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A Political Ecology of the Climate-Migration-Conflict Nexus in Syria

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Master of Science in International Environmental Studies

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Declaration

I, Iselin Katinka Shaw of Tordarroch, declare that this thesis is a result of my research investigations and findings. Sources of information other than my own have been acknowledged and a reference list has been appended. This work has not been previously submitted to any other university for award of any type of academic degree.

Signature……..

Date……

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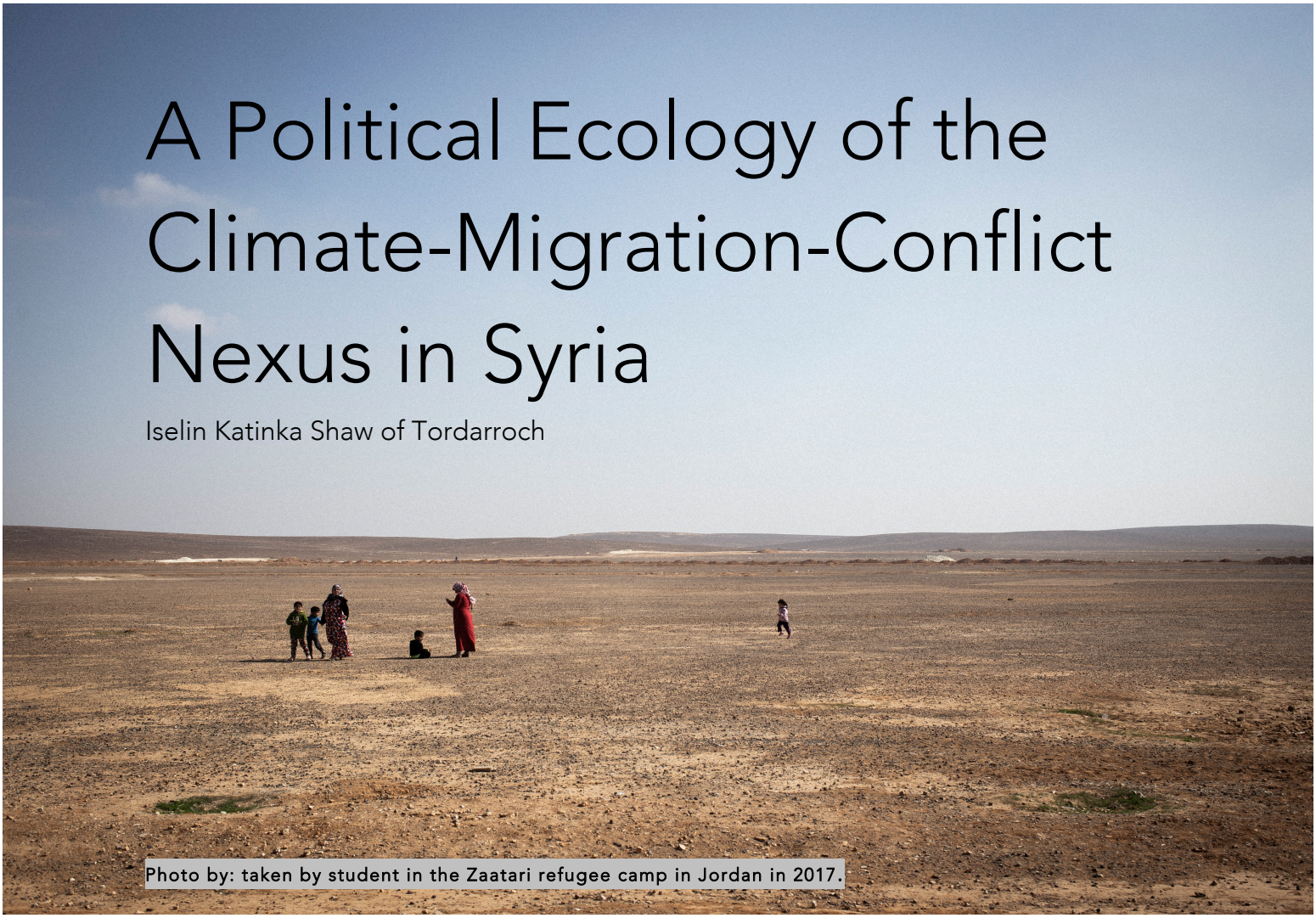

Photo by: taken by student in the Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan in 2017.

