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**CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF THE UNITED  
NATIONS' DISCOURSES ON CLIMATE  
CHANGE AND CONFLICT**  
Case of South Sudan

Faculty of Social Sciences  
Master's Thesis  
November 2020

# ABSTRACT

Iina Jussila: Critical Examination of the United Nations' Discourses on Climate Change and Conflict: the case of South Sudan

Master's thesis

Tampere University

Master's Degree Programme in Peace, Mediation and Conflict Research

November 2020

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The aim of this master's thesis is to examine how the United Nations portrays the interlinkages between climate change and conflict in the context of the South Sudan. The study is narrowed down to focus specifically on one UN specialised agency (FAO) and three UN programmes (UNEP, UNDP and WFP). The analysis is conducted by mapping a set of hypothetical discourses, drawn from the theoretical framework, against the data retrieved from the examined UN documents. The UN discourses are then further critically examined with the help of Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional framework theory to elaborate on the results from a linguistic, discursive and contextual perspectives. Further on the thesis also discusses the extent to which the UN discourses reflect the academic debates on the topic as well as the situation in South Sudan.

The thesis concludes that the UN actors portray the interlinkages with a mixture of different argumentation types, which form so-called hybrid discourses that are often represented, unconsciously or consciously, in a rather vague and discrepant manner. Interestingly, almost half of the examined documents did not contain any references emphasising the interlinkages between climate change and conflict. The further critical examination of the UN discourses also unveiled several alarming linguistic factors regarding particularly the concepts of responsibility and agency. Furthermore, the thesis found only weak alignment between the UN discourses, the academic debates and the existing situation on the ground. All of the highlighted factors run the risk of having a negative impact on the work of the examined UN actors, in addition to hindering the overall credibility of the whole UN system.

Keywords: climate change, conflict, critical discourse analysis, discourse, United Nations, South Sudan

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# TIIVISTELMÄ

Iina Jussila: Yhdistyneiden Kansakuntien ilmastomuutoksen ja konfliktin välistä suhdetta kuvaavien diskurssien kriittinen tutkimus: Etelä-Sudan tapaustutkimus

Pro gradu tutkielma

Tampereen yliopisto

MDP in Peace, Mediation and Conflict Research

Marraskuu 2020

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Tämä pro-gradu tutkielma tarkastelee Yhdistyneiden Kansakuntien (YK) toimijoiden tapaa kuvata ilmastomuutoksen ja konfliktin välistä suhdetta Etelä-Sudanin tapaustutkimuksen kautta. Tutkielma pyrkii myös selvittämään missä määrin YK:n organisaatioiden asiakirjoissa esiin nousevat diskurssit vastaavat tieteellisiä keskusteluja ilmastomuutoksen ja konfliktin välisestä suhteesta sekä Etelä-Sudanin vallitsevaa tilannetta. Tutkielma tarkastelee eritoten neljän YK:n toimijan diskursseja. Nämä toimijat ovat Maailman ruokaohjelma, YK:n elintarvike- ja maatalousjärjestö, YK:n ympäristöohjelma sekä YK:n kehitysohjelma. Tutkimus suoritetaan muodostamalla kuusi hypoteettista diskurssia, joita verrataan YK:n toimijoiden asiakirjoista saatua tietoa vastaan. Hypoteesidiskurssit on luotu tutkielman metodikappaleen perusteella. Tämän jälkeen tuloksia tarkastellaan Norman Faircloughin kriittisen diskurssianalyysin teorian avulla, joka erittelee diskurssien tutkimuksen kolmeen tasoon: tekstiin, diskurssikäytäntöön sekä sosiokulttuuriseen käytäntöön.

Tutkimustulokset osoittavat YK:n toimijoiden käyttävän useita argumentaatiotyyppisiä keskustellessaan ilmastomuutoksen ja konfliktin välisestä suhteesta Etelä-Sudanin kontekstissa, näin ollen muodostaen niin sanottuja hybrididiskursseja. Nämä diskurssit ovat usein myös esitetty, joko tietoisesti tai tietämättömästi, ympäripyöreällä, epäpoliittisella sekä osittain epäjohdonmukaisella tavalla. Eniten dokumenteissa esiintyvät diskurssit liittyvät resurssien niukkuuteen sekä ihmisten turvallisuuteen. Yllättävää oli myös poliittisia ja sosioekonomisia seikkoja korostavien diskurssien vähäisyys sekä yhteistyötä korostavien diskurssien olemattomuus. Lisäksi mielenkiintoista oli se, että melkein puolet tutkituista asiakirjoista ei sisältänyt viitteitä, joissa korostettaisiin ilmastomuutoksen ja konfliktien välisiä yhteyksiä. YK:n diskurssien kriittinen tutkimus paljasti myös useita huolestuttavia kielellisiä tekijöitä, jotka liittyivät erityisesti vastuunkannon ja edustuksen käsitteisiin. Tämän lisäksi tutkielma havaitsi vain heikonlaatuista yhdenmukaisuutta YK:n diskurssien, tieteellisten keskustelujen sekä Etelä-Sudanissa vallitsevan tilanteen välillä. Kaikki edellä mainitut tekijät voivat vaikuttaa kielteisesti niin tutkittujen YK:n toimijoiden työn tehokkuuteen kuin koko YK-järjestelmän uskottavuuteen.

Avainsanat: ilmastomuutos, konflikti, kriittinen diskurssianalyysi, diskurssi, Yhdistyneet Kansakunnat, Etelä-Sudan

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**List of Abbreviations:**

CDA = Critical Discourse Analysis

FAO = the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations

EU = European Union

UN = United Nations

UNEP = United Nations Environment Programme

UNDP = United Nations Development Programme

UNSC = United Nations Security Council

WFP = United Nations World Food Programme

## **Introduction**

Climate change represents one of the biggest challenges for the international community in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Its detrimental socioeconomic, political and natural effects are increasingly troubling particularly for the most vulnerable communities around the world, which is why the issue is often present on the global political agenda. Particularly the interlinkages between climate change and conflict have been increasingly discussed in the highest global forums, starting from the former United Nations Secretary-General Ban-Ki Moon, who highlighted the need for a better understanding of climate change's influence on conflict situations during then the largest-ever meeting of global leaders on climate change back in 2007 (UN News, 2007). The interlinkages between climate change and conflict have already been studied for many years with the scholarly debate dating back to the late 1980s. However, the conclusions drawn by different actors from the UN to states, NGOs and academia, continue to differ significantly even today. These discrepancies within the debates highlight the need for not only a better understanding of the topic itself, but also an understanding of the construction of the arguments regarding the interlinkages of climate change and conflict, and how they intertwine with the social realities around them.

The aim of this thesis is to critically examine how the UN has portrayed the interlinkages between climate change and conflict. Due to the fact that climate change is a highly spatially and temporarily dependent phenomenon, the research topic is narrowed down by focussing specifically on the case of South Sudan – a country whose short independent history is heavily influenced by on-going civil war as well as the increasing socioeconomic hardship affected by climate change. The decision to focus on a case study also contributes to a gap in the academic literature, as only very little research has been conducted on a case study basis regarding the interlinkages between climate change and conflict. Furthermore, the thesis will focus particularly on the discourses produced by the UN. This intergovernmental organisation represents a key actor within the promotion of global peace and prosperity, as well as an influential text producer with a wide readership and the ability to perform powerful speech acts. Thus, the way in which the UN actors portray issues through language has a significant effect on how these matters are then understood by the wider audiences. Moreover, the thesis

examines specifically the discourses of United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) and United Nations World Food Programme (WFP), to further narrow down the research. Within the UN system, all these actors have identified climate related risks as relevant to their work in conflict affected areas and they are also actively involved in South Sudan. The specific research questions the thesis is asking are:

1. How do the UN actors portray the interlinkages between climate change and conflict in the context of South Sudan?
2. To what extent do the representations reflect the academic debates and the current situation on the ground?

These questions will help guide the course of the research process. The thesis is divided into five chapters and the structure is as follows: The first chapter focusses on the background information regarding the South Sudanese conflict and the country's history as the world's newest nation. It will also elaborate more on the state of the environmental and climatic conditions in South Sudan, as well as share a brief literature review on previous studies regarding climate change, conflict and South Sudan. Chapter two introduces the theoretical framework of the thesis by giving an outline of the academic debates concerning the interlinkages between climate change and conflict. It will also establish the 'hypotheses' which will be used in the analysis to better understand what discourses are present in the examined UN documents. The last section of the chapter gives concluding remarks regarding the framework, whilst simultaneously highlighting some issues regarding the state of the academic research on the topic. Chapter three discusses the methodological tools of analysis used to conduct the research. First, it gives a more detailed overview of the data collection process. This is then followed by a section on the research process, which focusses on discussing the critical discourse analysis approach that is also the methodology used for this research project. The last two parts of the chapter include a section on the limitations to study, as well as some ethical considerations and positionality regarding the research process. Chapter four focusses on conducting the actual analysis, tackling specifically the first research question set above and critically examining the highlighted UN discourses. Chapter five ties



the analysis together by discussing to what extent do the representations discovered in the analysis reflect the academic debates and the situation on the ground in South Sudan.

## **Motivation for Study**

The motivation for this thesis stems from a personal interest in natural environment, and the role it plays in conflict dynamics as well as in peacebuilding processes. Climate change, in particular, presents one of the biggest challenges for the future of peace- and conflict research. The phenomenon has also been identified as a key challenge for the mandates of several international organisations dedicated to build and maintain a more peaceful and equal world. Thus, awareness of how the effects of climate change have been portrayed, discussed and understood in relation to conflict by the biggest international actors is crucial. The thesis does not attempt to prove any type of interlinkages but rather sheds light on the various ways in which they have been portrayed, and how these different discursive constructions could ultimately affect our actions. Discourses do not only shape our understanding of issues but also pose a risk of influencing social behaviour in ways, which may not necessarily be the most productive. Language and speech acts represent powerful tools for the shaping of social practices.

I first became familiar with the conflict in South Sudan through a course during my undergraduate studies, which sparked my initial interest on the country and the devastating situation it has been facing for several years. After doing further research on the conflict and particularly the impacts of climate change in the area, I decided to use South Sudan as a case study for my research. It is an interesting research topic for several reasons. Firstly, South Sudan represents an exemplary case for the study of climate change and conflict due to the current state of on-going conflict and the geographical location. of the country. The Horn of Africa, which South Sudan politically forms part of, is considered one of most climate-vulnerable areas in Africa, in addition to the Sahel region. Thus, the mixture of climate induced vulnerability and the high levels of instability, make South Sudan a prominent case-study for my research. Secondly, there is not much research done on the topic of climate change and conflict in South Sudan. Such gap in the literature surprised me, because the

nearby conflict in Darfur, Sudan, has gotten significant attention regarding the same topic. The Darfur conflict has been widely studied and discussed through the climate-conflict nexus, and even labelled as the ‘first climate conflict’ by the UN back in 2007. Simultaneously, hardly any empirical research has been conducted regarding a very similar conflict in South Sudan, even though the two countries share a close history, exists in near geographical proximity and have a similar socio-economic situation.

The reason why I wanted to examine how the UN actors have portrayed the interlinkages between climate change and conflict in the context of South Sudan, stemmed from the increasing attention given to the topic of climate change by the international community. The UN has recently paid a lot of attention to the phenomenon, and the potential effects it could have on the stability and development of several regions around the world. Thus, my assumption before starting the research process was that the interlinkages between climate change and conflict in the context of South Sudan would be heavily discussed amongst UN actors due to the similarities with the situation in Darfur. I also assumed to discover a substantive amount of literature and material on the topic through my data collection. However, my initial hunch turned to be slightly mistaken in terms of the quantity of available data and the assumed general emphasis of the UN actors regarding the interlinkages between climate change and conflict in the context of South Sudan. Despite these factors, an in-depth analysis was conducted on the topic. The next chapter will go through a brief history of South Sudan as the newest nation in the world, followed by an overview of the country’s climatic and environmental conditions. The chapter is then concluded with a literature review, which focusses on highlighting the existing academic research on topics of climate change, conflict and South Sudan.

## **Chapter 1: The Background**

### **1.1 A brief history of modern South Sudan**

Mention South Sudan and images of poverty, starving children and on-going violence spring instantly to mind. The short history of what today is known as the Republic of South Sudan is one characterised by violence (Astill-Brown, 2014). The world’s newest state, which

gained its independence from Sudan in 2011, has experienced ongoing war throughout its nine years of statehood. In order to understand the situation South Sudan currently faces, we must first look further into the region's history beyond the state's independent existence. The state of Sudan, which South Sudan was previously part of, was created during the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium between 1898 and 1955. At the time, Britain and Egypt occupied the territory, holding two distinctive administrative arrangements for the South and the North (Natsios, 2012; UNDP, 2020). Since before colonial rule, a deep ethnic, religious and cultural divide has existed between the North and the South of the country, which quickly turned violent upon the country's independence. Sudan's civil war is one of the longest conflicts in the African history to date. The first phase of the war began just before the state's independence from the colonising powers in 1955 and continued up until 1972. The settlement was followed by ten years of relative peace until the fighting broke out again in 1983. There were several attempts to reach peace, which all failed as violence continued to intensify. Up until 2005, the relationship between Northern and Southern Sudan was heavily dominated by violent conflict (Astill-Brown, 2014; Maystadt et al., 2014). Famine and displacement were widespread across both parts of the country due to unequal governmental distribution of resources and general underdevelopment.

Several factors contributed to the rise of conflict between the two parts of the country. The Sudanese civil war has often been described as a battle of religion between the Arab Muslim north and the mainly African Christian south. It is true that some factors in the rise of the conflict can be understood through the religious and ethnic differences between the regions, yet there are several other factors that have affected the escalation of the conflict, enabling its re-occurrence for almost 50 years. Factors such as poverty, underdevelopment, ethnic diversity, corruption, environmental hardship and various grievances all played a role in the creation of tension, which ultimately lead to conflict escalation. Another relevant factor worth mentioning was the division between the relatively wealthy and powerful Arab elites based in the capital and the marginalised and often impoverished societies on the periphery. The people of the South were particularly marginalised. Upon independence all positions of power were centralised and given almost entirely to the elite of the North. This created a neopatrimonial form of governance, which was centred in the capital, Khartoum. The newly

appointed government sought to enrich its members through the extraction of natural resources whilst turning a blind eye to the desperate needs of the Sudanese people, who were already suffering from famine, disease and poverty. The lack of political power, unjust distribution of resources and poor level of development in the South, led to rising unrest and eventually widespread violence between the two regions (Poggo, 2009).

