

# ‘Everything-old-is-new-again’: Private urban security governance responses to new harmscapes

Julie Berg 

University of Glasgow, UK

Clifford Shearing 

University of Toronto, Canada

University of Cape Town, South Africa

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## Abstract

This article reflects on the proliferation of novel forms of private urban security governance assemblages, specifically the roles of private auspices and providers in responding to contemporary climate-related socio-material harmscapes. The authors use the lens of climatic harms and associated discursive shifts in understandings of the relationship between humans and ‘nature’ to draw attention to gating adaptations, assemblages of powers and capacities being mobilised in response to emerging harmscapes, the logics and technologies underpinning these developments, the roles of established security agents and novel security professionals and the use of resilience as a conceptual framing. These security governance ventures are conceived of as mutating private urban security governance vestiges from PUSG 1.0 to PUSG 2.0 and in this regard, ‘climate gating’ is used as an emblematic example in exploring PUSG 2.0.

## Keywords

Anthropocene, climate gating, polycentric, private urban security governance, resilience

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### Corresponding author:

Julie Berg, Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research,  
School of Political and Social Sciences, University of  
Glasgow, 63 Gibson Street, Glasgow G12 8LR, UK.

Email: [Julie.Berg@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:Julie.Berg@glasgow.ac.uk)

## 摘要

本文反思了新式私人城市安全治理组合激增的影响，特别是私人赞助和私人提供者在应对当代气候相关社会物质危害方面的作用。作者从气候危害和相关话语转变的视角，去理解人类与“自然”之间的关系，来提醒人们注意门控适应、为应对新出现的危害而调动的权力和能力的组合、支撑这些发展的逻辑和技术，既定安保代理人和新安保专业人员各自所起的作用以及复原力作为概念框架的使用。这些安全治理企业被认为是将私人城市安全治理剩余力量从 PUSG 1.0 突变为 PUSG 2.0，对此，“气候门控”被用作探索 PUSG 2.0 的标志性示例。

## 关键词

人类世、气候门控、多中心、私人城市安全治理、复原力

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## Introduction

In this article, we consider the evolution of private urban security governance<sup>1</sup> and reflect on the spatial trajectories of governance. We draw attention to how locations, logics and practices of private urban security governance have transformed over time, with a focus on the challenges of unfolding 21st-century ‘harmscapes’ (Berg and Shearing, 2018) – specifically, climate crisis with its roots in ‘the inexpressible devastation of the Earth’ (Escobar, 2018: 7). We focus on how climate-related harmscapes have led to governance adaptations regarding private urban security that demonstrate continuities with the vestiges of past security logics and practices. We show how these new ventures have repurposed, extended and developed established forms of governing in the face of climate-related harms. To date, much thinking about shifts in the organisation and operations of private urban governance, in general, has been located within the context of the neoliberal ‘creed’ which seeks to unleash capitalism’s power (Gerstle, 2022: 5). This creed has shaped the sensibilities, ‘the ways of being alive’ (Morizot, 2022), out of which concrete governance processes emerge.

In this article, we acknowledge the influence of the neo-liberal creed in shaping

(private) urban security governance form and function and we also acknowledge that much has been written on the negative impacts and implications of neo-liberalism with respect to ‘a politically guided intensification of market rule and commodification’ (Brenner et al., 2010, in Whitehead, 2013: 1355) and the weak or uneven (state) regulation of the private sector, contributing to the worsening of the climate crisis (White, 2003). However, in this article we emphasise the importance of the influence of shifting harmscapes on the everyday reality and practices of security practitioners within changing socio-material contexts – most notably the Anthropocene. We therefore consider the implication of climate-related harmscapes for the private sector’s place and role within urban security governance. In doing so, we address a gap in the literature on urban climate governance, where there has been much focus on the role of the private sector and the ways in which it is regulated (by the state) in complying with environmental laws and regulations, but also in terms of the state harnessing the cooperation and resources of the private sector in responding to the harmful impacts of climate change (see White, 2003).