Wee, sleeket, cowran, tim'rous beastie,
O, what a panic's in thy breastie!
Thou need na start awa sae hasty,
Wi' bickerin brattle!
I wad be laith to rin an' chase thee
Wi' murd'ring pattle!

I'm truly sorry Man's dominion
Has broken Nature's social union,
An' justifies that ill opinion,
Which makes thee startle,
At me, thy poor, earth-born companion,
An' fellow-mortal!

Still, thou art blest, compar'd wi' me!
The present only toucheth thee:
But Och! I backward cast my e'e,
On prospects drear!
An' forward tho' I canna see
I guess an' fear![1]

[1] Robert Burns ,"To a Mouse", 1785. Full poem found at: https://www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk/poem/mouse/

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This dissertation holds the objective to contribute to an assessment of the climate-migration-conflict nexus as applied to the Syrian conflict. It does so by investigating how displaced Syrians perceive and react to the alleged climate-conflict links in the Syria-climate conflict thesis, and exploring their perceptions and experiences of the unrest that took place in Syria from 2011 and onwards. Overall, the dissertation contributes to discussion over what constitutes 'knowledge' in a time when 'facts' and 'truth' are publically contested, and debate over how human life will be affected by the very real anthropogenic climate change problem we know is both accelerating and exacerbating.

The Syrian War has according to the Syrian Network for Human Rights claimed the lives of 227,413 civilians, including 29,457 children. Over 5.6 million people have fled Syria, and 6.6 million are internally displaced, accounting for the world's largest forcibly displaced population (UNHCR 2020). The magnitude of devastation left behind by a revolution gone bad, and the conflict's ongoing protraction is undeniable. Given this backdrop, it is little wonder that the war has been subject to proliferating analyses, with debates over its triggers coming under increasing scholarly scrutiny. Among the explanations of the cause of the Syrian war is the Syria-climate conflict thesis, which views climate change as a threat multiplier. The thesis argues an alleged link between antecedent anthropogenic drought in northeastern Syria, mass internal migration, which eventually fuelled Syria's descent into civil war. Such narratives supposedly depict what conflictual circumstances await humanity under warmer conditions in the human-induced 'Anthropocene'.

This study directs a critical eye toward the contents and methods of the Syria-climate conflict thesis by means of qualitative and political ecology-aligned analysis. Little testimony from Syrians themselves is currently part of the thesis' foundation - a gap this dissertation aims to fill by negotiating 'insecurity' definitions with 'locals' themselves. Based on four focus group discussions and fifteen semi-structured interviews with a total of 79 Syrian participants, I argue that the Syrian conflict was neither scarcity nor climate-driven, but rather a result of coarse living conditions that generations of Syrians had endured under Baʿathist rule, that culminated in a widespread uprising after key events in early 2011, such as the Arab Spring. My analysis uncovers colonial, Malthusian, and environment-centric undercurrents in the Syria-climate conflict thesis as well as in broader securitised notions of climate change found in the nexus literature. It is also critical of the widespread endorsement climate-conflict narratives enjoy in the media and 'grey literature' without, from my perspective, possessing the empirical backing to do so. Using the analytical tools of narrative analysis and political ecology, I call for a decolonisation of the Syria-climate conflict thesis with recognition and senses of justice as key components. Humanity does have an environmental crisis on its hands, but as with the Syrian War, its genesis appears to have had a more human creator, rather than 'natural' one.