After decades of war, the year 2005 finally saw the acceptance of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between the North and the South, which ended the extensive fighting between the two sides. The agreement was facilitated in a joint effort by regional authorities such as the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development and the international community, mainly headed by the United States, the United Kingdom and Norway. For the first time in history, the CPA opened the possibility for the South to officially break free from the North. It offered the southerners a change to gain their independence by granting them partial autonomy, establishing a new Interim Constitution and guaranteeing an opportunity for a referendum to be held on the issue of separation. (Astill-Brown, 2014; UNDP, 2020; Vox, 2016). The history of modern South Sudan began in early 2011, when the referendum was held on the issue of separation. An overwhelming majority of South Sudanese people (almost 99%) voted for separation and in favour of the creation of an independent state. The United Nations, the United States and the United Kingdom were the main allies supporting the creation of the new state (Astill-Brown, 2014; Vox, 2016). Thus, six months later the Republic of South Sudan was established in July 2011 (UNDP, 2020).

Despite the initial victory, cracks started to appear in unanimous front of the newly founded state sooner than anticipated. The issues closely related to power, ethnicity and wealth, which had also defined the conflict with the North, slowly started to re-surface in the newly independent South Sudan. There are more than 60 different ethnic groups in the state of South Sudan; the two largest ethnic groups being Dinka (35.8%) and Nuer (15.6%). As previously mentioned, historically inter-tribal conflict was nothing new for South Sudan, yet prior to independence most of the ethnic groups had managed to put aside their differences in order to fight for the creation of their nation state. However, the unity was short-lived after the rivalry over power between the two biggest ethnic groups spiralled into violence. This is not

to suggest that attempts to establish a democratic and inclusive system of governance in South Sudan did not take place. On the contrary, initially the appointed Dinka President Salva Kiir asked the Nuer representative Riek Machar to be his vice president in an act of unity, which was needed to lay a solid foundation for the functioning of the new government (UNDP, 2020; Vox, 2016). However, these unity ties broke rapidly in 2013, after Vice President Machar was accused of planning a coup against President Kiir. The accusations led to a violent clash between Nuer and Dinka forces in the capital Juba. Machar also fled the country, denying all allegations made against him and heavily criticising the policies implemented by the new administration. Violence escalated as both sides used ethnic lines and hate speech to mobilise militias against each other. Several regional mediation efforts were conducted mainly by the Intergovernmental Authority of Development (IGAD) although with a low rate of success (Spaulding et al., 2019; UNDP, 2020; Vox, 2016).

In 2015, the first peace deal together with a ceasefire agreement (named the ‘Compromise Peace Agreement’) was established under severe pressure from the international community. In addition to the permanent ceasefire agreement, the deal called for the formation of a new transitional government laying out a fragile power-sharing agreement between Kiir and Machar. It also allowed Machar to return to Juba and to be sworn back in office as the vice president. However, it did not take long for both parties to violate the conditions of the agreement. After the second outbreak of violence in the capital, Machar was quickly removed from his position, forcing him to flee the country again (Christian Aid, 2019; Spaulding et al., 2019). Several unsuccessful attempts of ceasefires and power-sharing agreements, followed by sharp spikes in violence levels, have taken place since the first peace deal in 2015, highlighting the superficiality and fragility of peace in South Sudan (Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2019; CRF, 2020). The latest effort to reach peace was made in February 2020 with the rivals Kiir and Machar signing yet another peace deal and forming a unity government in the hopes of ending the long civil war (BBC, 2020). Riek Machar together with three other opposition leaders were sworn in office as Vice Presidents (BBC, 2020). However, after several failed deals and the burden posed by the devastating effects of the current global covid-19 pandemic, it is no surprise that peace continues to stand on fragile grounds in South Sudan.

The world's newest state has endured almost six and a half years of conflict, leaving the country in a state of on-going humanitarian crisis. The rebel in-fighting constitutes a large share of the fighting going on in South Sudan. The conflict has followed ethnic lines, such as the main rivalry between Dinka and Nuer, but simultaneously violent conflict also occurs between local communities. According to Global Conflict Tracker (CFR, 2020) more than 400 000 people have died as a result of the war. Four million people are displaced, of which roughly 1.8 million people are internally displaced. In addition, more than 2.5 million people have fled the conflict to neighbouring countries, particularly to Uganda and Sudan. The highest number of fatalities have occurred in Jonglei, Equatorias and Unity States (Christian Aid, 2019). In addition, the ongoing violence has stopped food production, causing widespread food shortages in the whole country. A state of famine was declared in 2017 and according to the latest estimations, over five million people are currently at risk of food insecurity (CFR, 2020).

## **1.2 Climate and environment in South Sudan**

As the main aim of this thesis is to understand how climate change has influenced the way conflict is seen and understood in the context of South Sudan, the following section focuses on explaining the role that the climatic and environmental realities have played in the history of the country. The section highlights three key factors closely related to the environment and/or climate, which characterise the situation in South Sudan. These are followed by a brief analysis of their influence on the development of the conflict. The section is divided into three parts, which focus on the following issues as identified in the literature on climate change in South Sudan: environmental degradation, resource scarcity and climate variability. However, it is important to understand that the section does not attempt to provide a comprehensive analysis of the effects climate and the environment have on the conflict dynamics in South Sudan, but rather to map out and introduce the main components regarding these factors. This is done to give the reader a better understanding of the situation and to lay the groundwork for the analysis, introduced in the following chapters.

South Sudan has a typical tropical savanna climate: a heavy rainy season with high humidity and large amounts of precipitation followed by a dryer season with little rainfall. The rainy season usually lasts from May to October with some variability on the length of the season. On the other hand, the winter season tends to be moderately shorter and dryer (Weather & Climate, no date). The lowest annual temperatures vary from 15 to 25 degrees depending on the region, whereas the highest annual temperatures range from 30 to 40 degrees. The highest temperatures usually occur before the rainy season commences in April/May. The country is covered in grassland, swamps and tropical forest depending on the area (Lovell-Hoare & Lovell-Hoare, 2013).

It is important to understand that climate change as a phenomenon is nothing new in the history of South Sudan. Observations on rising temperatures and decreasing amounts of precipitation across the region date back to the 1980s. Throughout the years, the rising temperatures have unquestionably made weather patterns, and particularly rainfall, increasingly more erratic and unpredictable (Gov. of the Netherlands, 2018; WFP, 2017). Scientists have estimated that the temperature in South Sudan will rise 2.5 times more than the global average (Stalon and Choudhary, 2017). One important characteristic of climate is that its impacts vary greatly across and within regions. For example, in South Sudan, the latest rainfall data indicated increasing amounts of precipitation in the northern parts of the country, whilst the rainfall in southern and western South Sudan was declining (WFP, 2014). Some experts believe that the changes in weather are partially caused by ‘el Niño’. The term ‘el Niño’ refers to the warming phase of the el Niño Southern Oscillation, which is a “cyclical weather pattern that influences temperatures and rainfall across the globe” (OCHA, 2017). El Niño has a severe impact on weather patterns around the world with unpredictable disruptions in winds, precipitation and temperature (OCHA, 2017). On the other hand, South Sudan is not a major contributor to the global warming, similarly to other developing countries in Africa, yet it does bear the consequences for it particularly in terms of development. The country produced 1,87 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in 2018 (Our World in Data, 2020), whereas the biggest polluter country China’s emissions were 10.06 billion during the same year (Roser and Richey, 2019).

### **1.2.1. Environmental degradation**

Environmental degradation presents a significant hardship for South Sudan's livelihoods and economy. It has also been argued to have indirectly influenced the development of the conflict by intensifying e.g. ethnic conflict over subsistence resources. Environmental factors including environmental degradation underpin both political and social instability in South Sudan. (Malith and Ahmed, 2017). However, it is important to understand that environmental degradation is predominantly a consequence of human induced activities, produced by continuous clearance of land, exploitation of natural resources, overgrazing and over-cropping. Such practices are conducted all over South Sudan (Elagib and Mansell, 2000). The consequences of these man-made actions include large-scale soil degradation, deforestation and loss of biodiversity, which are all predominantly consequences of modern agricultural activities. This is because South Sudanese society, much like Sudanese society, is heavily dependent on agriculture for their livelihoods. An estimated 95 per cent of the population is dependent on crop production, livestock husbandry, fishery or forestry for their daily income. Thus, agricultural activities form the core of South Sudan's overall economy (Caas, 2007; FAO, 2020). Throughout the years, farming activities and techniques have evolved significantly, moving them increasingly away from traditional farming to a more modernised cash crop agriculture, which favours large-scale mechanised cultivation activities. This more 'commercial' type of agriculture may have allowed some farmers to marginally increase their profits, but simultaneously it has also had severe negative impacts on the natural environment. Furthermore, the excessive oil drilling activities in the wetlands contribute to the pollution of rivers and the nearby natural environment, whilst fish stocks continue to dramatically diminish due to increased over-fishing (WHO, 2020).

### **1.2.2. Resource scarcity**

Closely linked to the issue of increasing environmental degradation is resource scarcity. Geographically, the region where South Sudan is located has always been rich in natural



resources, including resources such as oil, marble, uranium, and timber. However, the historically inefficient natural resource management combined with the greedy and ruthless activities of the elites to ensure personal profit, meant that the wealth extracted from the resources was never equally distributed in socio-economic terms (Suliman, 1994). The “lack of development of other no primary resources to grow the economy, combined with unsustainable practices, has created a pseudo-state of scarcity within an abundant resource base” (Malith and Ahmed, 2017, p.119). Thus, the situation in South Sudan is not necessarily about not having enough, but rather the people not having enough. The unjust distribution of wealth, a remnant of colonialism, has evidently played a significant role in the intensifying friction between multiple ethnic groups. The combination of scarcity and ill-suited and unjust development policies have been the cause of many grievances and violence in the country (Malith and Ahmed, 2017).

In addition, ‘*the black gold*’ has been at the forefront of first Sudan’s and later also South Sudan’s economy, particularly for the elites since the discovery of oil throughout Southern Sudan and the Upper Nile in the late 1970s (Larsson, 2020). Oil has provided a major source of income for the State, simultaneously making it very vulnerable to any type of economic shocks. Upon independence, oil accounted for 98 percent of the government’s revenue and roughly 80 percent of the country’s gross domestic product (GDP). Currently, oil accounts for 40 per cent of GDP, yet South Sudan remains the most oil-dependent country in the world, with oil accounting for almost all exports (Gibb, 2018; World Bank, 2019). This high dependency on oil has often come at the detriment of the natural environment. Due to its high market value, oil has also been at the centre of disputes and violence throughout the history of both Sudan and South Sudan. The violent disputes over oil have often been about the control of the resources and wealth extracted from them. For example, shortly after the first Sudanese war and discovery of oil reserves in the South, the leaders of the North attempted to redraw the boundaries of the Southern Region in order to transfer discovered oilfields back into their controlled territory. The attempts failed, but ultimately the Khartoum government resorted into taking some territory by force, including areas near the border such as the Muglad Basin. The incident increased the tension between the North and the South even further (Larsson, 2020). After South Sudan’s independence, issues concerning oil transit fees

have been a major source of tension between the two countries. This is because, even though most oil reserves are in the South, the main pipelines exporting the extracted oil reside in Sudan. The unresolved dispute even resulted in South Sudan temporarily shutting down its oil production, putting severe pressure on the government and its allies through financial hardship (Pedersen and Bazilian, 2014). Even though South Sudan is one of the most oil dependant countries in the world, it is failing to manage its reserves sustainably and to attract foreign investment to ensure development and prosperity for its people (The World Bank, 2020).

Due to the changing climatic conditions, resources such as water and land have also been under dispute, particularly in the more rural areas of the country, where most of the South Sudanese population lives. Water and land both represent lifelines for the highly agricultural society, which is why the diminishing water supplies and destroyed areas of land represent significant hardship for the survival of the people (Malith and Ahmed, 2017; FAO, 2020). However, whilst changing climatic patterns from droughts and floods to locusts and other pests have had a negative impact on the availability of some natural resources, it is the biased, inefficient and repressive development policies that have created the more large-scale issue of scarcity in both Sudan and South Sudan, which has further exacerbated the competition over diminishing natural resources (Goldsmith et al., 2002). Under the rule of the Khartoum regime, the decisions on developmental policies were often unsystematic, inefficient and even contradictory. The policies lacked “long-term vision and relied on institutions that were, and still are weak, corrupt and ineffective” (Caas, 2007, p.11). In addition, due to the prevalent underdevelopment, the governments have been forced to finance their operations through the over-exploitation of natural resources, creating an unstable and unsustainable situation “where all actors, from the small-scale farmer to the highest echelon of government, rely on natural resources for either their survival and/or to make profit” (Caas, 2017, p. 19). Thus, resource scarcity and environmental degradation end up being more a result of political games rather than the result of changes in the natural environment. The current South Sudanese government has made efforts to improve the management of natural resources with the help of the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP), yet very few concrete steps have been since taken to implement the current plan.

### **1.2.3. Climate variability**

Due to the high dependency on agricultural forms of living, climate variability has always influenced the livelihoods of the South Sudanese people. The changing weather patterns have destroyed crops, increased human mobility and inevitably hindered the countries development on different levels. Particularly, the South Sudanese food production has always been climatically reliant on rainfall, which consequently makes the most arid and semi-arid areas highly sensitive to climate shocks increasing environmental vulnerability (WFP, 2017). In addition, poverty and underdevelopment particularly in the more rural areas have made communities more vulnerable to the effects of climatic variability. Furthermore, there have been some instances where the effects of climate variability have indirectly led to increasing risk of violent conflict, yet no causal relationships could be identified (Tiitmamer et al., 2018). For example, the floods of the 1960s had devastating consequences in Bor and Yirol district, particularly for the livelihood of the Dinka pastoralists, forcing them to migrate to the nearby state of Equatoria. The increased environmental vulnerability resulted into the movement of people towards the already occupied areas, causing tensions between the local Equatoria farmers and the Dinka over the usage of land. The situation would have not necessarily lead into an eruption of violence, but as the appearance of the Dinka groups in Equatoria fed into the Equatorians' political grievances of Dinka domination on the regional government level, the clash was inevitably going to happen. Ultimately, the whole region was divided into the three separate administrative regions, sending the Dinka back to their original lands, which brought a temporary end to the conflict. (Tiitmamer et al., 2018)

Later, similar events occurred in other areas. The floods of 1991 that destroyed crops and livestock in Upper Nile region have been argued to have played a role in the Dinka-Nuer Conflict, in addition to the multiple political and historical factors, including the SPLM/A split (Tiitmamer et al. 2018). Furthermore, the same floods and the destruction of Bor region by the Nuer White Army militias, forced the Dinka residing in Bor to migrate to Equatoria, which again caused increasing tension and ultimately conflict between the Dinka pastoralists and Equatoria farmers. (Tiitmamer et al. 2018). There is a clear tendency of low and high

intensity tribal conflicts, particularly between the farmer and cattle herder societies, which has been present throughout the independent existence of both Sudan and South Sudan. Clashes over cattle raiding, trespassing, the burning of crops and grazing are all centuries old practices, which are highly tied to the natural environment in the form of environmental degradation, resource scarcity and climate variability (Caas, 2007).