Relatedly, there is much that has been written on the role of the private sector in

urban climate governance, in terms of its role in, for instance, plans, strategies and policies focused on the reduction of carbon emissions, carbon sequestration and carbon capture schemes, improvement of energy efficiency and investment in renewable energy, the development of technical and technological solutions to climate change and so forth (Boyd and Juhola, 2015; Bulkeley, 2010; Bulkeley and Castán Broto, 2013; Cho, 2020; Lal, 2020; Pauw and Pegels, 2013). Furthermore, there has also been a focus on specific parts of the private sector in responding (i.e. mitigating and/or adapting) to the harms of climate change, such as insurance companies (Dlugolecki and Keykhah 2018; Pauw and Pegels, 2013; Phelan et al, 2020), the finance sector and private philanthropy (Pauw and Pegels, 2013). In this article, we seek to contribute to that literature with a focus specifically on the role of private *security* – in terms of both the private security industry but also private forms of security-orientated or security-focused governance. There have been broader considerations of the links between climate change, security and conflict (discussed later), usually conceived of in terms of national and regional state-centric terms. However, in this article we explore the everyday, local-level security responses to climate change in terms of practices (climate gating), discourses (resilience) and governance configurations (radical polycentrism). We therefore seek to add to the small but growing engagement with the role of private security in urban climate governance and thereby contribute to literatures on urban climate governance trends.

We address the question: how have climate-related harmscapes – associated with today's climate crisis – impacted private urban security governance developments? Through reflecting on contemporary private urban security governance trends in Global North and South contexts, we follow Reiner (2010: 24) when he

argued: 'Policing [or security governance] cannot be seen primarily as satisfying grand social functions but rather as a Sisyphean labour of continuous partial emergency alleviation of recurring problems'. Adopting this approach, we argue that the evolution of private urban security governance has been shaped by the problem-solving of security actors, operating within the context of various socio-material developments and their associated sensibilities (Osborne and Rose, 1997). Therefore, in developing this argument, we note the significance of socio-material contexts in shaping private urban security governance. The first socio-material context we examine is the rise of 'mass private property' recognised earlier, as an enabler of private urban security governance, by the security scholars Shearing and Stenning (1981). We consider the emergence of mass private property to identify a spatio-temporal context upon which these ventures have been layered. After briefly identifying this historical context, we consider an emerging, and enormously significant, socio-material transformation that has shaped, and is shaping, how security is governed across the globe. This is the transition from the Holocene to the Anthropocene, a term signifying the 'Age of Humans', a 'moniker for a modern age beset by climate change' that recognises that humans – as a 'geological force' – are having a fundamental (and detrimental) effect on the planet (Chakrabarty, 2009; Harrington and Shearing, 2017: 19). The term recognises too that humans can no longer be thought of, or conceive of themselves, as solely social beings engaging in human-to-human relationships but that, we humans:

have discovered the unthinkable: how we act matters not just for us but for Earth itself. We are, to our surprise, deeply and irrevocably entangled . . . we are entangled in a complex set of assemblages – one set of interlinked things among many . . . [an] entanglement of nature and society . . . [human as] being-in-relation . . . enmeshed with a diversity of beings, things,

histories and technologies. (Harrington and Shearing, 2017: 16, 17, 20, 52)

Our analysis therefore focuses on the impact of this socio-material entanglement – with a specific focus on the private entities of security governance at the forefront of dealing with climate harmscapes. We draw on the work of scholars who have explored new trends in private urban security governance in response to Anthropocene-related harms as well as discourses and practices of practitioners from public and private sector policy papers. Our aim is not to provide full coverage of these developments but instead to identify exemplars of practices that identify urban ventures utilising ‘new’ security practices in responding to climate harms and that draw upon the vestiges of established security practices. We have necessarily been selective in this regard and have attempted to draw from Global North and South city-based initiatives to show that these trends are by no means exclusive to either, and to not suggest that any of them are exclusively a North or South issue. We turn now to a broad overview or historical backdrop of the rise of private security in urban security governance developments; thereafter, we review the impact of climate-related harmscapes on contemporary practices, with an emphasis on climate-gating initiatives.

### **PUSG 1.0: Mass private property, neo-liberalism and the post-regulatory state**

The late 20th century saw a change in the character of security assemblages brought about by a ‘re-birth’ of private security (Johnston, 1992) which constituted a ‘quiet revolution’ in security governance (Shearing and Stenning, 1981), enabled by mass private property that saw harms against persons and property occurring in these spaces being governed by private security<sup>2</sup>– PUSG 1.0. These

novel gated domains, which have become known as ‘gated communities’ (Atkinson and Flint, 2004), included shopping malls, industrial estates, residential developments and recreational spaces – see discussion of ‘climate gating’ below. These public spaces, governed by private security, later included Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), initiated in North America, which included the governance of security on public streets (see Kudla, 2022 for an overview). This change in the location of interpersonal harms, from established to new spaces, brought with it a shift not only in the providers of security, which discussion of the impact of neo-liberal sensibilities had noted, but also in the authorisers of security governance as a consequence of the rights and duties of landlords.