SAMMENDRAG

Denne oppgaven har målet å bidra til en evaluering av klima-migrasjon-konflikt forbindelsen slik den anvendes den syriske konflikten. Oppgaven gjør dette ved å utforske hvordan syrere oppfatter og reagerer på de påståtte sammenhengene mellom klimaendringer og konflikt funnet i den såkalte 'Syria-klimakonflikt avhandlingen' og ved å se på deres persepsjoner og erfaringer med uroen som preget Syria fra 2011 og utover. Alt i alt, bidrar denne oppgaven til diskusjonen om hva som utgjør 'kunnskap' i en tid der 'fakta' og 'sannhet' er offentlig bestridt, og debatten om hvordan samfunnet vil påvirkes av de veldig ekte og reelle problemene menneskeskapte klimaendringer bærer med seg. Endringer vi vet er under stadig akselerasjon og forverring.

Den syriske krigen har ifølge det Syriske Nettverket for Menneskerettigheter tatt livet av 227,413 sivile, inkludert 29,457 barn. Over 5.6 millioner personer er drevet på flukt utenfor Syria og 6.6 millioner internt, hvilket utgjør verdens største fordrevne befolkning (UNHCR 2020). Omfanget av ødeleggelsene etterlatt av en mislykket revolusjon og konfliktens fortsettelse er unektelig. Det er derfor ikke overraskende at den syriske krigen har vært i fokus i flere analyser, og at krigens utløsende årsaker har skapt het debatt. Blant forklaringene på utbruddet av krigen er Syria-klimakonflikt teorien som definerer klimaendringer som en 'trusselmultiplikator'. Teorien påstår at forutgående menneskeskapt tørke i nordøstlige Syria utløste massemigrasjon internt i Syria, og deretter bidro til å trigge borgerkrig. Slike narrativer forsøker å beskrive hva slags konfliktfylte scenarier venter menneskeheten under varmere omstendigheter i det menneskeskapte 'Antropocen'.

Denne oppgaven retter et kritisk blikk mot innholdet og metodene til Syria-klimakonflikt avhandlingen ved hjelp av kvalitative metoder og en politisk økologisk analyse. Det er foreløpig få syriske stemmer inkludert i avhandlingens bevisgrunnlag - noe denne oppgaven forsøker å gjøre noe med ved å forhandle definisjoner av 'usikkerhet' med 'lokale' selv. Basert på fire fokusgrupper og femten semi-strukturerte intervjuer med totalt 79 syriske deltagere, argumenterer jeg for at den syriske konflikten var hverken knapphets- eller klima-drevet, men heller et resultat av dårlige leveforhold for flere generasjoner under Baʿath styre, noe som kulminerte i bred oppstand tidlig i 2011 etter sentrale begivenheter som den arabiske våren. Analysen min avdekker kolonialistiske, Malthusiske og miljø-sentriske understrømmer i Syria-klimakonflikt teorien så vel som literaturen som anvender en sikkerhetsforståelse av klimaendringer. Det er også kritikkverdig at klimakonflikt narrativer har så bred tilslutning i media og 'gråliteratur' uten å, etter min mening, ha empirisk bevis for rettferdiggjøre det. Ved å bruke analytiske verktøy som narrativ analyse og politisk økologi, oppfordrer jeg til en 'avkolonisering' av Syria-klimakonflikt teorien med 'anerkjennelse' og 'rettferdighetsforestillinger' som nøkkelkomponenter. Menneskeheten har en miljøkrise i hendene, men som med den syriske krigen, har dens opphav en tydelig menneskelig skaper, mer enn en 'naturlig' en.

ملخص الأطروحة

تهدف هذه الأطروحة إلى المساهمة في تقييم العلاقة بين المناخ والهجرة والصراع بالطريقة التي يتم تطبيقها على الصراع السوري. تقوم هذه الأطروحة بمثل هذا التقييم من خلال استكشاف الطريقة التي يدرك بها السوريون ويتفاعلون مع الروابط المزعومة بين تغير المناخ والصراع الموجود فيما يسمى (أطروحة الصراع السوري وتغيير المناخ) وأيضا ومن خلال النظر إلى تصوراتهم وتجاربهم بشأن الاضطرابات التي تميزت بها سوريا منذ عام 2011 فصاعدًا. بشكل عام، تساهم هذه الأطروحة في مناقشة ما يشكل "المعرفة" في الوقت الذي تكون فيه "الحقائق" محل نزاع علني، والنقاش حول كيفية تأثر المجتمع بالمشكلات الحقيقية المتعلقة بالتغيرات المناخية الناتجة عن الانسان وما تنتج عنها من تحديات بحيث ان التغييرات التي نعرفها تخضع للتسارع والتدهور المستمر.

