

SOAS University of London

International Summer Course on (Im)mobilities (ISCM)

Seminar Convenor [Graduate-level seminar]

From Structural Violence to ‘Resource Wars’: The Climate Change, Conflict and Displacement Nexus

WEEK FIVE**LECTURE:** June 30th**SEMINARS:** July 2nd

1 Course Overview

The relationship between climate change, migration, and violent conflict is highly debated within academic literature, planning, and policy agendas. Where some argue that climate change’s pernicious effect on resources will engender migration and/or violent competition over an unevenly available resource supply, others challenge the existence of empirical links between climate change and violent conflict, instead labelling climate change a ‘threat-multiplier’ that exacerbates existing conflict drivers.

Both viewpoints have been under increasing scrutiny as the climate emergency deepens and we come to understand that how the relationship between these drivers of migration are problematised has decisive consequences for the crafting of meaningful solutions and policy responses.

Week five examines the key debates around the climate change, migration, violence, and conflict link. In this lecture and seminar, we will unpack theoretical and practical approaches to understanding and responding to this nexus of concern, reviewing what historical experiences can tell us about contemporary challenges. The sessions will offer insight into future projections around so-called ‘resource and climate’ conflicts and ‘climate wars,’ and will consider their implications for human mobility. We will unpack the relevance and threat of violence on those who are contemplating migration, those who do migrate, and those who return or resettle. We will also consider the broader context of structural and epistemic violence in which climate change and human mobility dynamics and responses to their interface are situated more broadly.

2 Seminar Session Details

Convenor: Elisa D’Amico**Date:** Wednesday, July 2nd, 2025**Time:** 7–9 PM ET (2-hour session)**Platform:** Zoom**Format:** Interactive seminar with breakout activities

3 Session Structure & Activities

3.1 Introduction (10–15 minutes)

- **Welcome and Self-Introduction:** Introduction of climate change, conflict, and displacement nexus
- **Overview of Week 5 Theme:** Core debates and complexities surrounding climate change, migration, and violent conflict
- **Seminar Objectives:** Highlight what participants can expect to gain from the session
- **Housekeeping:** Briefly cover the interactive nature of the session and remaining agenda

3.2 Interactive Activity 1: Debating the ‘Threat-Multiplier’ (30–40 minutes)

Learning Objective: To encourage participants to critically engage with the concept of climate change as a ‘threat-multiplier’ and explore differing viewpoints on the correlation vs. causality of climate change and violent conflict.

3.2.1 Required Readings

Participants should have completed the following readings prior to the seminar:

- Burke, M., Miguel, E., Satyanath, S., Dykema, J., & Lobell, D. (2009). Warming increases the risk of civil war in Africa. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 106(49), 20670–20674. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.0907998106>
- Buhaug, H. (2010). Climate not to blame for African civil wars. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 107(38), 16477–16482. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1005739107>
- Hendrix, C., Koubi, V., Selby, J., Siddiqi, A., & Uexkull, N. (2023). Climate change and conflict. *Nature Reviews Earth & Environment*, 4(3), 144–148. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s43017-022-00382-w>
- Hsiang, S., Burke, M., & Miguel, E. (2013). Quantifying the influence of climate on human conflict. *Science*, 341(6151). <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1235367>
- Selby, J., Dahi, O., Fröhlich, C., & Hulme, M. (2017). Climate change and the Syrian civil war revisited. *Political Geography*, 60, 232–244. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2017.05.007>

3.2.2 Discussion Framework

Guiding Question: “To what extent is climate change a direct cause of violent conflict, versus a ‘threat-multiplier’ that exacerbates existing vulnerabilities and conflict drivers?”

3.2.3 Activity Structure

1. **Brief Introduction (5 minutes):** Re-introduction of “correlation vs. causality” and “threat-multiplier” concepts

2. **Breakout Discussions (15–20 minutes):** Small groups (5 participants) assigned opposing stances to encourage critical analysis
3. **Plenary Discussion (10–15 minutes):** Group presentations and synthesis of arguments

3.3 Interactive Activity 2: Case Study & Policy Response (30–40 minutes)

Learning Objective: To apply theoretical and practical approaches to a specific case study, fostering solutions-focused discussions and considering historical experiences in understanding contemporary challenges.

3.3.1 Case Study: Lake Chad Basin

Regional Context: The Lake Chad Basin encompasses parts of Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon, serving as a vital water and livelihood source for over 40 million people. Lake Chad has shrunk by approximately 90% since the 1960s due to climate change and unsustainable water management.

Key Dynamics:

- **Resource Competition:** Declining fish stocks and arable land intensify inter-communal conflicts between farmers and herders
- **Structural Vulnerabilities:** Pre-existing poverty and weak governance exacerbated by environmental changes
- **Conflict & Displacement:** Boko Haram exploitation of resource scarcity leading to massive population displacement
- **Historical Disruption:** Traditional adaptation mechanisms (e.g., seasonal transhumance) overwhelmed by intensified climate impacts

3.3.2 Discussion Questions

1. How do structural violence, resource competition, and displacement manifest in this case?
2. What historical patterns inform our understanding of climate-conflict-mobility relationships?
3. What policy responses could address root causes beyond military interventions?

3.4 Interactive Activity 3: Future Projections & Reflections (20–30 minutes)

Learning Objective: To encourage critical thinking about future climate-conflict scenarios and equitable policy responses.

3.4.1 Reflective Framework

Central Question: “What are the most significant challenges and opportunities in addressing the ‘climate wars’ narrative and ensuring just and equitable responses to climate-induced human mobility?”

3.4.2 Methodology

1. **Collaborative Brainstorming (10–15 minutes):** Digital whiteboard/Padlet for collective idea generation
2. **Open Discussion (10–15 minutes):** Participant-driven Q&A and deeper exploration of topics

4 Concluding Remarks (5–10 minutes)

- **Synthesis:** Key takeaways emphasizing thematic complexity and importance
- **Continued Engagement:** Connections to online forum discussions and other course themes
- **Future Research Directions:** Emerging questions and areas for further investigation

5 Assessment & Participation

This seminar emphasizes active participation through:

- Engagement with pre-assigned readings
- Constructive contribution to breakout discussions
- Critical analysis of theoretical frameworks
- Application of concepts to real-world case studies
- Thoughtful participation in plenary discussions