These urban developments had the effect of transferring much of both the ‘steering’ and ‘rowing’ (Osborne and Gaebler, 1992) of security governance of urban harmscapes to the private sector, enabled by property and contract law (Hermer et al., 2005; see Scott, 2003 for a discussion of the constitutive role of legal regulatory frameworks and their impact on governance). With this, the governance of security in urban spaces moved significantly from state to non-state auspices and providers of security. These trends are emblematic of what has been termed the ‘post-regulatory state’, ‘new regulatory state’, ‘decentred’ state (Black, 2001; Braithwaite and Drahos, 2000; Scott, 2003) or, to use an alternative term, the ‘polycentric state’. This inclusion of non-state auspices and providers as both steerers and rowers within security assemblages makes a break with both the welfare state, where the state both steers and rows, and neo-liberal formations where the state steers while the private sector rows. As mentioned, this was enabled by the constitutive features of property law and contract law, which proved so significant in enabling these developments and facilitating new forms of private urban security governance.

In addition to shifting auspices and providers of security, and the novel plural assemblages of security that emerged with PUSG 1.0, security mentalities also changed. For instance, private security traditionally has been focused on preventative, risk management approaches to security in contrast to the enforcement or punishment-orientated mentalities (see Simon's (2007) discussion of practices that favour 'governing through crime') that had been and continue to be a definitive feature of thinking and practice within state police organisations. These spatial developments have been instrumental in introducing preventatively focused security mentalities, often with a spatial crime- and grime-related focus (see Kelling et al., 1996), into security assemblages and 'policing webs' (Brodeur, 2010). Central to these changes was an emphasis on controlling access to harm-related opportunity through creating inclusion–exclusion zones enforced through access controls, which have come to be known as 'gating', that emerged within the context of a neoliberal creed and associated 'private government' (Macaulay, 1986) and their 'feudal-like spaces' (Shearing, 2007; see Drahos and Braithwaite's (2002) 'information feudalism'). These shifts were significant in enabling the re-emergence of private security as a significant feature of urban security governance, and in doing so created wider security webs than had previously been the case. These developments and the privately governed 'bubbles of security' (Bottoms and Wiles, 1995; Rigakos and Greener, 2000) that emerged also included the governance, by the private sector, across privately owned conduits, which enabled flows of people and things between these bubbles – the extensive underground walkways that criss-cross cities like Toronto, linking mass private property, provide examples.

While contemporary urban governance advances have seen a continuation, and deepening, of these trajectories regarding auspices and providers and mentalities, they

have also seen a blurring of mentalities and technologies that has resulted in a reconfiguring of public–private distinctions (Berndtsson and Stern, 2011; Lewis and Wood, 2006). A security entity may exhibit several mentalities and technologies at the same time (Fleming and Rhodes, 2005). For instance, private security personnel and companies may adopt a law enforcement mentality in, for example, urban housing estates (see Rigakos, 2002) but this may be fluid depending on context. Furthermore, mentalities and technologies, within seemingly inflexible institutions, may adapt as new security threats arise (consider, for instance, O'Malley's (2011) discussion of the need for bureaucracies to become more imaginative with regards to predicting future risk). New configurations of security governance have also shown a move towards more hybrid forms of space (for instance, see Button, 2003), new assemblages of state and non-state security services (for instance, see Baker's (2008) account of 'multi-choice policing') and/or the actual merging of state and non-state security entities (not just the merging of service provision) (for instance, see Button, 2019; Oliveira and Paes-Machado, 2022, amongst others). In this way, contemporary private urban security governance shows increasing convergences of various mentalities as polycentric assemblages and networks have emerged as a predominant feature of governance innovations (see Whelan and Dupont, 2017).

Considering these urban ventures, what has changed in response to the new harmscapes of climate crisis? Are we seeing more of the same? Or are there new or different configurations of mentalities or logics, practices and assemblages? With this brief discussion of earlier spatial shifts and their impact on harmscapes and their security, as context, we turn now to the impacts of the Anthropocene and the emergence of PUSG 2.0. In doing so, we focus on harms and effects – acknowledging that pandemics such as COVID-19 also

constitute a new harmscape due to interlinkages with anthropogenic developments and ‘humans’ troubling relationships with nature’ (Lam et al., 2023: 327).