### **1.3 Literature review**

Even though the interlinkages of climate change and conflict are widely studied, there is only a limited amount of research conducted on South Sudan. The lack of academic research on the topic is most likely due to the newness of the state and the general low level of empirical data available. The latter is particularly affected by the ongoing conflict, which hinders the possibility to conduct thorough research in the area, and by weak national institutions with insufficient capacity and technology to aid the production of quality data. The following literature review highlights the main literature focused on the issues of climate change, environmental change and conflict in the context of South Sudan.

Studies on climate vulnerability have emphasised South Sudan to be a highly sensitive area. Busby et al. (2013) find South Sudan to be one of the most climate vulnerable areas in Africa together with Democratic Republic of Congo, Guinea, Sierra Leone and Somalia. Putoto's (2018) commentary on South Sudan's environmental vulnerability also highlighted the state's poor performance on the global Climate change vulnerability index in 2017. It also found that an increase in flood and drought rates to strengthen the probability of violent conflict via food and livelihood insecurity. Furthermore, academia and international organisations have both been concerned with the potential impact of climate change and conflict on the development of the new state. The South Sudanese government and United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) published the first report on sustainable environmental management called: South Sudan – first state of environment and outlook report in 2018. The report looks at the socioeconomic drivers of environmental change and outlines the necessary measures for more peaceful and prosperous co-existence through sustainable environmental management. It found that the increasingly more unpredictable

weather patterns caused by climate change combined with rapid population growth are “likely to see a rise in clashes over natural resources, reflecting how climate change can contribute to conflict” (p.13).

Ensor’s study (2013) on the role of youth in peace-building and post-conflict recovery in the Greater Equatoria region found that the consequences of climate change together with the long history of violence make the region one of the most vulnerable, underdeveloped and conflict-prone areas of South Sudan. The study focused particularly on the crucial role of the youth in solving the situation, as the young nation practically relies on “--the young population’s positive contributions to climate change adaptation, human development and sustainable peace” (p.528). Maystadt et. al’s (2014) study focussed on the links between localised weather shocks and conflict in North and South Sudan from 1997 to 2009 using a pixel-level analysis. The study found that temperature anomalies do strongly increase the risk of conflict. It also highlighted water scarcity to be the main driver of such relationship as the communities in region are highly dependent on agriculture and pastoralism for their livelihoods.

Regarding debates on resource scarcity and its security implications, Cascao’s (2013) study on resource-based conflicts in both South Sudan and Ethiopia’s Gambella establishes an intimate link between scarcity, political volatility, economical fragility and the conflict escalation. According to this analysis, the battle over the control of scarce resources does fuel conflict. In South Sudan the resource related conflict is not only about oil wealth, but also about the management and control of scarce renewable resources such as water and land, which both are highly vital resources for the society highly dependent of agro-pastoralism. Yoshida’s (2013) work on interethnic conflict in the Jonglei State also found that climate change has exacerbated the competition over scarce resources in region, which consequently has intensified the conflicts and developed ethnic cleavages amongst the communities. Furthermore, Harragin’s (2011) study on the concept of protection within the counties of Jonglei state highlighted that the fighting between Dinka, Nuer and Murle groups is rooted in various factors. These factors include heightened inter-ethnic tensions, increasing flow of small weapons, the rising amount of deprived and armed youth, resource competition (e.g.

water and land) and the political economy of cattle raiding. The latter two are both linked to scarcity, environment and climate.

Maxwell et al. (2012) research focused on examining the concepts of livelihoods, social protection and basic services in South Sudan. The study highlighted the rapidly increasing degradation of land and water supplies to have increased the tension between local societies, which represents a prominent challenge particularly for the livelihood recovery of the communities. Even though, the so-called “resource conflicts” are nothing new in the history of South Sudan, the increasing rate of environmental degradation was deemed alarming due to its ability to multiply the potential negative effects. Selby and Hoffman’s (2014) study critiques the often uncontested mainstream academic and policy accounts which explain the relations between environmental change and conflict through the concepts of scarcity, state-failure and under-development and arguing the approach to be ill-suited in the context of the Sudans. Instead, they emphasise the need for the international community to focus on concepts of resource abundance, state building and development in making sense of the relation between environment and conflict. Moreover, their approach finds that political economic dynamics have had far more impact on the environment-related conflicts in the Sudans than resource availability.

Specific literature examining the nature of the interlinkages between climate change and conflict in the context of South Sudan is very limited. One of the only studies focusing on the topic is by Tiitmaer et al.’s (2018), whose research investigated the extent to which climate change and climate variability events link with eruptions of conflict in South Sudan. The study was conducted by using meteorological data and conflict records in addition to data on floods and droughts. Tiitmaer et al. (2018) emphasised the need for the evaluation of “climate change-conflict nexus in the context of South Sudan, as climate change has become a significant driver of conflicts in places where communities mostly depend on natural resources” (p.3). The study did not find sufficient evidence to draw a direct link between climate change and the rise of conflict, but it did emphasise the importance of environmental conditions for regional stability in South Sudan. Thus, the area with high risk of natural disasters, such as floods and drought, were also found the most prone for conflict.

The literature review demonstrated that the relation of climate change and conflict in South Sudan have to an extent been discussed and analysed by academia and other international organisations, particularly in terms of vulnerability, development and resource scarcity. However, the literature on particularly the nature of the interlinkages between climate change and conflict in South Sudan was limited. As the overall goal of the thesis is to understand, how UN actors have portrayed the interlinkages between climate change and conflict in the context of South Sudan, the following chapter will establish the theoretical framework for the study.

## **Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework**

### **2.1. Discourses on climate change and conflict**

The following chapter will introduce the theoretical framework used in the thesis, which focusses on highlighting the most relevant debates regarding the interlinkages between climate change and conflict. Due to the extensive amount of literature on the interlinkages, the discourses have been divided under five broader sub-categories: ‘climate security’, ‘human security’, ‘threat multiplier’, ‘socioeconomic and political factors’ and ‘cooperation’. The debates highlighted in the theoretical framework will be also used to identify a set of hypothetical discourses (the hypotheses) for the study. Further on, these hypotheses will be mapped against the discovered UN discourses, in order to better understand how the UN actors have portrayed the interlinkages between climate change and conflict in the context of South Sudan. Moreover, the chapter will be concluded with a brief analysis of the overall theoretical framework and the introduced academic discourses, highlighting some of the key issues regarding the research on the topic. I have intentionally not included detailed information on the debates concerning migration, conflict and climate change, as they constitute a broad and separate branch within the study of climate change and conflict. Thus, they would require an individual study of their own, which I will not be able to conduct due to time and word count limitations. However, the aspect of migration would present a suitable topic for further studies on the interrelation between climate change and conflict. The

following subsections will now introduce some of the key debates regarding the interlinkages between climate change and conflict as well as present the identified hypotheses that shall be tested further on the study.

### **2.1.1. Climate security**

One of the most popular ways of framing climate change and its impacts on societies has been through a security lens. Security driven discourses focus predominantly on potential threats that climate change may pose to national and global security. Even though climate security discourses have been around since late 1980s, it was not until mid-2000 that the securitisation of issues related to climate change started to gain wider popularity amongst academia, policymakers and the international community (Bettini, 2014a; Hartmann, 2010; Oels, 2013; Boas, 2015; Rothe 2016). The theory of securitisation is the most prominent concept of the Copenhagen School of security studies, and it refers to a process of transforming subjects, such as climate change, into matters of ‘security’ through politisation that is conducted through a speech-act. (Buzan et al., 1998). The year 2007 was particularly remarkable for the climate security discourses in terms of global attention. Both the European Council and the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) debated the issue of climate change in their respective meetings, placing it on “the highest level of political discourse on the matter of international peace and security” (Huntjens and Nachbar, 2015, p. 13). In addition, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released its newest report on climate change and was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize together with Al Gore on their remarkable efforts in combating climate change (Nobel Peace Prize, 2007). The securitisation move and the increased attention that followed, also meant that the discussions on climate security and ‘climate-conflict nexus’ began to reach higher political stages, with governments of states such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany and India all identifying climate change as a challenge for national security (McDonald, 2013; Huntjens and Nachbar, 2015)

The idea of climate security threats, particularly in developing countries, builds on the rather alarmist work of Thomas Homer-Dixon (1999) who was concerned with the social effects of resource scarcity and its potential negative implication for global order. The study found



causal relationships between resource scarcity and conflict, pinpointing precisely environmental degradation as the main driving force for scarcity and thus consequently for conflict. In this context, the combination of inevitable global population growth and the unequal resource management could ultimately lead to the eruption of conflict, particularly in the less developed communities. Even though the approach was first met with hesitation and objection, it still managed to attract research funds and interest amongst the scholarly. This was partially because at the time Homer-Dixon was successful in conceptualising a variety of rising conflict situations, such as the ones in Somalia and Rwanda, by offering a precise framework that provided a more convincing rationale in comparison to previously used ideological grounds (Matthew, 2002, p. 116). The most prominent ways that climate change is assumed to threaten national and global security are by a) fuelling conflicts over scarce resources, b) destabilising already fragile states and c) inducing both internal and global waves of migration (Bettini, 2014a; Detraz and Betsill, 2009; Hartmann, 2010; Methmann and Rothe, 2012; Rothe, 2012; Boas, 2015). Another framing, also deriving from Homer-Dixon's (1991) earlier work, describes particularly climate induced environmental degradation as potential exaggerator of conflict. Such framing has been particularly common amongst Western politicians and scientists who shared an understanding of so-called secondary implications of climate change (Methmann and Rothe, 2012), which were seen to place the Global North in danger of potential climate-induced spill-over effects from the Global South (Boas and Rothe, 2016). With these remarks, the first two hypothesis that the UN discourses will be mapped against are "climate change, through environmental degradation, is contributing to the eruption of conflict" and "increasing resource scarcity due to climatic changes causes conflict".

### **2.1.2. Human Security**

The discourses focussing on human security emphasise the negative effects of climate change on the existing socio-economic stresses that threaten human security. "Climate change is understood as a threat to human security in that it disrupts the capacity of both individuals and communities to adapt to changing conditions, usually by multiplying existing or creating new strains on human livelihood" (Huntjens and Nachbar, 2015, p. 5). It could exacerbate

socioeconomic stresses such as resource scarcity, arable land, weakening institutions and forced migration, which consequently could increase the chances of the eruption of violent conflict (Huntjens and Nachbar, 2015)

Across academic and policy communities the notion that climate change will most devastatingly affect those that are the least able to adapt to it, is strong. Even though the impacts of climate change are predicted to be the most detrimental in the Global South, the issue of climate insecurity is not tied to the distinctions between the North and the South or between developed and developing countries. As a global phenomenon, climate change will impact all ways of life, affecting the security of every individual and community around the world. Thus, the discourses focussing on human security have increasingly gained interest and challenged the more state-centric discourses on climate change and conflict. Furthermore, human security discourses have been developed into two distinctive approaches: some focussing on vulnerability and others focussing on resilience.

Discourses on vulnerability emphasise that debates on climate change and conflict should focus on recognising climate change as “accelerant of vulnerabilities”, rather than threat-multipliers in relation to conflict situations (Jasparro and Taylor, 2008, p. 237; O’Neil, 2011). In other words, this would mean a transition from more threat-centred frameworks to the ones emphasising and assessing vulnerabilities (Detraz, 2011). Contemporary intrastate conflicts are prominently taking place in the developing countries. These states are also usually situated in the most climatically vulnerable areas with little or no capacity to contest to climate-induced hazards (Huntjens and Nachbar, 2015). As demonstrated in the previous chapter, climate change can hinder the conditions required for sustaining traditional livelihoods. Furthermore, poverty and marginalisation can also have negative impacts on adaptation efforts, and even increase relative deprivation in the increasingly more resource scarce areas (Huntjens and Nachbar, 2015). The vulnerability discourses also emphasise that climate change does not solely drive conflict vulnerability, but vice versa: conflict also increases climate vulnerability (Buhaug, 2016; Abraham and Carr, 2017, IPCC, 2014, p. 758). ”The negative impact of conflict on vulnerability manifests in negative impacts on long-term

investment, infrastructure, and human suffering leading to communities' with limited resilience to climactic shocks" (Abraham and Carr, 2017, p. 238).

Discourses on resilience stress "rationales and practices such as adaptation to risk, shared responsibility, and self-capacity to achieve human security" (Boas and Rothe, 2016, p. 622). They focus on the capabilities, which communities acquire to recover from climatic shocks and to adapt to the changing environmental conditions (Zebrowski, 2015, p.5). They challenged the traditional climate security discourses by rejecting the simplistic and mechanistic understanding of causality that emphasised direct linkages between climate change and conflict (Bettini, 2014b, p. 182). The resilience discourses emphasise long-term solutions, instead of focussing on 'hard security' as the base for climate action, which are often defined by only short-term solutions (Boas and Rothe, 2016). The emphasis on resilience within the wider context of climate change and conflict debates, is seen as a highly productive approach to discuss the issue, as it focuses on action rather than just explaining the phenomenon. This is crucial for the resolving the problem itself. (Abrahams and Carr, 2017; Boas and Rothe, 2016). The resilience discourses also focus on the creativity and self-adaptive potential of all systems and communities, transferring the responsibility for coping with climatic change "from the state to networks of public and private organisations, communities and individuals" (Joseph, 2013, p. 43). Thus, the third identified hypothesis that the UN discourses will be mapped against is "climate change increases vulnerability, which poses a threat to human security".

### **2.1.3. Threat multiplier**

The threat multiplier discourses focus on the idea that climate change does not directly cause conflict, but rather makes current causes for conflict more salient. The discourse became widely known and embraced after the Centre for Naval Analysis Report on the subject was published in 2007. The idea of climate change being a 'threat multiplier' pushed the debated away from causal and deterministic argumentations. The threat multiplier discourse was first introduced from a more security and defence related perspective but overtime it has also been increasingly embraced by the non-security orientated actors such as humanitarians,

environmentalists and development experts. Even today, the discourse remains extremely popular and used, particularly in the policymaking and advocacy circles. For example, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) has recognised the effects climate change may have on global peace and security, framing it as a prominent ‘threat multiplier’. Climate change is understood to fuel the complex conflict situations through several political social, economic and demographic factors.

The most radical experts claim that existing vulnerabilities, strengthened by climate change, can increase the risk of political instability and even terrorism (Banuciewicz, 2014). On the other hand, scholars within policy circles tend to emphasise the fact that climate change and resource scarcity pose a significant threat multiplier in terms of conflict risk (Boas and Rothe, 2016; Abrahams, 2019). For example, Evans (2010) highlights that eruptions of conflict could rise from e.g. tensions over access and/or control of scarce resources, leading to further state fragility and climate induced, and scarcity driven unplanned mass migration. However, he also acknowledges that the impacts caused by climate change and scarcity have much to do with economic, social, institutional and ecological vulnerabilities of the society. In the context of South Sudan, Tamela Knight’s (2013) study supports Evans’s theory, pinpointing climate change as an undisputable intensifier of conflict, particularly between the ethnic groups in South Sudan. Burke et al.’s (2009) study also supported this notion, highlighting the fact that climate change could lay the groundwork for the eruption of conflict, even though it is not able to directly, on its own, cause conflict. The study found strong historical linkages between civil war and rising temperatures in Africa, highlighting that the warmer the year the more significant increase was witnessed in the likelihood of violent conflict. Climate induced stresses, thus, act as threat multipliers, because of their ability to contribute to and exacerbate conflict (Ruttinger et al., 2015; Raleigh and Kniveton, 2012). The main issues with these discourses lie in the notion that climate change as a phenomenon is widely tied to temporal- and spatial variables. This means that the impacts of climate change, which in some scenarios might drive conflict will not do so in others. Thus, where and when to adopt the ‘threat multiplier’ discourse regarding the effects of climate change, remains a question (Abrahams and Carr, 2017). Regarding the case of South Sudan, the fourth

identified hypothesis, which the UN discourses will be mapped against, is: “climate change does not directly lead to conflict, yet it makes current causes for conflict more salient.”