خلال فترة الحرب السورية فقد 227،413 مدنياً حياتهم من بينهم 29،457 طفلاً، بحسب الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان. كما أجبر أكثر من 5.6 مليون شخص على الفرار خارج سوريا و6.6 مليون شخص تم تهجيرهم داخليًا، وهذا يشكل أكبر عدد من النازحين في العالم (حسب المفوضية السامية للأمم المتحدة لشؤون اللاجئين 2020). حيث لا يمكن إنكار حجم الدمار الذي خلفته الثورة التي لم تنجح ببلوغ اهدافها واستمرار الصراع داخل الأراضي السورية. لذلك ليس من المستغرب أن تكون الحرب السورية في بؤرة التركيز في العديد من التحليلات والدراسات، وأن الأسباب التي أدت إلى اندلاع الحرب قد خلقت جدلاً محتدمًا. من بين تفسيرات ونظريات اندلاع الحرب هي نظرية الصراع المناخي في سوريا والتي تعرّف عامل تغير المناخ على أنه (عامل مضاعف للتهديد). النظرية تنص على أن موجات الجفاف والتصحر السابقة والتي كانت من صنع الإنسان في شمال شرق سوريا تسببت في هجرة جماعية داخلية في سوريا، ثم ساهمت بعد ذلك الى إشعال فتيل الحرب الأهلية. تحاول مثل هذه الروايات وصف نوع النتائج المليئة بالصراعات التي تنتظر البشرية في ظروف أكثر دفئًا في الأنثروبوسين من صنع الإنسان.

تلقي هذه الرسالة نظرة نقدية على محتوى وطرق أطروحة الصراع المناخي السوري باستخدام الأساليب النوعية والتحليل البيئي السياسي. هناك عدد قليل جدا من الأصوات السورية المدرجة في قاعدة الأدلة الخاصة بالأطروحة وهو أمر تحاول هذه الأطروحة أن تفعل شيئًا حياله من خلال التفاوض على تعريفات مثل "انعدام الأمن" مع "السكان المحليين" أنفسهم. استنادًا إلى تصريحات أربع مجموعات تركيز قابلتهم وخمسة عشر مقابلة شبه منظمة مع ما مجموعه 79 مشاركًا سوريًا، زعمت لهم أن الصراع السوري لم يكن نادرًا ولا مدفوعًا بالعوامل المناخية، بل نتيجة لسوء الأحوال المعيشية لعدة أجيال في ظل حكم البعث، والتي بلغت ذروتها في انتفاضة واسعة في أوائل عام 2011 بعد أحداث رئيسية مثل الربيع العربي. دراستي هذه تزيل الغطاء عن تيارات استعمارية ومالثوسية متمحورة حول البيئة في نظرية الصراع المناخي في سوريا وكذلك الأدبيات التي تستخدم الفهم الأمني لتغير المناخ. من المستهجن أيضًا أن روايات الصراع المناخي تحظى بهذا الدعم الواسع في وسائل الإعلام و "الأدب الرمادي" دون وجود اي دليل ملموس يبرره، حسب رأيي الشخصي.

باستخدام أدوات تحليلية مهمة مثل التحليل السردي والبيئة السياسية، أدعو إلى "إنهاء استعمار" نظرية الصراع المناخي السوري مع اضافة "الاعتراف" و "مفاهيم العدالة" كمكونات رئيسية.