## **PUSG 2.0: Adapting to climate crisis**

The 21st century has been characterised as the age of the ‘polycrisis’ – a term used to describe the global and simultaneous harmscapes being faced by humanity (Morin and Kern, 1999: 73). The Anthropocene, as mentioned, with its profound implications for the relationship between ‘the social’ and ‘the material’ (socio-material), ‘human’ and ‘nature’, has both amplified existing global harms (and governance responses) as well as created new ones, whilst also challenging conventional urban security governance and criminal justice responses. For instance, zoonotic diseases, like COVID-19, linked to environmental harm, have shown that some of the greatest challenges faced by humankind harms are not necessarily criminal, and that traditional urban security governance responses to public health can be deeply problematic.

In this section, we focus on the impacts of these new harmscapes on private urban security governance ventures – these include a focus on the evolving nature of gating practices, particularly ‘climate gating’, as well as on the new logics and discourses that have emerged along with the development of radical polycentrism involving new and evolving roles for security professionals.

### *Climate gating*

There have been a range of advancements in gating practices particularly associated with the effects of the Anthropocene and its consequences, such as the incorporation of new logics and practices onto the vestiges of established gating practices, as well as the rise of climate gating in response to harmscapes

that include adverse weather patterns, rising pollution, resource depletion, a reliance on unstable and unsustainable energy systems and so forth. These novel ventures have demonstrated a layering of logics and practices focused simultaneously on pre-existing and climate-related insecurities intended to mitigate the effects of climate change.

Global South gating practices provide a good example of this. In previous sections, private urban security governance has been characterised by various interrelated logics associated with, for instance, traditional law enforcement mentalities but also those associated with risk prevention informed by market logics and a desire for a certain social and moral ordering that have shaped private security urban governance in areas such as the shopping mall and the BID. To explore climate gating, in what follows we draw upon South African exclusive, luxury gated security ‘estates’ or ‘parks’, privately governed by private security companies, with walls and barbed wire (Cooper-Knock, 2016; Hook and Vrdoljak, 2002). These large spaces of mass private property are manifold in their intention – to simultaneously protect from crime and insecurity, but also to incorporate and protect certain (homogenous) lifestyle preferences. As ‘private governments’ (Macaulay, 1986) they are considered symbols of prestige, exclusivity and independence from state services (Hook and Vrdoljak, 2002: 201). They have been overlaid by desires for homogeneity and like-mindedness, often exhibiting racialised and classist discourses of belonging in the pursuit of a ‘pretend rurality’ (Hook and Vrdoljak, 2002: 201) amid urban insecurity, economic instability, political change and the uncertainties of multiculturalism (Giddens, 1991). An explicit re-branding of these gated communities has taken place, as the rise of eco-estates has drawn on an ideal of escapism and an ecology entailing being closer to nature. The marketing of these eco-estates has often

emphasised 'environmental awareness and/or practices that work in unison with the environment with the goal of limiting harm to nature' (Durlington, 2006: 151) – a mentality ironically informed by a human-centric view of nature as a resource for consumption and human enjoyment (Ballard and Jones, 2011).

While some of these logics and practices of the 'traditional' gated community or security estate are retained, they have been overlaid with logics and practices of the climatic harms associated with the Anthropocene. What has changed within gated communities, as we have hinted earlier, has been the view of 'nature' as a source of harm to humans, in the face of resource scarcities, inconsistencies in energy supplies and adverse weather conditions. In other words, a transition has occurred to a discourse which views nature as a threat to humans. For example, with the rise of climate-related insecurities, there have been moves within gated communities to mitigate the impact of water shortages and energy supply shortfalls, over and above those pre-existing insecurities related to crime and social ordering. As a consequence, gated communities are becoming not simply bubbles of security in the face of human-to-human harms, which 'crime' has traditionally referenced, but havens of security in the face of environmental harms. This includes attempts to live 'off grid', living independently from state infrastructure and the resultant insecurities of climate-related shortfalls in the flows of critical resources such as water and electricity. This move to off-grid living has synergies with existing security estates concerned with enhancing physical security via a reliance on privately funded and provided forms of security. As with established gated communities, where the focus is on interpersonal harms, with 'climate gating' publicly provided security governance services are supplemented, or replaced, by privately provided services, such as water, electricity, internet access and sewerage. 'Off-grid'