#### **2.1.4. Socioeconomic and political factors**

The more critical scholars have highlighted the importance of the other socioeconomic and political factors within the interplay of climate change and conflict. The most prominent criticism emphasises the importance of social factors in the eruption of violent conflict. It is mostly targeted towards the discourses focussed on traditional climate security, which tend to emphasise direct links between climate change, resource scarcity and conflict. For example, Salehyan (2008) questions the accuracy of proposed interlinkages, claiming that the discourses focussing on causal relationships completely ignore the complex social structures of the society within their analysis. His study points out that often the fundamental purpose of armed conflict is in social struggle, which usually has very little to do e.g. with the level of resources available. Instead, armed conflict is often used as a tool to contest the failures of political processes or the inexistence of political will to deliver wanted change. Thus, there should be more emphasis on “the interaction between environmental and political systems”, as it represents a more critical factor for the understanding armed conflict (Salehyan, 2008, p.318). Currently, there is no way to predict outbreaks of armed conflict purely by analysing climatic or environmental conditions. For a causal climate-conflict link to exist, all situations regarding natural disasters, changing migratory patterns and diminishing natural resources should result into conflict. However, this is hardly ever the case. “Resource scarcity, natural disasters, and long-term climate shifts are ubiquitous, while armed conflict is rare” (Salehyan, 2008, p. 319).

Moreover, Barnett and Adger (2007) argued that in certain circumstances climate change could indeed increase the risk of violent conflict through “direct effects on livelihoods and indirect effects on state functions” (p. 640). However, this would not happen in isolation from various other important social factors, such as poverty, grievances, social cohesion and access to economic opportunities (p. 644). Thus, it is vital to take into consideration all the various aspects shaping the situation, rather than focusing solely on a causal relationship between

climate and conflict. The downfall of the study is that the established connections are yet to be empirically proven, which is the case in many studies highlighting linkages between climate change and conflict. Studies (Fearon, 1995; Salehyan, 2008) have also emphasised civil war to be an ineffective, counter-productive and costly manner to respond to e.g. resource scarcity - if conflict was to be seen as a strategic response to resource scarcity, it would be a poor one. Violence is extremely draining for the well-being of natural environment. This means that conflict would only diminish the already scarce resources, leaving communities with even less than what they previously had (Fearon, 1995; Salehyan, 2008). There is a wide body of empirical case studies, particularly focusing on pastoralism, forestry and agriculture in Africa, which oppose the more traditional climate security as well as environment security discourses regarding scarcity, population and the rise of conflict (Gausset et al., 2005; Derman et al., 2007)

Salehyan (2008) also stresses the responsibility of governmental bodies in managing resources and addressing scarcity to prevent the rise of conflict. In other words, a high emphasis on climate change -conflict nexus as a justification for conflict and instability could allow “decisionmakers to shift the blame for civil wars and grave human rights violations” to predominantly on climate change (Salehyan, 2008, p. 317). However, the changing climatic conditions should not be used as a scapegoat for the lack of effective governance. In the context of South Sudan, this a valid concern, considering the amount of attention given on environmental issues within the country on top of the work done by UN actors on improving environmental conditions.

Furthermore, it is important to remember that existing power structures within communities often determine the ways in which diminishing resources are distributed. Thus, “socioeconomic marginalisation or discrimination based on group membership may be equally important in determining vulnerability to climate change as the environmental changes themselves” (Huntjens and Nachbar, 2015, p.6). Barnett and Adger (2007) emphasised that if the effects climate change has on livelihoods, are not address by e.g. facilitation of alternative livelihood opportunities or other sufficient social safety nets, an eruption of violent conflict could potentially occur. Based on these remarks, the fifth

identified hypothesis is: “complex political and socioeconomic structures of society cannot be separated from the study on climate change and conflict”.

#### **2.1.5. Cooperation**

Climate change and conflict can be also analysed and understood through discourses emphasising cooperation. Instead of focussing on ‘climate-conflict nexus’ or ‘resource scarcity’, these discourses highlighted concepts such as ‘interdependence’ and ‘sustainable development’ (Brauch, 2009; Hagmann, 2005; Harari, 2008; Wolf, 2007). The cooperation discourses also deviated the debate on climate change and conflict closer to the ideology behind ‘environmental peacebuilding’. The initial term was introduced in Conca and Dabelko’s work in 2002, which focussed on examining shared natural resources as a conflict resolution tool rather than a conflict agitator. Thus, environmental peacebuilding theory withholds the idea that resources do not always necessarily fuel conflict, but that they could stimulate cooperation as well. The discourse focuses on how natural resource management may benefit peacebuilding efforts, especially in intrastate conflict (not only interstate conflict). However, the approach is very contested, as other scholars have emphasised the need to expand its evidence base in order to strengthen the discourse’s credibility. It has had moderate success in the policy side, but less within academia (Evans Odgen, 2018). Many scholars and organisations are increasingly focusing on environmental cooperation as “a potential peacebuilding tool to address resource-driven conflicts and beyond” (Dresse et al. 2019, p. 100). For example, several studies on water scarcity have found that communities are more likely to result to cooperation through negotiations and/political confrontation instead of conflict over water resources. (Gleick, 1993; Trombetta, 2012; Witsenburg and Roba, 2007). Drawing on these debates and the debates regarding resilience mentioned in previous sections, the sixth identified hypothesis that the UN discourses will be mapped against further on in the research, is: “the relationship between climate change and conflict in South Sudan should be discussed through long-terms solutions emphasising resilience and/or cooperation”.

In conclusion, the theoretical framework, which highlighted some of the key debates regarding the interlinkages between climate change and conflict, was used to identify six

potential hypothetical discourses (hypotheses) for the study. These hypotheses were drawn to guide the research and help it examine how the UN discourses on South Sudan reflect what we know about the links between climate change and conflict, which ultimately helps the thesis understand how the UN actors have portrayed the interlinkages. In the analysis, this will be done by mapping the gathered data against regarding the UN discourses against the set hypothesis drawn from the theoretical framework. The set hypotheses were as followed:

1. Climate change, through environmental degradation, is contributing to the eruption of conflict
2. Increasing resource scarcity due to climatic changing causes conflict
3. Climate change increases vulnerability, which leads to eruption of conflict
4. Climate change does not directly lead to conflict, yet it makes current causes for conflict more salient
5. Complex political and socioeconomic structures of society cannot be separated from the study on climate change and conflict
6. The relationship between climate change and conflict in South Sudan should be discussed through long-terms solutions emphasising resilience and/or cooperation

## **2.2. Conclusions drawn from the theoretical framework**

Four conclusions rise from analysing the large pool of discourses on climate change and conflict. Firstly, the literature on the interlinkages of climate change and conflict is very mixed, with significant discrepancies between the debates. One reason for such discrepancies is because the scholars have adopted a broad range of different “methodological approaches, units of analysis, temporal scales, indicators of climate/weather, and definitions of conflict” (Salehyan, 2014, p. 2). This type of pluralist approach can be a productive manner to conduct research at times, but it can also lead to a variety of mixed findings, as it has in the case of climate-conflict research. Researchers have not reached consensus on the nature of the relationship, what are its specific effects (how exactly does climate affect conflict) and under what conditions. Secondly, even though a great amount of scientific research and empirical evidence has been found on climate change, the evidence base linking climate change and



conflict remains weak. Partially, this has to do with the relation of the two concepts. There is no pattern or algorithm that would be able to explain all climatic variabilities in all contexts. The effects of climate change vary tremendously within countries and even within cities, which means that a generalised analysis will not be able to produce reliable and concrete findings that would accurately describe all potential scenarios. Thus, regional mapping becomes very limited, which makes the understanding of long-term consequences difficult (Evans, 2008). The lack of reliable data also presents a significant problem for future research on climate change and conflict. Currently, not even the climate scientists are able to pinpoint the exact timelines and potential effects that humanity might face in the near future due to climate change. There is an increasing need for more case-study based and context-specific research that would include sub-national policies and local realities into its analysis. The development of new technology, able to anticipate the potential outcomes of the changing climate, is also required for more accurate and evidence-based research. Particularly, the studies focusing on climate security discourses have been criticised for the poor evidence base of their research. For example, Nordas and Gleditsch (2007) raised concerns over the limited amount of peer reviewed research articles and the lack of solid case-specific empirical evidence regarding the research on the relationship between climate change, conflict and security. They stated that these analyses constructed their argumentation from assumptions rather than evidence, and that 'statements about security implications have so far largely been based on speculation and questionable sources' (Nordas and Gleditsch, 2007, p. 628). There continues to be a growing need for more case-study based and detailed academic research on interlinkages climate change and conflict, and for a creation of larger data bases regarding the issue.

Thirdly, the connections between the impacts of climate change and the rise of conflict are highly spatially- and timely related. As already mentioned, the effects of climate can vary greatly not only between states but also within states. In order to establish a strong causal relation between climate change and the eruption of conflict, scholars would have to prove patterns that are replicable in different scenarios. However, this is very hardly the case, as factors that result into conflict in one place, may not do so in other. Furthermore, the fact that scholars use different units of temporal scales in their studies, results into further

discrepancies within the findings (Salehyan, 2014). “Natural disasters such as cyclones and floods may unfold in a matter of days, droughts can span several years, and climate change itself implies long term changes in observed conditions over decades or centuries” (Salehyan, 2014, p. 3). Some scholars have examined the interlinkage between climate change and conflict through the “short-term shocks” in precipitation or temperature (Hendrix and Glaser, 2007; Landis, 2014), whereas others have focusses on the longer-term processes that are only visible in much longer time intervals (Zhang et al., 2007). Fourthly, both climate and conflict are too complex and elusive concepts to be explained through single-explicatory causes. The field of climate conflict studies has yet to establish any collectively accepted definitions of either ‘climate change’ or ‘conflict’, which means that scholars have utilised various definitions, when examining the interlinkages between the two phenomena. Particularly the reasons behind an eruption of conflict are highly multidimensional, meaning that direct causal linkages are almost impossible to establish on their own. This notion is supported by the discovered lack of evidence on the interlinkages of climate change and conflict. The understanding of the multifaceted ways, in which climate change interacts with drivers of conflict, is highly crucial for research now and in the future. Particularly so that investments end up going in the right place.

### **2.3. The four UN actors & their organisational interpretations of the interlinkages**

In order to reach a more comprehensive understanding of the UN discourses regarding the case of South Sudan, it is important to take a step back to see how the examined UN actors have discussed the interlinkages between climate change and conflict in the wider organisational context. All of the four actors: WFP, UNEP, FAO and UNDP have discussed the topic, even though the main focus regarding the interlinkages between climate change and conflict does varies across organisations. The following sections will provide a brief overview of each organisations’ main arguments regarding the interlinkages between climate change and conflict.

#### **The World Food Programme**

WFP has focussed on discussing the interlinkage between climate change and conflict largely through the aspects of food insecurity and vulnerability. Their reports have singled out climate change induced conflict as one of the main drivers of the increasing food insecurity levels around the world (WFP, 2017; FAO et al. 2017) as well as emphasised how in situations where ” *conflict and climate shocks occur together, the impact on acute food insecurity is more severe*” (FAO et al. 2018, p. 58) . In 2019 the agency produced a report exclusively discussing the interlinkages between climate change and conflict and their impacts for WFP’s work. The “*Climate Change and Conflict*” brief, published in September 2019, identifies climate change as a risk multiplier particularly within the societies that are already more prone to social tension and/or unrest. “*While climate change cannot be identified as the only reason for conflict, it amplifies and compounds those inequalities and vulnerabilities that often underpin conflict*” (WFP, 2019c, p. 1). Climate change is also described to have “*complex interactions with the political, social, economic and environmental drivers of conflict*” (WFP, 2019b, p.1), yet the ways in which these interactions are outplayed are not comprehensively understood. Furthermore, the brief (WFP, 2019b) finds climate-induced environmental factors, such as water scarcity and loss of pasture resources, to increase tensions within communities that are highly dependent on agriculture or animal husbandry. In addition, economic factors such loss of livelihoods, decreasing agricultural productivity, food insecurity and other economic shocks are considered issues that can also contribute to likelihood of violent conflict in the most vulnerable societies. Furthermore, socio-political dimensions such as migration, income disparity and inequality, disruption of political institutions and land inequality are stated to increase the likelihood for the eruption of conflict (WFP, 2019b).

### **The United Nations Environmental Programme**

The initial spark for UNEP’s work on climate change and security dates back to the late 2000s when Jan Egeland, then the UN Special Envoy for Climate Change, requested the agency “to conduct an analysis of climate change and security risks in the Sahel Region” (UNEP, 2020). Ever since, the agency has discussed the interlinkages between climate change and conflict in its publications (e.g. UNEP, 2011; G7, 2015), identifying climate change as “*the ultimate*

*“threat multiplier” aggravating already fragile situations and potentially contributing to further social tensions and upheaval”* (UNEP, 2020). In their 2011 report on the livelihood security in the Sahel region, the agency highlighted that: *“the impacts of changing climatic conditions on the availability of natural resources, coupled with factors such as population growth, weak governance and land tenure challenges, have led to increased competition over scarce natural resources – most notably fertile land and water – and resulted in tensions and conflicts between communities and livelihood groups* (p. 6). Furthermore, UNEP has the most security focussed approach to the issue of climate change and conflict out all the four actors. This is evident in examining UNEP’s active collaboration with the UN Security Council (UNSC), particularly in providing information regarding the security implications of climate change and conflict with a focus on the effects of environmental degradation and resource scarcity. For example, in a UNSC meeting (20<sup>th</sup> July 2011), then the Executive Director of UNEP, Achim Steiner, stated climate change to be a “threat multiplier” that would have *“fundamental implications for weather, settlements, infrastructure, food insecurity, livelihoods and development. Competition over scarce water and land, exacerbated by regional changes in climate, was already a key factor in local conflicts in Darfur, the Central African Republic, northern Kenya and Chad”*. He continued by emphasising the importance of a deliberate and collective response to address issues: *“Indeed, there is no reason why the international community cannot avoid escalating conflicts, tensions and insecurity related to a changing climate if a deliberate, focused and collective response can be catalysed that tackles the root causes, scale, potential volatility and velocity of the challenges emerging”* (Steiner, 2011 in UNSC, 2011).

