identified problems. However, discourses do not automatically translate into policies measures and can be interpreted by practitioners and local stakeholders in different ways. Hence, further research is required to study actual practices of resilience promotion and the question of how the subject positions and narratives identified in this study become enacted and rearticulated on the ground.

Notes
1. To identify the relevant reports I conducted an online search combining multiple keywords (such as ‘climate change’, ‘migration’, ‘security’, ‘conflict’, ‘gender’, ‘women’ and ‘resilience’) and different databases including Google Scholar and Web of Science.
Additionally, I manually scanned the databases of major organizations and NGOs in the development-environment-security field. Given the interconnected nature of this emerging network it is not possible to clearly distinguish between an academic, a policy, or a civil society discourse or to assign discursive speakers to a particular actor group. For example, NGOs are often funded by government agencies, while reports of governmental organizations are written by academic scholars.

These are understood as analytical ideal-types and, even if resilience is the more recent discourse, it did not completely replace earlier discourses. In empirical reality both discourses continue to coexist and sometimes even overlap as we will see below.

For limitations of space it is not possible to sketch the contours and the development of both discourses in full detail here. For more detailed descriptions, see Bettini (2014), Boas (2015), Boas and Rothe (2016), Corry (2014) and Hartmann (2014).

For a closer reading of the genealogy of resilience see Chandler and Reid (2016) or Walker and Cooper (2011).

Bibliography


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