service provision has been, and continues to be, a well-established feature of rural living. What is new is the extent to which this is becoming an urban phenomenon. In the remainder of this section, we draw upon the results of a case study of responses to the 2015–2018 Cape Town droughts in South Africa (Simpson et al., 2019, 2020a, 2020b). These private urban security governance innovations and associated private resourcefulness represent not simply a shift in service provision but also an accompanying shift in mentalities and related practices, for instance, the changing mentalities among water users from a 'dam mentality' that viewed water collection as by definition something that only public authorities could accomplish to a mentality that viewed water as something that water users could collect themselves, via for example rooftop harvesting or the use of dehumidifiers.

This shift in sensemaking<sup>3</sup> (Weick, 1988) enabled the exploration of novel pathways in response to water restrictions imposed by the City of Cape Town, for more affluent water consumers who were reluctant to reduce their water consumption, a requirement that the City had introduced. What transpired as a consequence of their collective water harvesting ventures was the emergence of novel water governance assemblages, within a context where water provision had been essentially a public monopoly. Again, there are clear synergies with the emergence of hybrid security assemblages associated with established gated spaces of PUSG 1.0 that have today become so common across many areas of the globe (see below).

These developments in response to contemporary forms of resource insecurity associated with both failures of state provision and interruptions associated with contemporary harmscapes are epitomised by gated spaces such as Steyn City in South Africa. In a brochure for this luxury 'eco-estate', mitigating resource insecurity is described as follows:

Loadshedding [a term used for public grid-related electricity interruptions] has become a scourge of South African life. Worst [sic] still, just as soon as we have adapted, we learnt of the latest challenge to hit us: watershedding. For residents at Steyn City's City Centre, these issues are, well, non-issues. That's because the forward-thinking development has been designed with every convenience in mind – and convenience certainly requires both water and electricity. With this in mind, City Centre's flagship features both back-up energy to ensure 24-hour power, and onsite water storage tanks, making potable water freely available at all times. (Steyn City Properties, 2022)

Similar examples from other security estates' brochures and websites in South Africa include traditional references to, for instance, community and eco-living and closeness to nature. However, concepts such as 'state-of-the-art security' sit alongside references to 'water purification', access to solar energy and 'silent back-up generator[s]' or 'on-site alternative energy provision' – alluding to the above-mentioned resource insecurity and attempts to guarantee clean water provision and mitigate electricity deficits (Steenberg Green, n.d.; Waterfall City, n.d.). One can therefore see that the established 'convergence of the ideas of "community" and "security" in the marketing of enclosed and gated streets or complexes' (South, 2020: 63) is expanded to now also encompass today's emerging socio-material harmscapes.

There have also been a range of initiatives with regards to the purposeful and pre-emptive creation of climate gated initiatives such as 'eco-islands' (South, 2020; Thomas and Warner, 2019). These 'privatized green enclaves' (Brisman et al., 2018: 302) or 'resilient retreats' (Rice et al., 2022: 631) attempt to retain Holocene-like climatic conditions and constitute a 'market for bunkerization' (Burrows et al., 2022; Lam et al., 2023: 328) that caters to an elite or privileged few to the exclusion of the most precarious, thereby

constituting a climate apartheid (South, 2020; for a discussion of governance imaginaries associated with the alt-right, see Smith and Burrows, 2021). In this regard, new logics and practices associated with climate gating have synergies with the past in that the focus remains that of exclusivity and segregation intended to exclude 'undesirable' populations. However, these populations – usually the most vulnerable – have been reconfigured in new ways and are no longer only associated with crime, disorder and 'grime'; their security threat has been redefined in relation to climate harm within an emerging socio-material environment. In this context, it is not only the environment itself which poses a threat; 'people and social hazards (e.g. social disorder, violence, crime) [have emerged as] the principal dangers emanating from climate change' (Thomas and Warner, 2019: 2). Consider, for instance, civil unrest, crime, conflict and disorder resulting from disasters and/or resource scarcity.