UNEP’s work has also touched upon the prevention and management of land and natural resource conflicts, where they have highlighted the importance of the concept of vulnerability. *“The impact of climate change and natural hazards need to be understood within the context of vulnerability. Vulnerability represents the interface between exposure to physical threats and the capacity of people and communities to cope with those threats. Adapting to climate change and reducing risks from natural hazards involves reducing the exposure of populations to the potential impacts, while increasing their adaptive capacity and resilience* (UN Interagency Framework Team for Preventive Action, 2012)”. Furthermore, UNEP also

published a climate-fragility risk guidance note in collaboration with the European Union (EU) in 2019, which aims to inform key actors on how to build resilience by linking sustainable livelihoods, climate change adaption and peacebuilding (UNEP, 2019).

### **The United Nations Food and Agriculture Programme**

FAO has discussed the interlinkages between climate change and conflict largely through the issue of food security. In FAO's case, the interlinkages have been infrequently discussed within their reporting since the early 2010s with a noticeable increase in emphasis from 2017 onwards. In the 2017 report *"Sowing the seeds of peace for food security: Disentangling the nexus between conflict, food security and peace"*, FAO highlighted that *"climate-related events, especially droughts, tend to affect food availability and access, exacerbating the risk of conflict in such contexts"* (FAO, 2017, p.3). Later on, the 2018 Crop Prospects and Food Situation Report continued along similar lines, stating that: *"persistent conflicts and climate-related shocks are currently driving high levels of severe food insecurity, particularly in Southern African and Near East countries, which continue to require humanitarian assistance..."* (FAO, 2018a). Furthermore, during the 2018 Nobel Peace Prize Forum, FAO's then Director-General, José Graziana da Silva, also underlined that the levels of conflict and hunger were to rise if the impacts of climate change would continue to be ignored. He also concluded that: *"when climate change promotes conflict, such as over access to increasingly-scarce land and water resources, it further promotes food insecurity"* (FAO, 2018b). Similarly, the State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World report (FAO et al., 2018) also highlighted that the increase in global hunger that year was largely due to climate related shocks and the increased amount of violent conflict.

FAO's approach to the interlinkages also relies heavily on the notion of human security, emphasising particularly the severity of the impacts of food insecurity among the most vulnerable populations around the world (FAO, 2018a). The agency also emphasises the importance of resilience building within its discursive approach. Climate change forms a corner stone of FAO's work: agriculture should be *"promoted through the implementation of climate-smart approaches, practices and techniques that also preserve the environment and*

*biodiversity, and adaptation must help build the resilience of millions of poor family farmers”* (FAO, 2020).

### **The United Nations Development Programme**

UNPD identifies “*conflict prevention, climate change mitigation and adaption*” (Mod  r, 2019) as central parts for their mission in achieving long-term sustainable development. Climate-related security risks are seen to undermine the efforts to reach the 2030 Agenda Global for Sustainable Development, which is why “supporting climate security” is an important part of their mandate. UNDP identified that:

*While climate change does not cause violent conflict, in and of itself, it can through its interaction with other social, political and economic factors have negative impacts on international peace and security. The pathways through which these risks manifest is highly contextual and determined by the interaction between climatic hazards, exposure, and, most importantly, the vulnerability and coping capacity of states and societies. The risks are greatest where institutions and communities are unable to cope with the stress or absorb the shock and can lead to downward spirals when critical thresholds are exceeded and adaptive capacity compromised. These risks have already become a reality for millions of people around the world. (UNDP, 2020a)*

UNDP also recognises that whilst the issues of climate and conflict are nothing new, their interlinkages are still not comprehensively understood. Thus, the issues regarding climate change and conflict require a multi-dimensional approach in order to find truly sustainable solutions. Factors such as recognition effective governance, equitable and fair management of natural resources, resilience building and availability of alternative climate-resilient livelihoods are important parts within this approach. Moreover, the agency (UNDP, 2020a) also underlines its aim to ultimately “*facilitate a systematic shift from crisis response to coordinated risk prevention, early warning and effective adaptation*” (p.1).

Overall, there are two common factors present in all of the examined UN actors' organisational discourses, which should be taken into consideration. Firstly, all the examined actors generally 'set the stage' in a fairly limited fashion: the specific contexts where the interlinkages between climate change and conflict are addressed focus almost exclusively on the developing world, and in particular, the African continent. This is done even though examples of interlinkages are also found from the developed world. One good example of a situation where environmental change has influenced the creation of conflict would be the city of New Orleans, US, after the hurricane Katrina in 2005. Devastated by natural disaster, the city experienced widespread of class and race induced violence in the aftermaths of Katrina (Arsel, 2011, p. 452). However, these types of examples were missing from the UN reports. Secondly, all the actors construct their arguments regarding the interlinkages between climate change and conflict in an apolitical and, at times, vague manner. A comprehensive and nuanced discussion about the role of e.g. international corporations or the responsibility of developed countries for several environmentally driven and the politicised operations are completely missing. In the words of Arsel (2011) describing the UNEP policy paper 'From Conflict to Peace: the role of Natural Resources and the Environment': "*Rather than unpacking how the various groups and their interests are constituted as part of broader political economic processes, the report instead takes these tensions for granted and feeds them into the deterministic understanding that purports to be apolitical*" (p. 455). Even though, the UN actors mention the importance of e.g. socioeconomic and political factors within their reports and emphasise the importance of a comprehensive approach in understanding the interlinkages, they do not discuss these in great detail or through concrete examples. It seems as if the agencies are shying away from showcasing some of the more politicised factors; most likely because highlighting those would require calling out the harmful actions of the more powerful actors. However, one key component in making sense of the interlinkages lies in the understanding that the main role is not necessarily played by climate change or conflict themselves, but rather the prevailing socioeconomic and political structures that they exist in, which are constructed and maintained in the interest of those in power (Arsel, 2011). Choosing not to explicitly underline this, can also be considered an act of power by the UN. In conclusion, even though all the examined agencies find the issues of

climate change and conflict important with their own interpretations, if the UN actors opt to only show one side of a particular situation within their evaluation and guidance, they are simultaneously aiding the creation of one-sided, and ultimately faulty, solutions to the issues they are so eagerly attempting to solve.

### **Chapter 3: Methodological Tools for Analysis**

Chapter 3 provides a detailed discussion of the methodological framework of the study and explains why Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is the most suitable method to help answer the research question under investigation. The first section discusses the process of data collection, which is followed by the introduction of methodological framework. This entails a deeper look into CDA as a methodology as well as a run-through Norman Fairclough's three dimensions theory, which is used to conduct the research. Lastly, the final sections discuss the potential limitations of the study in addition to shedding light on ethical considerations and positionality regarding the research.

#### **3.1. Data Collection**

Most of the data collection process was conducted between March 2020 and May 2020. The aim of the data collection was to find material, which dealt with the issues of climate change in the context of the South Sudanese conflict. The final dataset consists of fifteen sources to be analysed in depth, which turned out to be a lot less than anticipated. The data consists of reports, briefs, studies, blogposts, story articles and news articles produced under the name of the four UN actors in question. The majority of documents were news articles, press releases, blogposts or story articles (10). The rest of the documents represented either reports (2), report summaries (1), working papers (1) or briefs (1). The page numbers of the documents ranged from 3-46 pages. All the documents were all produced and published between 2011 (the independence of South Sudan) and May 2020. Due to time and length constraints, the data was narrowed down by the number of UN actors and the availability of sources. The four chosen UN actors represent relevant and active actors in the conflict in South Sudan, with mandates that identify climate change as a key operational obstacle. Furthermore, all of the examined



UN actors also work closely on developmental issues related to the implications of climate change: (UNEP – climate smart environmental development, FAO – climate smart agriculture, WFP – food security through climate resilience, UNDP – sustainable development goals/climate action). The number of documents from each actor was determined first and foremost by availability, yet the balance between the actors remained stable. The dataset consisted of five documents from FAO, four from UNEP, four from WFP and two from UNDP.

The data was collected from publicly available sources from the internet. These included mainly the examined UN actors' main websites. The relevant information was often found from the relevant websites under the section on South Sudan. In addition to the actors' websites, which included often large amounts of information, I also used the search engine at Reliefweb.int to find more relevant sources. Reliefweb.int is the largest humanitarian information portal in world, and it is administered by the United Nations office for the Coordination of humanitarian affairs (OCHA). In order for the sources to be considered relevant for the study, they had to discuss the particular situation in South Sudan (keyword: "South Sudan") and include the keyword "climate change" in addition to synonyms, derivatives and other phrases implying similar meanings. These included keywords such as "drought", "flood", "environmental degradation" and "resource scarcity". To expand the search, the following additional keywords were used to discover more sources of data: "conflict", "climate-conflict", "insecurity", "security" and "vulnerability". Furthermore, I also used the names of the examined actors to limit the search and eliminate unnecessary sources of data.

### **3.2. The research processes**

#### **3.2.1. Critical Discourse Analysis Approach (CDA)**

*Critical discourse analysis is a contemporary approach to the study of language and discourses in social institutions. Drawing on poststructuralist discourse theory and critical linguistics, it focuses on how social relations, identity, knowledge and power are constructed through written and spoken texts in communities (Luke, 1997, p. 50)*

Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth CDA) is both a theory and a method, which views the use of language as a form of social practise. It represents an interdisciplinary approach to study of discourse, stemming from critical theory of language (Janks, 1997). CDA focusses on examining how societal power relations are realised and reinforced through the use of language. Hence, it differentiates from discourse analysis by the aim of unveiling issues of exploitation, power asymmetries and structural inequalities through its analysis (Blommaert and Bucean, 2000). CDA was chosen as the methodology for the thesis in question, due to its critical stance, which could help reveal issues from UN discourse, which could otherwise go unnoticed.

CDA as a theory is hard to define, because it includes various different approaches, which can be utilised in many different disciplines from humanities and social sciences to linguistics. Rogers et al. (2005) emphasises that critical theories are usually concerned with issues of justice and power in addition to the ways in which factors such as class, gender, religion, economy, race, and education produce or transform social systems. In Wodak and Mayer's (2009) opinion, CDA stresses the need for interdisciplinary analysis in order to develop a "proper understanding of how language functions in constituting and transmitting knowledge in organising social institutions" (in Mogashoa, 2014, p. 105). Van Dijk (2006) argues that CDA is primarily motivated by the attempt to make sense of pressing social issues (p.252). For Norman Fairclough (2001a), CDA "aims to show non-obvious ways in which language is involved in social relations of power and domination, and in ideology" (p.229). It focusses on not only describing discursive practices but also on shedding light on the constructive effect discourse may have upon social relations, social identities and systems of knowledge and belief (Fairclough, 1992, p. 12).

Two of the main concepts of CDA are *ideology* and *power*, which is why its key functions relies in "unmasking ideologies" and "revealing structures of power" (Wodak and Meyer, 2009, p. 8). In political science, *ideology* is defined as "a coherent and relatively stable set of beliefs or values" (ibid.). However, the ideology that CDA refers to differs from that of political science, as it is firmly linked to everyday beliefs and dominant ideologies that come across as "neutral" (ibid.), simultaneously legitimating potential dominance or even power

abuse (van Dijk, 2009, p. 78). Van Dijk (2009) defines ideologies as “the fundamental social beliefs that organise and control the social representations of groups and their members” (p. 78-79). The issue with dominant ideologies is that they usually exist widely unchallenged and thus appear “neutral”. This can be problematic from an analytical as well as human point of view as it may cause individuals to think alike and to disregard the potential surrounding alternatives (Wodak and Mayer, 2009, p. 8). We can become blind to the ways in which language constructs our social realities. According to Parker (1992): “language is so structured to mirror power relations that often we can see no other ways of being, and it structures ideology so that it is difficult to speak both in and against it” (p. xi). As the UN is considered a powerful text producer with wide readership, it is important to examine further the kind of ideologies the UN actors are producing through their discourses, as they may eventually, if not already, as everyday beliefs and become ‘the norm’ that shapes opinions, actions, and even policy.

The other important concept in CDA, which also has a close link to ideology, is *power*. CDA is particularly interested in analysing the speech acts of those in power. It focusses on studying how the powerful actors utilise language to produce or reproduce domination (Wodak and Meyer, 2009, p.2). Language has become one of the key means to uphold social control and power. As Fairclough (2001) points out, the exercise of power through “ideological working of language” has become increasingly successful (p.2).

Ultimately, CDA attempts to bridge textual analysis of language with the analysis of social practise (Van Dijk, 1998). Ultimately it examines the relationship between language, text and social structures. It is well suited for the purpose of this study as it is very textually orientated, rather than focusing on engaging and discussing discourse in a more abstract manner. All the material used for the thesis are UN documents. Furthermore, CDA’s criticality in studying the language and social practice helps the thesis to beyond surface of the discourse and truly understand their meanings and implication better. As mentioned earlier, there are several different methodologies for carrying out CDA (Lillis and McKinney, 2003; Wodak and Meyer, 2009), yet this research will focus on Norman Fairclough’s three-dimensional model, which will be further explained in the following section.

### **3.2.2. Norman Fairclough's CDA: the three-dimensions model**

Norman Fairclough's (1989; 1992; 2003) three-dimensional framework will be used as the guiding method for the analysis. According to Fairclough, analysis of text can never be done in isolation from the wider social context. Thus, all communicative events comprise of three dimensions: The first one is a textual dimension (descriptive level), which can involve speech, writing and/or visual images. The second one is discursive practise (interpretative level), which includes the production and consumption of text. The last dimension deals with social practice (explicatory level). The following sections will explain the dimensions in more detail.

#### *First dimension: textual analysis (the descriptive level)*

The first dimension entails a linguistic analysis, which aims to examine how discourses are textually realised, and how their construction supports specific interpretations of issues (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). In this thesis, the textual analysis of the UN documents in question allows us to understand better how e.g. different power relations or ideologies within UN discourses on climate change and conflict are linguistically produced. Fairclough's (1992) theory identifies some analytical topics, which will be used later on to analyse the textual dimension of the data. These topics are mainly concerned with the ideational function of the language, meaning how the UN discourses linguistically contribute to the construction of the social reality. The topics are cohesion (connectives and argumentation), grammar (transitivity and modality) and vocabulary (word meaning and wording). The analysis of cohesion is concerned with identifying certain types of narratives and argumentation. In this study, it means identifying how the relationship between climate change and conflict has been constructed. The analysis of transitivity deals with questions of agency, causality and responsibility (Fairclough, 1992). It is particularly useful for the investigation of the relationship between human action and climate change: how is the relationship portrayed and what kind of ideological and structural effects could it entail? In regard to responsibility, the most interesting and valuable aspect to examine is how cause and outcome are expressed in

the text. In other words, who gets the blame. The analysis of modality examines the degree of affinity that is expressed through the text. In this study, this was done through investigating whether the documents present their information as absolute truths, or if they leave room for alternative or competing interpretations. Lastly, the analysis of the vocabulary allows us to critically examine how certain key words are utilised and what type meanings and/or ideologies do they convey. In this thesis, the analysis focusses on the meaning behind the words conflict, climate change and security.