أخيرا تواجه البشرية أزمة بيئية حقيقية، ولكن كما هو الحال مع الحرب السورية، فإن أصول هذه الازمة البيئية يقف خلفها مسبب بشري واضح، أكثر من ما هي مسببات طبيعية.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Being a student during a global pandemic has been tough. A journey I expected to be social and interactive has been largely confined to my living room, with social interaction mostly taking place on screens. Work with my dissertation turned out to be something quite different to what I expected, however, this last year has made me very aware of the value of those around me – something we perhaps all took a little for granted before COVID-19 dominated our lives. A few key persons deserve special mention for their patience and support throughout my work with this study.

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Thanks to my cheery classmates who kept things alive on WhatsApp and Zoom when social meet ups weren't possible. And to my wonderful friends outside of university for continuous support and care.

Last, but certainly not least, my greatest gratitude goes to the incredible participants who build the very foundation of this dissertation. I sincerely hope your home finds peace in the near future.

Contents of the Dissertation

Appendices

List of Figures, Tables and Photographs

Tables

Figures

Pictures

1.0 Introduction

Ten years. A decade. A generation. 2021 marks the ten-year point of the Syrian war, a violent chapter of tragedy in Syria's history that has yet to come to a close. According to the Syrian Network for Human Rights 227,413 civilians have lost their lives since the conflict's inception, including 29,457 children (SNHR 2021). Over 5.6 million people have fled Syria, and 6.6 million are internally displaced, accounting for the world's largest forcibly displaced population (UNHCR 2020). An entire generation has prematurely been pushed into adulthood, had their education disrupted and missed out on milestones considered crucial for a healthy development. Out of 800 Syrian youth (aged 18-25 years) surveyed in Syria this year, the International Committee of the Red Cross found that 47% have had a member of their immediate or close family die as a result of the conflict (ICRC 2021). Economic struggles, unemployment and food insecurity still plague those living in Syria (ICRC 2021), and those displaced outside Syria's borders face significant difficulties in rebuilding their lives and identities in host communities as refugees (Ozkaleli 2018). The magnitude of devastation left behind by a revolution gone bad, and the conflict's ongoing protraction is undeniable.

The onset and rapid exacerbation of simmering conflict in Syria in 2011 would have been hard to miss for casual and avid news followers alike. Correspondents reported daily from visibly war stricken cities such as Damascus and Aleppo, to the background cacophony of gunfire and explosions, after what was hoped was a liberating extension of peaceful demonstrations taking place in the region during the so-called *Arab Spring*. The uprisings in the Middle East took the world by surprise (Goodwin 2011), having contradicted the predictions of several state fragility indices with multiple indicators (Werrell et al. 2015). Some considered particularly the Syrian uprising an "out of the blue" occurrence (Femia & Werrell 2013: 24). Unsurprisingly therefore, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and the doings of his Baʿath party quickly became front-page material, and the focus of proliferating analyses. As the war continues to protract, so does the debate over its triggering factors, with events predating 2011 coming under increasing scholarly scrutiny.

Among the explanations of the cause of the Syrian war is the *Syria-climate conflict thesis*, which views climate change as a *threat multiplier*; a security concern that can exacerbate unstable conditions in states already rendered fragile (CNA Military Advisory Board 2007). The main tenets of the thesis are that antecedent climate change drove drought, famine and mass displacement in Syria's northeastern al[1]-Ḥasaka region, eventually serving as a significant contributor to the outbreak of war by functioning as a 'stressor' to existing insecurities. Studies supporting the thesis look at geographical scales of the drought and migration (e.g., Kelley et al. 2015), drought severity (e.g., Femia & Werrell 2012) and agricultural impacts (e.g., Gleick 2014). The thesis stems from literature on the *climate-migration-conflict nexus* ('migration' is often omitted) and is an embodiment of a postulated positive correlation between climate change and conflict outcomes, albeit an indirect and admittedly complex correlation. Syria, alongside the Sahel, have become primary examples of these climate-conflict narratives voiced particularly by the media, and are playing an increasingly influential role in global policy on the environment, security, migration, as well as development and humanitarian initiatives.