An emerging discourse around this includes attention to the threat of displaced refugees due to climate change, resulting in the fear of 'hordes' of displaced persons (from the Global South) migrating to the North (Dalby, 2015: 439; Thomas and Warner, 2019). Within this framing, climate insecurity is constituted as a national security threat and justifies tightening borders, but also, locally, justifies the use of gating, surveillance and private security to defend against climate harms and persons (Dalby, 2015; Thomas and Warner, 2019). In this regard, Rice et al. (2022: 631) point to features of these eco-islands as being 'defensive and exclusive' in their protection against climatic uncertainties, 'tech-centric' in their use of technological innovation and 'utopian' in terms of their underlying ideologies. For instance, consider Eko Atlantic City, a self-governing, private security-protected, climate-gating enterprise in Lagos, Nigeria



(although still under development at the time of writing) (Brisman et al., 2018). A public–private partnership initiative, it comprises a luxury gated community for the wealthy to experience both a discrete form of social and lifestyle ordering as well as economic and climate stability, whereby security and environmental ‘goods’ are provided independently of the state (Ajibade, 2017; Brisman et al., 2018; Caprotti, 2014: 1293). The City was originally designed as a land reclamation project to ‘mitigate coastal threats, increase housing stock, and boost the local economy of Lagos by attracting foreign direct investment . . . an adaptation that balances resilience planning with environmental, social, and economic benefits’ (Ajibade, 2017: 85; Thomas and Warner, 2019). Gating and private urban security governance are intertwined with global climatic harmscapes and their impacts.

Furthermore, climate gating has synergies with ‘traditional’ private urban security governance characteristics that have been translated into new contexts and reassembled. These vestiges are outlined by Thomas and Warner (2019: 2) and include ‘threat displacement’, which they define as the ‘unintentional or indifferent relocation of climate threats’. For instance, using the example of Eko Atlantic, the redesign of coastal landscapes for the affluent has meant an increase in storm risk for those in low-lying areas of the city, inhabited by the poor and vulnerable. This threat displacement resonates with criminological accounts of ‘crime displacement’, where it has been argued that gating, such as BIDs, has displaced crime and ‘grime’ to other areas instead of resolving it – although this is contested (Bowers et al., 2011; Meek and Hubler, 2006; Morçöl and Wolf, 2010). Another characteristic of climate gating raised by Thomas and Warner (2019: 4) is ‘climate gentrification’ and ‘elite fortification’, which, as with established forms of gating, often involves the exclusion

and displacement of vulnerable populations to benefit the affluent (see Atkinson (2020) for a discussion of the colonisation of urban landscapes by the super-rich). These changes represent an extension of the discourses and modes of security associated with established gating practices but through a climate lens. Traditional logics of security and the market are interposed with the new quest for climate security – where ‘security’ is broadened, and new discourses have arisen but where ‘traditional’ security practices remain.

Notwithstanding this, there are two nascent trends that are worth delving into that extend traditional security discourses and practices somewhat.

### *Resilience as a new discursive framing*

Although by no means a new concept, a key discursive framing emerging from urban security governance developments is that of ‘resilience’ as a ‘mentality of the Anthropocene’ whereby responses to ‘unanticipated and unforeseen disruptions of novel earth system dynamics’ are conceived of as adaptative governance responses – often with the intention of returning not simply to the conditions which preceded the disruption, ‘bouncing back’, but to new versions and iterations, ‘bouncing forward’ (Alexander, 2013; Haas, 2015). In this ‘bouncing forward’ framing, resilience is conceived of as ‘adaptability and transformability’ – coping with new threats by creating ‘a fundamentally new system’ when the old arrangements become unsustainable (Ajibade, 2017: 86). In other words, resilience means ‘the ability to withstand shocks and stressors, it is about more than just effectively responding to risks. It is also about evolving to better capture future rewards and cope with change’ (Roberts, 2023: 124).

This discursive framing aligns with, and constitutes an extension of, risk society discourses (Beck, 1992) in what O’Malley

(2010: 488) has called the ‘age of high uncertainty’ where conventional preventative measures are increasingly difficult to enact and accomplish.

Climate harms compel a focus on adaptability and agility that requires security actors to move beyond conventional templates of ordering that focus primarily on harms *to* humans *by* humans. Meanwhile, within the new world of the Anthropocene there is an urgent need to focus on the harmful impacts of human action on the environment and the subsequent detrimental impact on human survival. Resilience, as a conceptual technology, operates to cement a future focus to private urban security governance by establishing ‘a better tomorrow’ as a central objective. This contrasts with the established past-focused ordering mentality, noted earlier, of ‘governing through crime’ (Simon, 2007). These developments have strong synergies with the long-established critique that a ‘governing through crime’ approach often does more harm than good, and that this feature of established security governance practices frequently does not necessarily align with, and may indeed be antithetical to, the public good (see Berg and Shearing, 2018: 78).