*The second dimension: analysis of discourse practice (the interpretive part)*

Discursive practices entail the processes of text production, distribution and consumption. The second dimension thus focusses on analysing the relationship between the text and the order of discourse. Furthermore, it attempts to tackle the issue of what discursive practices are drawn upon within the texts and how they are expressed together (Fairclough, 1992/1995). This is an important part of the study as it tackles the question of what discourses regarding climate change and conflict are drawn upon and how they are articulated and combined within the UN documents. The tools used to conduct the analysis of discursive practice are the analysis of intertextuality and interdiscursivity as well as the analysis of intertextual chains (Fairclough, 1992). Due to the nature of the study, I will not be focussing explicitly on questions of consumption. The analysis of intertextuality focusses mainly on what previous texts are the documents referring to and in which ways. On the other hand, the analysis of interdiscursivity is concerned with what type of discourses are present in the text and how are they combined. For example, a useful way to move forward with these is to investigate the various configurations of discourses regarding climate change and conflict, which simultaneously indicate how the issue is perceived. Furthermore, another useful point of enquiry could be to investigate what previous texts are explicitly or implicitly highlighted in the documents and pinpoint their producers in addition to the institutional position they hold. Regarding the distribution, the analysis of intertextual chains will examine the transformation of UN documents into e.g. media texts, academic articles, report etc. The transformation process usually results into the incorporation of different elements to text which can then form new mixes and meanings (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002).

### *The third dimension: analysis of social practise (the explicatory part)*

This level is primarily concerned with concepts of ideology and power. The analytical objective of the level is to examine how the discursive practises are shaped by wider social practises and realities, as well as to scrutinise the effects discursive practise may have on social practise. This thesis will focus particularly on the institutional, situational and financial realities that shape the construction of the UN discourse. In addition, it is also important to understand what effects the discourses have on the construction and constitution of social relations, identities, and systems of belief and knowledge (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999; Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002).

### **3.3. Limitations to study**

The first limitation to my research is represented by the amount of data as well as the time constrains. The data gathered on UN discourses is very limited due to short independent history, and thus relatively short period of UN activities in the state. In addition, there was not much information to begin with and due to time- and length constrains, I was only able to include data that fulfilled the earlier described conditions. The fact that the data was narrowed down to only consider South Sudan could also be problematic, as there could be discrepancies in the results, if analysed. However, by conducting a case-study based analysis, the thesis aimed to do its part in filling the gap in the research, which was highlighted to be the low level of case-specific empirical research regarding the interlinkages on climate change and conflict. In addition, as both climate change and conflict are highly temporally- and spatially dependent phenomena, the research should in all cases be limited to smaller areas, such as countries, regions, cities or even communities, depending on the amount of available data.

In addition, the chosen methodology also limits the scope of the research. One limitation of CDA is that meanings are never actually fixed, meaning that everything is always open for differing interpretations and even negotiation (Morgan, 2010). Another potential limitation and also one most common criticism direct at CDA, is that it relies heavily on the insight of the researcher (e.g. Widdowson, 1995a/1995b). Thus, the biggest concern is whether the researcher is able to separate

his or her own opinions or beliefs from influencing the process (Litosseliti, 2006, p. 54). Moreover, the fact that CDA focusses greatly on the results, whilst paying little attention to the methodological process that guide the process, has not alleviated such concerns over potential research bias. Moreover, the fact that CDA offers many different perspectives and methodological perspectives for the study of language and social practise can be overwhelming to any researcher. This can also be considered a potential limitation if research techniques are not focussed and narrowed down appropriately to fit research question. In terms of representativeness of critical discourse analysis, the length of selected texts can hinder and limit the results of the analysis (Schegloff, 1997; Sharrock and Anderson, 1981; Stubbs, 1997; Verschueren, 2001; Wetherell, 1998). Understanding and acknowledging of these potential limitations, the thesis advances to conduct the analysis after highlighting some further ethical considerations and issues regarding the researchers own positionality within the research process.

### **3.4. Ethical Considerations and positionality**

The section highlights ethical considerations regarding the topic and the research process as well as my own bias towards the thesis. It will also touch upon the concept of positionality. All these factors are crucial parts of any research process. First, I must consider my personal incentives regarding the topic and why I have chosen it in the first place. The reason as to why I chose to study the interlinkages of climate change and conflict in a faraway African country rather than focussing issues closer to home was purely out of interest. There was also more material (read: UN documents) available on climate change and conflict regarding the Southern hemisphere rather than e.g. Scandinavia, which in hindsight represents a certain bias of its own. Nevertheless, the matter of availability together with my personal interest on South Sudan consciously guided my decision regarding the topic. Furthermore, it is important to note that I have never actually visited South Sudan or any other African countries, which makes me reliant on second-hand knowledge through literature and media as well perceptions in understanding the situation. The study of UN discourses on climate change and conflict in the context of South Sudan itself is not considered a sensitive topic as the focus is on language and discourses and their meanings rather than on individuals. The decision to focus specifically on South Sudan was made due to personal interest. Furthermore, through the case study, the thesis aimed to shed light

on South Sudan's particular situation, rather than generalising the discourses on climate change and conflict to consider the whole "African continent". As the theoretical framework highlighted, such generalisation could in worst case scenario lead to e.g. incorrect policy-planning.

As mentioned earlier, my research did not include any participants, but rather focussed on looking at discourses and language in their social contexts, meaning that the risk of non-maleficence within the research process was low. All the data used in analysis was also publicly available for anyone to use. However, there is one major ethical issue, which needs to be considered in using CDA as the methodology. This is the potential of misrepresentation. As a researcher, I need to be very conscious of not cherry-picking the discourses and social interactions from the text that would only support my set hypothesis. This is particularly crucial in presenting evidence via quotations. Highlighting only certain parts of text can easily twist or even falsify the original meanings. Thus, I have to analyse the texts as a whole with all its nuances.

Furthermore, I also need to consider how my previous experience have affected my research. Firstly, my experience working with the Permanent Mission of Finland in Geneva, where I participated to several UN agency briefings, has also shaped my understanding on how the whole UN system functions. Due to the amount of diplomatic balancing required to accomplish any type of collective outcomes, my understanding of the UN actors' ability react to situations was not very optimistic to begin with. I also must take into consideration that I was introduced to the conflict in South Sudan from a security orientated point of view during a course called 'Responsibility to Protect and Prosecute' during my undergraduate studies at the University of Leeds and even wrote an essay about principles of 'responsibility to protect' in the context of South Sudan. Thus, I have to be cautious of my own subconscious biases, which have been installed in me through my studies, and make sure my observations within my research remain impartial. Impartiality is crucial for any research project. Any conclusion drawn from literature or the data must truly be drawn from the existing evidence, rather than letting the researcher's own predispositions guide the research process.



Moreover, my positionality as a white Finnish female researcher has most likely affected my perspective on the topic, and moreover how the topic is approached within my analysis. Considering the dominance of the global North in gathering and producing academic knowledge, it is important to understand how my work contributes to these existing power structures. My personal academic background includes peace and conflict studies in the Finnish context as well as security politics and international relations in British context. Both experiences have shaped my understanding of the world and particularly social sciences. Thus, I must also acknowledge how heavily my academic background has focussed on explaining issues through the so-called Western lens of social sciences, which emphasises the European and American contexts. However, I attempted to counter some of these biases rising from my own positionality by using CDA as method for the analysis.

## **Chapter 4: Analysis**

Chapter 4 will examine how the four UN actors (UNEP, FAO, WFP and UNDP) have presented and conceptualised the relation between climate change and conflict in the context of South Sudan. Thus, the analysis will be conducted by comparing the collected data against the set hypotheses that were drawn from the theoretical framework. In order to understand what discourses surrounding climate and conflict are utilised and how they are being articulated, the findings will be further examined with the methodological tools identified in Chapter 3. The first part of the chapter highlights the different discourses prevalent in the assessed documents.

The analysis discovered that the discourses used in the UN documents are overlapping in many ways. One document could contain several different conceptualisations of the relation between climate change and conflict, which at times hindered the overall effectiveness of the message. In addition, it is worth mentioning that six of the fifteen documents did not contain any type of conceptualisation of the relation between climate change and conflict. Nevertheless, the following sections will discuss the conceptualisations that were present, and how well they reflected the set hypothesis.

#### **4.1. How do UN discourses on South Sudan reflect what we know about the links between conflicts and climate change?**

The argumentation suggesting a **link between climate change and conflict, through environmental degradation (the first hypothesis)**, could only be found from one source, which were the UNEP Brief (Gilruth, 2019). The link was described to be a two-way stream: climate-induced environmental degradation could contribute to the eruption of conflict, yet simultaneously conflict could also degrade the natural environment and exacerbate climate change.

*The key message for this brief is that conflict degrades the environment and environmental degradation **can be** a driver of conflicts. When climate change accelerates environmental degradation, the risk of conflict increases. This feedback loop is demonstrated in the case of South Sudan (p.1).*

In the brief, climate-exacerbated environmental degradation is conceptualised to lead to resource scarcity and forced migration, which consequently could increase the frequency of violence in South Sudan through e.g. cattle raiding. The argumentation highlighted the need for a better understanding of the interconnections between environmental factors and security, in the light of intensifying climate change. However, the discursive construction is done in rather cautious terms by avoiding the use of any deterministic tones. Climate change was described as merely an accelerator, which could increase the risk of conflict among other factors. The text also identified other factors, as the flow of small weapons, to increase the levels of violence.

Further on, the text also highlighted the vastness and complexity of the interconnection between climate change, environment and conflict by discussing the multiple factors, which allow a feedback loop to persist. Such factors were described to be e.g. oil, biodiversity, migration, urbanisation, forestry and agriculture. The argumentation demonstrated medium levels of modality. The text presented their findings regarding the interrelations as legitimate and urgent, emphasising the following: “the international community engaged in

implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) must understand these interconnections between environment and security in view of the onset of climate change” (Gilruth, 2019). However, the argumentation supporting hypothesis 1 forms only one part within the entire discursive construction of the text.

The argumentation suggesting that **climate-induced resource scarcity could lead to the eruption of conflict (the second hypothesis)** was encountered in six documents. Most of the documents found climate change induced drier weather patterns to be an underlying driver for resource-based conflicts between the South Sudanese pastoralists and the farming communities over access to grazing land (WFP, 2017b; UNDP, 2017a; UNDP, 2017b; UNEP, 2017). Resource scarcity was also portrayed be the consequence of climate-induced environmental degradation (UNEP Brief/ Gilruth, 2019), which consequently resulted into more cattle raiding and/or conflict. UNEP’s (2017) press release highlighted the most drastic language by referencing South Sudan’s previous Environment Minister Deng Deng Hoc Yai who stated that climatic changes (e.g. drought) put pressure on resources which consequently then “*fan the flames of conflict*”. It also emphasised access to water and loss of grazing land to be triggering factors for violence. Interestingly, other contributing political or socioeconomic factors were only mentioned within two of the six documents (WFP, 2017b; UNEP 2018a). WFP’s (Sova, 2017b) blogpost was one of the only texts highlighting ethno-religious factors in discussing the situation regarding climate change and conflict. Even though the text of the quote is referring to Darfur conflict in Sudan, the overall text does further on emphasise how these same highlighted tensions are also playing out in South Sudan:

*These long-term climatic trends have had significant consequences for Sudan’s two predominant – and sometimes competing – agricultural systems: Smallholder farmers relying on rain-fed production and nomadic pastoralists. Agriculturalist in Sudan are predominantly ethno-African, while pastoralists are disproportionately of Arab ethnicity. Fast-moving desertification and drought slowly eroded the availability of natural resources to support livelihoods and peaceful coexistence of these two groups in the region (Sova, 2017b)*

Six documents included argumentation suggesting the **increased climate-induced vulnerability to be a severe threat to human security (the third hypothesis)** (FAO, 2020; UNEP, 2018a; Gilruth, 2019; Sova, 2017b; WFP, 2019; UNDP, 2017b). Climate change was portrayed to have a devastating impact, not only on natural systems, but also to human and social systems, as the combination of on-going civil war and extreme weather events are seen as the main cause for increased food and livelihood livelihood. WFP's (Sova, 2017b) blogpost underlined the following:

*The combined effects of civil war and drought have left nearly 5 million people food-insecure in the country (South Sudan), representing over 40 percent of the population. (WFP, 2017b, p. 2)*

Furthermore, UNEP's brief (Gilruth, 2019) highlighted that despite the increasing knowledge on the effects of climate change, its implications for human security and the rise of conflict are yet to be fully understood.

The argumentation concerning the conceptualisation of **climate change as a threat multiplier (the fourth hypothesis)** could be found in three documents (Gilruth, 2019; UNEP, 2018a; UNDP, 2017). This was surprising considering how dominant the 'threat multiplier' discourse has been within the political discourses. UNEP's (Gilruth, 2019) brief emphasised that:

*The current consensus is that climate change alone is unlikely to be the primary cause of conflict, but it is an important threat multiplier. As such, climate change has been identified as a threat multiplier, which can exacerbate existing threats. (p. 1)*

Similar argumentation was used in an example in UNDP's (2017a, p. 2) blogpost, which constructed climate change as a potential threat multiplier in South Sudan that could exacerbate tensions and conflict, similarly to how it has done in Lake Chad region, if something was not done about it.

*As the world gears up to confront the threats posed by climate change and support communities most affected, **South Sudan faces a grave risk of being left behind** despite being a signatory to the Paris Agreement. **Mounting evidence across countries and regions show inaction now can have long term and potentially irreversible consequences. A case in point is the Lake Chad region** which in relatively short span of fifty years has shrunk from an area of 25,000 square kilometres to 2,500 square kilometres, affecting nearly 50 million people and **turned into a ‘threat multiplier’ by exacerbating tensions and conflicts in the communities that live there.***

As already mentioned, the most deterministic nuances were represented in UNEP’s news article (2017), which referenced e.g. South Sudan’s former Environment Minister, Deng Deng Hoc Yai’s statements, in which he claimed climate change to have exacerbated the civil war in South Sudan, as well as a report by Germany’s International public broadcasting company Deutsche Welle, which highlighted how “*many experts believe the changing climate is partly responsible for South Sudan’s three-year old internal armed conflict*” (UNEP, 2017). Both of these references were used to legitimise the discursive contraction of climate change as a potential threat-multiplier.

The argumentation highlighting other **political and socioeconomic factors within their conceptualisation of the relation between climate change and conflict (the fifth hypothesis)** could only be identified in four documents (WFP, 2014; FAO, 2016b; FAO, 2017; UNEP, 2018b). Despite identifying some political and socioeconomic factors, such as governmental actions and effective distribution as issues for the peaceful development of the country (e.g. news article by FAO, 2017), ultimately the UN actors used very little effort to further explain these factors and their impacts within their discursive construction. In majority of cases they were only included in a list form within the text.