The Syria-climate conflict thesis has been disputed and sparked heated debate in academic circles, due to the narrative's imperative to focus primarily on climate change as a driver of conflict, thus diverting attention away from issues such as resource mismanagement (De Châtel 2014) or ideology (Daoudy 2020), as well as contestations over the thesis' meriting evidence (e.g., Selby et al. 2017a). More recently, Syrians themselves have voiced protesting concerns over the suggestion that the war had a 'natural' cause (Daoudy 2020). An especially prevalent rebuttal of the Syria-climate conflict thesis is its slim empirical underpinning, consisting predominantly of three peer-reviewed articles (Werrel et al. 2015; Gleick 2014; Kelley et al. 2015). Up until 2015, Francesco Femia and Caitlin Werrell's three page 'briefer' report (Femia & Werrell 2012) for the Center for Climate and Security in Washington DC served as the main reference point for the Syria-climate conflict thesis (Selby et al. 2017a). Despite this weakly observed foundation, the narrative maintains widespread endorsement by the media (e.g., Quinn & Roche 2014), policymakers (Miller & Ansari 2015) and public figures (e.g., Stevens et al. 2017). Although scientists more or less unanimously agree on the existence and

[1] 'al' denotes the definite article 'the' in Arabic and is therefore only used when referring specifically to 'the governorate/region'.

acceleration of climate change, there is considerable divergence around the notion that climate has and will cause more migration and/or conflict, with supporting claims of the threat multiplier theory found mostly outside academic channels, in grey literature - that is, materials by non-governmental organisations (NGOs), think tanks, advocacy groups or governments.

1.1 Objectives and Research Questions

It is undoubtedly problematic that a theory so heavily critiqued for its evidential standing prevails so strongly in mainstream forums. Even more troublesome is that the Syria-climate conflict thesis, with it's mainly three supporting peer-reviewed studies, rests predominantly on statistical variables, despite the massive human dimension of its subject, the Syrian war. Thus far, research has largely revolved around statistically verifying precursory climate change and ensuing migration and civil conflict with indices and predictive climate models (e.g., Werrell et al. 2015). The debate has also largely neglected the engagement of Syrians themselves, to ask them what they think of the theory, despite their indisputable stakes in defining important triggers of their own revolution and war. I therefore wish to direct attention towards Syrians' own perceptions and experiences to analyse the Syria-climate conflict thesis through a political ecology lens by means of qualitative analysis. This dissertation holds the objective to highlight Syrian voices, and contribute to an assessment of the climate-migration-conflict nexus as applied to the Syria conflict by investigating how displaced Syrians perceive and react to this alleged link. To do so I will answer the following research questions:

1. *How do displaced Syrians react to the 'Syria-climate conflict thesis' and why?*
    a. *Have they heard about this thesis before, if so, in which channels?*
    b. *What perceptions and experiences are behind their reactions?*
2. *What perceptions do displaced Syrians have about triggers of the 2011 unrest and why?*
    a. *How do displaced Syrians conceptualise the conflict?*
3. *What are displaced Syrians' perceptions about the relationship between climate change and conflict, and why?*
    a. *What does climate change mean to them?*
    b. *How do they relate their experiences with drought and migration to the conflict?*
4. *How can 'Syrian' narratives be analysed in relation to the Syria-climate conflict thesis and the broader climate-migration-conflict nexus?*

1.2 Justification and Motivation

The aim of my dissertation is to contribute to the empirical gap identified by several scholars (e.g., Selby et al. 2017a; Vesco & Buhaug 2020; Ide 2018), within the Syria-climate conflict thesis by delving deeper into the complexities characterising the nexus and Syrian context. Having noticed a significant preference for quantitative variables in academic discussions on the topic, I wish to employ qualitative methods to better understand the individual experiences and perceptions that construct a 'Syrian narrative'. By focusing on the voices of Syrians who themselves lived through the harrowing experiences of war and displacement, we may be better able to understand if and how climate change was involved in the decisions and events that led to their current status as victims of war and displacement. Rooted in this objective is a moral imperative, both of a general nature, but also as a researcher within the field of political ecology. Benjaminsen & Svarstad (2021: 22) argue "political ecologists, like all scholars, have an ethical duty to speak out when our research reveals oppression, injustice or destruction of nature". The findings and context of my study concern all three of these aspects, forming a robust justification for its subject matter, a justification further strengthened by the fact that suffering and destruction still prevails in Syria. We owe it to those who lost their lives and whose struggles still persist to understand what happened, hear their stories and do what we can to strive for a peaceful resolution of the Syrian conflict; the world's worst humanitarian crisis of the 21st century (Staněk 2017).