Further to this, whereas private urban security governance logics and practices have traditionally been aligned to human-centric and city-focused harms of crime and grime, disorder and moral ordering, the age of uncertainty is characterised by harms associated with the collapse of critical socio-material infrastructures required to maintain flows of critical goods and services. Although this notion of collapse may seem exaggerated and hyperbolic, the massive disruptions caused to supply chains by the COVID-19 pandemic and the strains experienced by health systems – even in the richest countries – have shown how quickly a stable system can deteriorate into a state of extreme fragility as supply chains upon which urban dwellers depend are

interrupted. One consequence of this has been the emergence of what Mutongwizo et al. (2019: 607) have termed ‘resilience policing’, whereby security governance organisations seek to strengthen the resilience of urban communities ‘to effectively anticipate and respond to material shocks’.

This and similar trends suggest that security discourses are evolving for security and police practitioners, to encompass new languages of harm and risk – whereby ‘resilience’ constitutes a new security governance framing. An important feature of this resilience framing is the encouragement it provides to established security governance entities to take on new security roles and to participate, and reshape, networks to mitigate the complexity of new harmscapes (Mutongwizo et al., 2019). It remains to be seen whether this and similar emerging developments, for example initiatives developing under signs such as ‘community-led’ (see e.g. Sanderson, 2019), constitute a significant break from established logics and practices such as the established risk prevention approach traditionally associated with private urban security governance.

### *Radical polycentrism, new assemblages and shifting security roles*

As mentioned earlier, private urban security governance has been characterised by novel, hybrid and polycentric security formations coupled with shifting spatial configurations. These polycentric developments have taken on a more radical character as existing security actors, both police and private security, have taken on new roles, and become part of new assemblages, within the context of new harmscapes.

In relation to the harmscapes of public health crises, it has been found that private security performed ‘frontline’ roles during the COVID-19 pandemic. This led to them being granted ‘critical worker’ status in the

UK and ‘essential worker’ status in New Zealand and being designated an ‘essential sector’ in Belgium and a range of other European countries – a title usually reserved for those maintaining essential societal services, such as health professionals, police, teachers and firefighters (CoESS, 2020; Deckert et al., 2021; Leloup and Cools, 2022; White, 2023). Their roles have included social ordering, and infection protection and control (IPC) duties in a variety of contexts – from hospitals, quarantine sites, testing and vaccination centres to supermarkets and commercial and industrial estates (CoESS, 2020; Deckert et al., 2021; White, 2023).

More traditional roles of private security thus have been, and are being, overlaid with new framings of ‘security’ that have seen public health discourses being influenced by the logics and practices of the private sector in urban governance formations. Another dimension of this, already alluded to, has been the role of private security in protecting critical urban infrastructure in the face of new harmscapes. For instance, a private security group at one of Australia’s main ports has its own emergency response team, its own medical response team including ambulances, paramedics and medical staff and its own fire and rescue service complete with firefighters and a fleet of fire and rescue vehicles and equipment. This company also operates internationally – for instance, it was hired to provide support after the Christchurch earthquakes in New Zealand, and regularly provides consultancy services to government emergency response departments in other countries (see Corporate Protection, 2018). Private firefighters were also utilised during Australia’s 2019–2020 bushfires (Binskin et al., 2020).

‘Natural’ disasters have encouraged the rise of increasing polycentric arrangements of security governance. One consequence of this has been that established entities within these arrangements, for instance the public