The intensifying impacts of climate change and the difficult socioeconomic realities were described to “*form a complex dynamic of causes contributing to environmental change in*

*South Sudan*” in the UNEP Report (2018b, p. 12). Moreover, the political and socioeconomic factors, present in South Sudan, were described to increase the society’s vulnerability to the natural hazards, such as floods and droughts, whose duration, frequency and intensity were exacerbated by climate change (UNEP, 2018b). Moreover, the following political and socioeconomic stressors were also identified:

*Socioeconomic factors and dynamics, such as economics, demographics, technology, cultural norms, governance and conflict, are the root causes that drive physical pressures on the environment. Pressures range from extractive and land use activities such as forestry, agriculture, to fishing and mining (UNEP, 2018b, p.9).*

Furthermore, the same report (UNEP, 2018b) also identified various other drivers of conflict such as “*the proliferation of small arms, the politicisation of ethnicity, a legacy of weak property rights, the lack of economic diversification and over-reliance on oil*”( p.9), in addition to “*the influx of refugees, returnees and internally displaced people since 2005*”, which have “*also been a significant cause of inappropriate land use and over-exploitation of natural resources*” (p. 9 )

FAO’s (2016b) report identified South Sudan to be one of the most violence prone states in the world, sitting at sixth place in the global rankings of conflict events. “*Most of these conflicts are associated with issue related to governance, but also with natural resources*” (FAO, 2016b, p.35). However, the text did not go into further explaining, what types of issues it referred to, leaving the discursive construction weak. Furthermore, even though WFP’s (2014) report identified some type of a link between the impacts of climate change and conflict, it was the only report emphasising that conflicts in South Sudan to be first and foremost political:

*Climate impacts have also a bearing on conflicts, but this has not been included in this report, given that the major conflicts being faced in the country is political (p. 2).*

The **discursive construction emphasising the need to build resilience (the sixth hypothesis)** was not widely present in the UN's discursive construction of climate change and conflict in the context of South Sudan. Three of the examined documents (UNDP, 2017a; UNDP, 2017b; FAO, 2017) mention the need to build more diversified livelihoods and increase the nation's resilience within their discursive construction. UNDP's (2017a) blogpost emphasised the importance of long-term solutions focussing on resilience and cooperation, particularly in terms South Sudan's agricultural practices:

*Strengthening domestic preparedness on climate change adaptation and investing in climate resilient agriculture will be a concrete step towards building resilient communities. The challenges faced in South Sudan call for a new way of working by striking a better balance acting simultaneously on lifesaving, recovery and resilience-building fronts. (p. 2)*

FAO's (2017) news article emphasised the need to build resilience and take mitigative action for both situation of conflict and the intensifying effects of climate change. The need to "support an agenda of climate change adaptation and building diversified livelihoods in South Sudan" (Press release - UNDP, 2017b) was also brought forward in the discursive construction, emphasising the need for long-term solution that focus on resilience in understanding the relationship between climate change and conflict. Overall, the discursive construction regarding resilience placed a lot of responsibility on the back of the international community, in terms of enabling the needed resilience building in South Sudan. UNDP's (2017a) blogpost emphasised that:

*The country needs a bold and ambitious international response, including access to new, adequate and sustained source of climate change finance and clean technology. While a good start, the needs far outstrip the resources available within the Global Environmental Facility and the Green Climate Fund. (p. 2)*

Any argumentation regarding **discourses on cooperation (also part of the sixth hypothesis)** could not be found from the data.

## 4.2. Critical examination of the Discourses: Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Theory

The following section will attempt elaborate on the finding drawn from UN documents by critically examining them with the help of Fairclough's (1992, 1995) three-dimensional analytical model's principles. First, the analysis begins with a more detailed textual analysis of the findings. This is then followed by an analysis of the discursive practice. The final section focusses on reflecting upon the social, institutional and situational realities in which the examined UN actors have discussed the interlinkages between climate change and conflict.

### 4.2.1. Textual analysis

The textual analysis will focus on locating the language used to portray the discourses drawn from UN documents, which helps us to understand how the discourses regarding the interlinkages between climate change and conflict are linguistically realised. Drawing upon Fairclough's methodological framework, the first section focusses on the **analysis of cohesion**, which is the inquiry of argumentation regarding the construction of the relation between climate change and conflict within the texts. Many of the documents combined different discursive branches within their conceptualisation, creating several 'hybrid-discourses'. This implies a combination of several argumentation types, which are mixed and match to construct the wanted discursive make-up. For example, the UNEP brief (Gilruth, 2019) combined four of the outlined six hypothetical discourses within its discursive construction, whereas the WFP (2014) report only highlighted one. The discursive make-ups of the documents are not only different between the four agencies but also within the agencies as well. Therefore, it is impossible to establish any overarching and comprehensive patterns regarding how the UN actors construct their discourses. However, the two most common types of argumentations regarding the relation between climate change and conflict in the context of South Sudan were hybrid-discourses. The first one portrays a relationship where climate change fuels conflict over grazing areas between pastoralists and farmers (UNDP, 2017a; UNDP, 2017b; UNEP, 2019; UNEP, 2017), which represents mixture of discourses



emphasising environmental degradation and resource scarcity. The second type of argumentation portrays the relationship as follows: increasing challenges posed by climate change are exacerbated by the on-going conflict, which then pose a risk to human security, mainly through hindering food security (UNEP, 2018a; FAO, 2017; FAO, 2018; FAO, 2020; Phiri, 2019). It is important to acknowledge that these were not the only argumentation present, even though they are considered the most common ones within the dataset. When looking separately at each agencies' documents in the context of South Sudan, one can actually identify some over-arching aspects with the organisation level argumentation. UNEP's discursive construction did contain the most security driven tones. WFP and FAO both focussed the first and foremost the importance of food security in understanding the interlinkages and UNDP was the main agency emphasising the aspects of resilience. Thus, on this level there seems to be some correlation. However, overall the discourses did not follow any 'coherent blueprint', and as mentioned, several discursive discrepancies can be identified between and within these UN documents. It must be also emphasised that six of the documents did not discuss the interrelation between climate change and conflict at all. Rather, they focussed on explaining the effects both phenomena have in South Sudan separately, which was the most common among FAO's documents.

**The study of transitivity** focussed on looking at questions of agency, causality and responsibility within the UN discourses. In terms of **agency**, the study found that majority of the UN documents understood climate change as being largely the result of human action. For example, UNEP (Gilruth, 2019) underlined that issues, such as oil extradiation, deforestation (due to forestry and agriculture) as well as pollution caused by increasing urbanisation, were some of ways human action contributes to the increasing effect of climate change in South Sudan. These issues were also exacerbated by conflict situations. The level of responsibility that was placed on South Sudan's human agency overall was low. It did however vary between the documents, as some highlighted the effects of the lack of good governance (FAO, 2017; UNEP, 2018a) or the earlier mentioned human activities, such oil extradiation and charcoal production to bear responsibility (Gilruth, 2019), whilst other did not shed light on the responsibility of South Sudanese agency at all. Furthermore, the argumentation, which victimised South Sudan, emphasising how the country

is not actually contributing to global warming through e.g. emissions, yet simultaneously it is suffering from its consequences, could also be identified (UNDP, 2017a). The argumentation describing the agency of the UN or the international community as contributors to climate change was silenced.

In terms of **causality**, some of the discursive practises portrayed climate change to be the main contributing agent within the interrelation between climate change and conflict, which can be problematic. By presenting climate change as a natural threat that exacerbates conflict in South Sudan, the discursive construction conceals the huge responsibility of the North for the generation of CO<sub>2</sub> and greenhouse gas emissions. The developed world has historically produced more emissions than the developing countries, which has also aided their development by e.g. cheaper transition to industrialisation (UNFCCC, 1992; Rocha et al., 2015). Thus, they should bear the responsibility in addressing the negative impacts of climate change. However, this type of emphasis on climate justice and fair distribution of responsibility are hardly ever seriously discussed in the dominant discourses due to the difficult political nature of the issue and the opposite understanding of responsibility and culpability particularly between the global North and South (Whalley and Walsh, 2009). The lack of attention given to issues regarding historical injustices, in addition to silencing the marginalised voices within the discursive practices become problematic as they enable the neo-colonial structures of power to be linguistically realised without any opposition. Only one document, WFP's blogpost (Phiri, 2019), highlighted the low level of responsibility that South Sudan bears in contributing to climate change, whilst simultaneously suffering from its consequences greatly.

Furthermore, the portrayal of climate change as 'the root of the problem' also fails to acknowledge the negative consequences of the South Sudanese government and institutions for e.g. their unjust distribution of resources and poor environmental management. Only a few documents highlighted other alternative socioeconomic and political factors, which contribute to the wider insecurities present in South Sudan. However, the reference to such factors within the discursive construction were very brief and vague. The documents were thus successful in downplaying the responsibility of the South Sudanese government and

national institutions. Rhetorically, it is very different refer to ‘issues related to governance and natural resources’ rather than ‘the actions of the government’s ineffective policies regarding the distribution of natural resources’.

In terms of **responsibility** for acting and responding to the humanitarian crisis present in South Sudan, the UN documents emphasised predominantly the role of the international community. Only a few documents briefly mentioned the potential ways in which the complex mixture of violence and devastating effects of climate change could be contained in South Sudan. Such factors were e.g. effective governance and equal distribution of natural resources. However, these factors were only vaguely brought forward, and they were expressed without providing further explanations as to how or why. Thus, the discursive constructions within the documents can be said to have emphasised the need for the international community to act, whilst simultaneously victimising South Sudan by portraying an image of the country as ‘unable’ to act in such complex situation. The low level of discourses focussing on resilience within the UN documents is also testimony to this.

*Despite its having no role in contributing to global warming, the country is at once highly vulnerable and least prepared to address looming threats systematically across sectors (UNDP, 2017a).*

*Through no fault of its own, South Sudan is now suffering from the vagaries of a changing climate, which exacerbate the already enormous challenges caused by decades of political instability, poverty and persistent food insecurity (WFP: Phiri, 2019).*

Both the victimisation and the portrayal of the South Sudanese communities as inherently vulnerable and incapable; characteristics that only increase due to climate change, are problematic. They undermine the capabilities of the South Sudanese agency to adapt and learn from the complex interplay of climate change and conflict, presupposing South Sudanese to be just passive victims of climate-induced insecurity. The image feeds into the neo-colonial ideology that enforces the agenda of the developed countries who ‘know better’, rather than allowing the focus to be on finding homegrown solutions to the issue. The undermining of the African agency in solving its issues can pose a fundamental threat to the further development of the whole African region, including South Sudan (Ayodele,

2020). Through “indirect form of control by a superpower through cultural and economic means” (p.356) they enforce and withhold the unequal relations of power, creating further dependence between the developed world and developing countries such as South Sudan (Durokifa and Ijeoma, 2018). The discourses related to victimisation also enforce hierarchies that are based on the pre-determined criterion for industrialisation or development. As the effectiveness of climate solutions are often determined by the level of infrastructural preparedness and technological innovations, less developed states become characterised as ‘backward’ or ‘unprepared’ (William et al., 2014). The hierarchisation also creates a dynamic where the less developed countries are forced to abide by the rules imposed on them and thus, countries such as South Sudan are always having to catch up in a structurally uneven playing field (William et al., 2014).

The study of **modality** demonstrated mixed results in terms urgency within the documents. None of the arguments focussing on the relation between climate change and conflict were presented as absolute truths. The constructions of the arguments regarding climate change and conflict were also weak and vague in the sense that they were often not backed by sufficient facts or other references. Moreover, the fact that six of the documents did not identify any interrelations between the concepts of climate change and conflict, also speaks volumes on how the relationship is not given much emphasis or urgency.

Finally, the **study of vocabulary** highlighted a few key words that were essential amongst the construction of UN discourses regarding climate change and conflict. Firstly, the word ‘security’ was employed in different contexts and with various meanings within the documents. Overall, it is important to highlight that talking about ‘security’ rather than e.g. ‘vulnerability’ may propose a more traditional security focussed approach to the issue, shaping the context around it significantly. Therefore, the choice of words does always bear consequences. In the examined UN documents, the way in which the word ‘security’ was predominantly used emphasised issues regarding human security. Thus, the majority of the examined documents emphasised, first and foremost, the security of the South Sudanese people. They emphasised non-traditional conceptualisations of security such as food security and livelihood security, with the referent object being the local human beings. Such human

security focus is increasingly emphasised in the wider UN discourse. Only two documents (Gilruth, 2019; FAO, 2020) put some level of emphasis on climate-induced insecurity as a potential threat to global security, due to the potential ‘spill-over’ effects from South Sudan to the neighbouring countries and even outside of Africa. Despite being cautiously expressed and even partnered with the issue of human security, such statements can arguably create a sense of urgency for action, as well as strengthens the assumed link between the concept of climate change with more traditional security concerns. This, however, represents more profound issues. For example, such arguments could be used to enforce the North’s ethnocentric perspective, which portrays the Global South as the barbaric Other, incapable to maintaining order at the face of adversity (Mgbeoji, 2006; Mauthener, 2013). Meanwhile, similar assumptions are never made about the developed countries of the North. The rhetorical construction also undermines the scientific fact that climate change is a global issue, as well as creates a very deterministic and colonialist outlook for the understanding of the interlinkages between climate change and conflict. Furthermore, the conceptualisation of the South as a primeval Other justifies violence and denies the possibility of peaceful dialogue. It can also be used to justify any type of intervention by the North, whilst simultaneously obscuring their complicity in generating climatic and environmental problems through e.g. extractive industries, emissions, commercial agriculture, and the lack of land reform.

The word ‘conflict’ is also invested with different meanings and connotations. The documents included some instances where links between the ‘conflict’ and ‘climate change’ were being drawn through e.g. environmental degradation or resource scarcity. However, these were portrayed in rather cautious terms, which avoid using deterministic tones. The majority of the reference made to conflict, discussed it in terms of human security, disruption of agricultural production or the impediment of sustainable development. Moreover, the word ‘conflict’ was most of the time used independently, without indication to any type of causal relationship. State and non-state conflicts are said to impede sustainable development, destroy local livelihoods, hinder agricultural production as well as lead to further food insecurity in South Sudan. The word ‘climate change’ is also discussed in varied ways. Some of the texts portray it to represent an independent ‘actor’, naturalising climate change as an actor. Alternative terms, such as ‘droughts’, ‘floods and ‘extreme

weather patterns', were also present in the data. Only one source recognised South Sudan's situation to be a "man-made crisis" (UNDP, 2017a). The linguistic construction of the threat by climate change and its relation to conflict focussed mainly on the detrimental effects it may have on human agency, which is a common approach for UN actors.