My focus on narratives springs out of a belief that there are no single truths, especially when it comes to conflict. There are two sides to every story. Oftentimes, more. This dissertation is also an attempt to advocate for meaningful participation with the people whose voices establish the foundation of this study, and to direct a critical eye to the notion of 'knowledge', regardless of its ulterior motive. Proclamations in support of securitising climate change, for example, aim to urge action on climate change and prevent similar violent eruptions to those experienced in Syria. Both are in my view legitimate concerns, however, we must practice caution in making claims of causation, and moving issues into the realm of security. Firstly, because securitisation might in fact hinder action (Warner & Boas 2019), and

secondly, because it in itself could contribute to conflict or insecurity outcomes (Weinthal et al. 2015). Hendrix's (2017: 251-252) remark on the topic is illustrative of this point: "to the extent the dominant narrative got the Syrian case 'wrong', it will ultimately make it harder for scholars and scientists to communicate the very real economic and security implications of climate change more broadly". In times of such contestation over what is 'true' or 'factual', I believe it is vital that science is based on sound evidence and candid methods, and that journalists and policymakers be more meticulous in pursuits of knowledge on which to base their work on. Ultimately, I hope empirical contributions to the climate-conflict discourse will emphasise the importance of navigating climate and security policy towards targets that serve both the environment and society, and not least, that are scientifically justified.

1.3 Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation unfolds in a six-part organisation. Chapter one lays out my methodological choices and justifications for them, including descriptions of how I carried out focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews with 79 Syrian participants living in Turkey, Syria and Norway - some orignally from Ḥasaka. The second chapter gives a historical backdrop to my analysis, outlining key events from France's colonial power over Syria, the rise of the mostly al-Assad led Baʿath party in Syria, to the revolutionary evolution in Syria in 2011. Chapter three encompasses my analytical framework, touching on key topics such as political ecology, narratives, the nexus, and Syria-climate conflict thesis, as well as dominant discourses on environmental security, Orientalism and decolonisation. Chapter five focuses on Syrian inputs collected in this study, and discusses them in relation to the broader literature and my selected theoretical and conceptual tools. Chapter six rounds the dissertation off with concluding remarks on this study, as well as suggested foci for future related research.

2.0 Methodology

The overarching motivation behind this project has been to bring Syrian voices to the fore, by interactive means, based on a moral imperative to meaningfully pursue participatory research. As mentioned in the introduction, it is my personal conviction that 'reality' and 'knowledge' are social constructions based on individual experiences in varying contexts. Bryman (2016) argues this ontological position requires research that examines a certain 'reality' together with individuals who construct it. I have therefore chosen to conduct a qualitative study that focuses on 'Syrian' interpretations of reality related to the war[2] they endured and its triggers. This chapter will outline methodological choices related to research design, sampling, data collection, data analysis, ethical considerations and data limitations.