police, have been reconsidered and refigured as a “‘whole-of-nation”, “‘whole-of- government” and “‘whole-of-society” cooperation and effort’ (Binskin et al., 2020: 23). There have also been research findings on governance responses to Hurricane Harvey in the USA in 2017, where the unprecedented devastation surrounding the disaster went beyond the capacity of traditional respondents and resulted in ad hoc and innovative polycentric responses (see e.g. Mutongwizo et al., forthcoming). What has made these polycentric formations increasingly radical is the decentring role of the state legal order and the enhanced influence of multiple non-state entities in responding to the disaster and taking on ‘security’ functions. In other words, what has been found is that the centres of authority in these polycentric networks of governance may be shifting amongst various state and non-state entities (as is the normative position in a polycentric governance framing – but not always an empirical reality) or there may be no centres at all. This is a radical version of polycentric governance in relation particularly to security governance scholarship, discourse and practice (see Shearing, 2006) – where it has always been assumed that the state (usually the public police) would be the centre, or the primary auspices, of security networks – let alone that the centre could shift to non-state (private) entities or that these networks could be centreless. Here we see synergies with past polycentric governance trends and the ‘decentred’ or polycentric state, but climate harms have perpetuated and/or accelerated these developments within traditionally state-centric security governance arrangements into more radical formations constituting private-led or centreless formations.

## Conclusion

In this article, we have drawn attention to the intersections of space, harmscapes and

private urban security governance. We have sought to explore the impacts of the new harmscapes – associated with climate crisis – on urban security governance formations, with a focus on private governance responses. We have found that, in addition to the changing socio-material contexts that have shaped governance thinking, security governance is continually shaped by thinking within the crucibles of governance practice, which Reiner (2010) has characterised as Sisyphean labours.

In developing these thoughts, we turned our attention to 20th-century shifts in urban landscapes that property and contract law has enabled, which have moved large swaths of public space and the activities that take place within them onto privately owned property, namely the emergence of mass private property and its associated ‘bubbles of governance’. With this context in mind, we considered how these developments of inclusion and reciprocal exclusion have merged as a central security governance feature of Anthropocene security governance.

In developing our argument, we turned to the sensemaking practices that emerged as the contours of security governance have altered within the Anthropocene. Significant here has been the emergence of the idea of ‘resilience’, understood, across its many different meanings, as the capacity of entities to maintain flows of goods and services that are being interrupted by climatic events that have emerged as a defining feature of our age of uncertainty. Associated with this has been a radicalisation of the polycentric forms of security governance that has become a defining feature of 21st-century security governance. This radicalisation has seen both an explosion in the variety and number of entities involved in the governance of security along with an increasing localisation of steering of security governance.

Yet, although we have identified some novel changes in thinking or sensemaking about the environment and the mitigation of climate harms through e.g. discourses of resilience, much of the practice remains the same, with emerging socio-material security governance developments simply subverted into risk discourses ‘entwined with the security society’, as Davoudi (2014: 360) has argued – yesterday’s vestiges shape contemporary ventures. Crises – not necessarily or only environmental ones – may serve as Latourian ‘actants’ promoting and shaping polycentric governance systems, new security configurations and the rise of innovation in the face of traditional security deficits. To some extent, this has happened with regards to the shaping of private urban security governance practices in response to climate crisis. However, with the onset of climate crisis, we are seeing synergies with the past and (to date) are not seeing the types of radical innovation one might expect in terms of security governance developments but – as our title references – more of the same; ‘everything-old-is-new-again’. The curation of urban landscapes that gated communities enabled has taken on new forms appropriate to contemporary harmscapes – vestiges shaping new ventures. This is a familiar ‘old wine in new bottles’ story, where humans continue to draw on old ways of doing things to resolve novel problems. By doing this, we bring with us issues and challenges associated with old ways of doing things. As we have outlined, an important feature of responses to new harmscapes has been a familiar story of segregation, inequality, escalating vulnerability and racialised forms of social ordering. While we have used climate gating as an exemplar of these sorts of developments, where the past is refurbished for the present, considerably more research is required to consider the suggestions associated with this exemplar in relation to other areas of security governance within the Anthropocene.


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## ORCID iDs

Julie Berg  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4730-1778>

Clifford Shearing  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5036-8335>

## Notes

1. When we use the term ‘security governance’, we are referencing all entities, organisation, institutions and groupings (both state and non-state, public and private) involved in ‘the application of any means that will promote safe and secure places in which people live and work’ (Johnston and Shearing, 2003: 71). By ‘private urban security governance’, we specifically refer to private entities and the governance of urban space.
2. When we talk about private security governing space, we acknowledge the multiple sources of authority from which this is derived (including their own original authority as citizens, their authority derived from citizens, the authority delegated from landowners and so forth) (see Mopas and Stenning, 2001; Stenning, 2000).
3. By ‘sensemaking’, we mean ‘the subset of individual and social processes by which people and organizations frame the unknown and respond to it’ (Dupont et al., 2023: 2).

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