#### **4.2.2. Analysis of Discursive Practice**

The analysis of discursive practice is concerned with locating the varying discourses regarding climate change and conflict in the text and examining their interplay. It investigates how the text are produced and how they draw from the existing order of discourse (Fairclough, 1992). Particularly interesting is to examine what discourses within the UN documents are dominant, present, absent or even silenced. The analysis of **interdiscursivity** identified the application of several different discourses, but at the same time revealed the discourses emphasising human security and resource scarcity to be more the most dominant within the documents that did address the relation. When the relation between climate change and conflict, through environmental degradation or resource scarcity, is being explicitly addressed, it is not described as the sole push factor, but rather as a component in an interactive mixture of factors alongside other political and socioeconomic components of vulnerability, such as poverty and underdevelopment. The argumentation related to human-centred discourses is prevalent in the majority of the analysed documents. The portrayal of climate change as a threat to human security is thus very common. The most used discursive construction emphasised the notion of human security and particularly the devastating effects climate exacerbated vulnerabilities could have on food and livelihood security. Articulations emphasising environmental conflict related discourses only figure in a few texts (e.g. Gilruth, 2019), whilst being completely absent in the majority of analysed documents. Furthermore, within the documents in which these discourses are easily discernible, the text never solely draws upon that one discourse. Rather they form part of a hybrid discourse, which mixes several branches of discourses. Discourses on resilience and cooperation were hardly present at all within the documents, which is interesting considering the institutional image of the UN system as the voucher of international cooperation and sustainable development goals. In terms of **intertextuality**, it was not uncommon for

the examined UN actors to refer or to reference their own previous reports and studies or ones done by other UN actors. The fact that it can form the texts in such manner, emphasises UN's credibility and powerful standing as a text producer. Academic references could only be found in two documents.

The **analysis of absences** is considered to provide insightful information for social analysis (Fairclough, 1995). The biggest factors that are not present in the discourses, are the societal root causes, which have exposed the people of South Sudan to increasing vulnerability to climate change. In the rare occasions, when the underlining political and socioeconomic causes of vulnerability are addressed, they are recognised to be the cause of issues such structural inequalities or unequal development processes. However, explicit calls to tackle these causes are largely missing from the argumentation. For example, the responsibility of the South Sudanese government, institutions and national actors is hardly being highlighted within the documents. Similarly, matters of climate justice are also silenced in the majority of the texts, apart from a few rare exceptions.

#### **4.2.3. The analysis of Social Practise**

The critical discourse analysis framework proposes that discourses are never decontextualised and isolated from the existing social practice. After having discussed the language and discursive meanings within the UN documents, this section focusses on further exploring the broader social contexts and structures in which examined the UN actors discuss the relation between climate change and conflict. It is important in order to fully grasp the intention, aims, the used language and the overall rationale of the documents. The section will highlight some political, institutional, situational and financial means in which the portrayed discourses exist. The attempt here is to give context and to explain why such discourses have been utilised.

##### *Institutional*

The institutional standing of the examined UN actors as part of the UN structure also

influences the way discourses are produced. UN institutional reputation as the global peacemaker influence the way in which particularly issues with high volatility are discussed - the UN actors must be strategic in their approach, in order to not come across as the one pointing fingers and culpability particularly on their member states. What remains puzzling, is how the discourses focussing on adaptation, cooperation and resilience were not extensively underlined within the UN documents.

### *Situational*

The situational context in South Sudan, in which the examined UN actors are operating is also rather complex. South Sudan as the world's newest state continues to exist on a highly instable base. The on-going violence and intensifying effects of climate change are also the outcomes of years of structural violence, unjust governance and unfit development efforts. For example, issues such as access have been on the table as the mobility of UN personnel, such as humanitarian workers and other specialists, is very restricted on the best of the days. Maintaining good relationships between the government and communities around is of utmost importance for the operation of any agency. Thus, the UN actors' discourses on climate change and conflict, which on an extremely vague level recognise the responsibility and culpability of the local authorities in contributing to vicious circle, can be understood as strategically created. The UN actors do recognise some factors related to responsibility and culpability of e.g. local authorities in combating the effects of climate change and conflict, yet this is textually done in an extremely vague manner that leaves a lot of facts unsaid. Thus, the ways in which the situation could be improved through better government policies and accountability is not made clear to the reader.

### *Financial*

The financial context is also something to take into consideration, when examining the UN discourses. This context is not necessarily strictly attached only to the issues of climate change and conflict or their suggested interrelations. Moreover, it is a more universal issue for the UN and its various actors altogether. A large proportion of the funding that UN receives comes from donor countries from the global North. Therefore, even though e.g. the issue of



climate justice is perceived highly important on the more general UN level, the different UN actors involved in country-specific projects may rhetorically want to leave such emphasis out, because of the risk of increasing tension or sparking potential disagreements between donor states. This could be particularly counterproductive for the UN actors' ultimate purpose, which is to obtain the required funding for the survival of their on-going operations.

#### **4.2.4. Summary of the analysis**

The critical examination of the UN discourses found some level of correlation between five and a half of the six hypotheses laid out in chapter 2. The only argumentation that could not be found from the documents was the one emphasising cooperation. The most dominant argumentations types emphasised resources scarcity and human security. The first one portrayed the interlinkage between climate change and conflict as climate change fuelling conflict over grazing areas between pastoralist and farmers, which emphasises particularly the issue of resource scarcity. The other one emphasised the increasing challenges posed by climate change to be exacerbated by on-going conflict, which then posed a risk to human security through e.g. increasing food insecurity. However, it is important to highlight that there were multiple discrepancies between the discourses within and between the documents. Furthermore, and even more surprisingly, six out of fifteen documents did not emphasise the interlinkages between climate change and conflict at all within their discursive construction, which can be understood as an indication of the lack of emphasis the UN actors are putting on the matter.

Overall, even though UN actors recognise the implications of human action on climate change, only a few do this in a comprehensive and explicit manner. The responsibility of the South Sudanese agency, the local government and the international community was not widely discussed and even silenced, as the majority of the documents directly or indirectly portrayed climate change to be the main contributing agent for the issues posed in South Sudan. Such linguistic naturalisation can be problematic, as it conceals the various other contributing factors such as political and socioeconomic realities and the responsibility of the Global North for their greenhouse gas emissions. Another issue rising from such discursive

construction is the active victimisation of the South Sudanese agency, which creates an image of the South Sudanese communities as inherently incapable of resolving and adapting to their situations. In addition, it also feeds into neo-colonial ideologies that aim to enforce the agenda of the developed countries, who supposedly 'know better' upon what is considered less developed or even backward. The victimisation nuances together with the low emphasis on the political and socioeconomic realities may help downplay the responsibility of the South Sudanese government for their ineffective actions and policies in handling the situation. The vocabulary choices also complement these argumentations, and the ideologies and structures of power are creating. However, to some extent, the discourses overall can be said have mirrored the highlighted institutional, situational and financial realities, in which the UN actors operate.

## **Chapter 5: Discussions**

The chapter 5 will expand on the results drawn from the analysis to discuss to what extent do the UN discourses actually reflect the academic debates and the situation in South Sudan in addition to some explanations as to why this is the case. In terms of academic debates, the critical examination of the UN documents identified a broad mixture of overlapping, discrepant and vaguely presented discourses. Even though some of the UN documents are successful in referencing academic sources in constructing their discourses, the variety of these sources was limited: only two documents included academic references to back up the argumentation within their text. Many of the documents relied on referencing other UN documents, the statements of heads of state or media in constructing and justifying their discourses. Furthermore, six of the fifteen sources did not emphasise any type of interlinkages between climate change and conflict, but rather focussed on discussing the issues of climate and/or conflict separately, mainly in relation to the issue of food insecurity in South Sudan. This indicates that the interlinkages themselves are not given as big of an emphasis as the researcher expected at the start of the thesis process and that the discourses cannot be said to align comprehensively with the current academic debates either. The extent to which the UN discourses reflect the situation on the ground is also complex. The UN actors have successfully managed to highlight some realities of the South Sudan situation (e.g. the

emphasis on the impacts of livelihoods), whereas others have not been brought forward properly (e.g. socioeconomic and political factors such as inefficient governmental policies regarding natural resources). Furthermore, the fact that the issue of climate change and conflict in the context of South Sudan has not been given a greater emphasis within the UN discourses could be seen as problematic. Both the on-going state of violent conflict and the intensifying effects of climate change with increasingly erratic weather patterns represent significant issues for today's South Sudan. Thus, a more comprehensive and holistic understanding of the relation between the two phenomena could greatly benefit the efforts to find sustainable and peaceful solutions for the country.

There are a few potential explanations as to why there is only weak alignment between the examined UN discourses, the academic debates and the situation on the ground in South Sudan. Firstly, as mentioned before, the UN actors did not rely on solely one conceptualisation of the relation between climate change and conflict to construct their discourses, but rather resulted in utilising several and at times overlapping conceptualisations, creating a series of different hybrid discourses. One possibility is that this somewhat incohesive approach reflects the fact that UN actors' have not necessarily fully grasped all nuances of the relationship between climate change and conflict. This, however, also reflects the current theoretical climate regarding the topic within academia as highlighted in the theoretical framework. As the academic field is yet to agree upon the nature of the relationship between climate change and conflict and how the two phenomena even should be defined, it is no surprise that the UN actors have resulted in portraying the situation in South Sudan in such varying ways. The downfall of such inconsistencies and uncertainty is that they may potentially hamper the adoption of effective and sustainable policies on the issue of climate change in South Sudan. Another potential reason hindering the UN actors' abilities to align their discursive constructions with the current academic literature and the situation in the ground in South Sudan is the lack of empirical data. The availability of data has been a problem for the overall study of the interlinkages, and it has proven to be an even greater issue in the context of South Sudan. Furthermore, the lack of emphasis on the issues regarding political and socioeconomic factors as well as climate justice, present in the UN discourses on South

Sudan, can also be seen as a way to shrink the responsibility of both the international community and the South Sudanese government and institutions. However, it can also be understood as a conscious tactic to push forward an image or agenda of the UN systems' neutrality and impartiality. By silencing both the questions related to accountability and the political and socioeconomic factors within the discursive construction, the actors embrace "the depoliticised stance of UN (Mason, 2014, p. 806)". Thus, to support the purpose of the whole UN system in "*maintaining international peace and security, developing friendly relations among nations and promoting social progress, better living standards and human rights*" (UN, 2015), the UN actors are forced to push forward certain agendas that reflect the apolitical stance, which is required to hold on to a level of neutrality before the eyes of its member states. Furthermore, it is also said to be easier to convince the 'audience', whether it is the international community or the South Sudanese state actors, to act against a threat such as climate change, when it is clearly defined as an external enemy (Kester & Sovacol, 2017).

Overall, the analysis here concludes that the UN discourses regarding the interlinkages between climate change and conflict cannot be said to comprehensively reflect the academic literature and the current situation on the ground. The inconsistency of the discourses and concealment of certain critical and politicised factors may hinder the credibility and efficiency of the examined UN actors and their work in South Sudan in the long run. The amount of discrepancies is particularly concerning, as it may hinder the ability of the actors to adapt and enforce sustainable and effective policies to aid the South Sudan to transform their society towards a more peaceful and resilient future. Moreover, the highlighted neo-colonial nuances in some of the discourses may also come across as alarming. The dilution of responsibility together with the self-referential nature of the identified UN discourses feed into this idea that emphasises the superiority of UN produced knowledge, which simultaneously also solidifies the actors' positions of power. As the majority of the examined documents lacked academic references, the discourses make it seem as if the UN actors were the main legitimate source of information on the matter. These factors then allow the UN actors to continue to push the agendas they see fit and useful, even if that comes at the expense of the South Sudanese agency.

## **Concluding Remarks**

With the specific research interest in the case of South Sudan, the thesis examined how the UN actors have portrayed the interlinkages between climate change and conflict in their discursive construction, in addition to discussing the extent to which these UN discourses actually coincided with the known academic debates as well as the situation on the ground in South Sudan. The analysis was conducted by mapping the set of hypothetical discourses, drawn from the theoretical framework, against the data in order to understand how the UN discourses reflected what we know about the link between climate change and conflict. The research found that the UN utilised a mixture of different argumentation types in describing the interlinkages, creating so-called ‘hybrid-discourses’ that varied not only across actors but also within one agency’s documents. The majority of discourses were constructed and presented in a rather vague and discrepant manner that most likely intended to maintain an apolitical stance. Argumentation emphasising aspects of human security and resource scarcity was the most dominant amongst the discovered discourses. Only the argumentation emphasising cooperation was completely absent within the documents, which was interesting considering the nature of UN system as a facilitator of international cooperation. More importantly and surprisingly, the thesis also discovered that discourses focussing on the interlinkages between climate change and conflict were not as widely present within the examined UN documents as expected. Almost half of the documents did not discuss the interlinkages at all, which speaks volumes of the low level of urgency the UN actors are putting on the matter in the context of South Sudan.

The further critical examination through Fairclough’s three-dimensional theory also revealed how the responsibility of the South Sudanese agency, the local government and the international community was not widely discussed and even silenced in many of the UN discourses. Many of the documents utilised argumentation that directly or indirectly portrayed climate change to be the main contributing and even independent agent for the issues posed by South Sudan. Such linguistic naturalisation is problematic, as it conceals the various other contributing factors, such as crucial political and socioeconomic factors as well as the responsibility of the Global North for their greenhouse gas emissions. Another issue rising

from such discursive construction is the active victimisation of the South Sudanese agency, which creates an image of the South Sudanese communities as inherently incapable resolving and adapting to their situation. Moreover, it also feeds into the Neo-colonial ideologies, which enforce the agenda of the developed countries, who supposedly 'know better', upon countries such as South Sudan. The victimisation together with the low emphasis on the political and socioeconomic realities successfully downplay the responsibility of the South Sudanese government for their ineffective actions and policies in handling the situation which the country faces. The vocabulary also complemented these argumentations, and the ideologies and structures of power they have created. Overall, the discourses however mirrored, to an extent, the explained institutional, situational and financial realities in which the UN actors operate.

The discussions chapter highlighted that the UN discourses on climate change and conflict demonstrated low alignment with current academic debates and the known situation on the ground in South Sudan. The critical examination of the discourses discovered discrepancies and even silencing of some of the argumentations, indicating that the actors may not fully grasp all the nuances of the relationship between climate change and conflict in the context of South Sudan or they are choosing consciously or unconsciously to not discuss them as comprehensively as they could. . However, it is important to understand that the lack of engagement in terms of the nuances of the interlinkages is not that surprising, considering how discrepant the field of academic debates on the topic is. The current amount of available empirical data on the interlinkages and the case of South Sudan is also not sufficient for reaching a truly comprehensive and nuanced research outcomes. More case specific empirical research is particularly needed in order to have a better understanding of the theoretical and situational grounds, as well as to create greater alignment. Furthermore, the decision to portray the interlinkages in such vague and discrepant manner may also be seen as an intentional attempt by the UN actors to withhold their organisational neutrality and depoliticised stance as the insurer of global peace. Overall, the UN discourses on climate change and conflict cannot be said to comprehensively reflect the academic literature and the situation on the ground, which may ultimately hinder the UN actors' abilities to fulfil

their goal of helping the South Sudanese people move towards sustainable peace and a more resilient and prosperous future.

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