2.1 Research Design

Bryman (2016: 39) defines *research design* as "a framework for the generation of evidence that is chosen to answer the research question(s) in which the investigator is interested". The first component of this study's framework is its *social constructivist approach*, which is based on a notion that reality and facts are socially constructed and subject to constant change (Bryman 2016). The second component of my framework is its *critical approach*, which goes beyond just interpretive exploration of an issue. Nygaard (2017: 27) explains that critical approaches "aim to look beyond what they see to consider the larger social structures and distribution of power behind them". They are deliberately conscious of context and underlying power dynamics, and often strive to achieve social change with their critical stance (Nygaard 2017). A critical approach harmonises with the objectives, methods and analyses of political ecology, a field which also tends to employ qualitative methods - those best suited for normative assessments of individual perceptions (Benjaminsen & Svarstad 2021). As a strategy, qualitative research is usually *inductivist, constructivist* and *interpretivist*, meaning a) the research itself generates the theory, b) ontologically, it studies social reality as a

[2] The majority of research participants preferred the term 'revolution' in discussion of the 2011 demonstrations, and 'war' or 'conflict' rather than 'civil war' in discussion of post-2011 conflict events in Syria. I therefore use revolution/demonstrations for the former and war/conflict for the latter.

constructed entity that cannot exist separate from the individuals who construct it and, c) epistemologically, it emphasises investigation of social reality by looking at how it is interpreted by those living in it (Bryman 2016). As I was interested in learning about the experiences and normative perceptions Syrians themselves have about the Syria-climate conflict thesis, a qualitative strategy seemed appropriate.

I also realised my literature review would touch upon several academic disciplines, meaning an *interdisciplinary* lens would be needed. International environmental studies, the academic field this dissertation is rooted in, is intrinsically interdisciplinary in that it combines information, perspectives, concepts and theories from multiple sources of specialised knowledge (Kanazawa 2018). The specific lens of political ecology also plays on contributions from both natural and social science, although the latter is oftentimes weighted more heavily. An interdisciplinary approach allows research findings that transcend the capabilities of single disciplines alone (Kanazawa 2018). I believe that an examination of the Syria-climate conflict thesis in an interdisciplinary manner provides ample opportunities to bring novel and useful insights to the effects climate change will have on human life. The main disciplinary strands my dissertation refers to are: environmental studies, security/peace and conflict studies, international relations, geography, and postcolonial studies.

The design of my study was premised on an overall objective to understand what the Syrian participants in my study think about the Syria-climate conflict thesis, drawing on their own experiences, and a subset of narrower research questions that tried to grasp why they think in this way. This allowed me to study the complex nature of climate change as an environmental and social issue, as well as the unique features of the Syrian conflict. In sum, this dissertation can be categorised as a qualitative study that uses a social constructivist and critical approach to study the Syria-climate conflict thesis in an interdisciplinary fashion.

2.1.1 Data Reliability & Validity

Research design also relates to the evaluation and quality assessment of social research. This study used data *triangulation* by supporting its arguments with several methods and data

sources in order to strengthen each individual claim (Kanazawa 2018). For *data reliability* and *validity*, which concerns the repeatability of a study and the integrity of its findings, I follow Guba & Lincoln's (1994, cited in Bryman 2016) suggestion of *trustworthiness* and *authenticity* as two overarching criteria as they are better suited than reliability and validity for studying a diverse set of social reality accounts. Their concept of trustworthiness consists of four sub-criteria: *credibility, transferability, dependability* and *confirmability*.

Credibility pertains to the feasibility and acceptability of the social reality a researcher presents. To achieve this, a researcher should follow principles of good practice and pursue *respondent validation*, which means some kind of confirmation from respondents that you have interpreted their response(s) accurately. I have endeavored to do this by firstly, leaning on established guidelines within methodology literature, and secondly, through consultation with relevant professionals such as a clinical psychologist (discussed below), key contacts in humanitarian organisations like CARE International in Turkey and the Norwegian Refugee Council, and my academic supervisor. For participant validation, I made sure to summarise discussion points and answers during the interviews and focus groups to allow participants to 'approve' my interpretations or offer comments and clarifications if they felt their response was misrepresented. I also emailed written summaries to participants upon request.

Transferability relates to the possibility of transferring findings to other related contexts, and is often an important criteria in quantitative research. Because qualitative studies tend to focus on the uniqueness of a specific social context, they often employ what anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1926-2006) (1973, cited in Bryman 2016) refers to as thick description. This involves detailed description of the social setting the data comes from so others can evaluate whether a study's findings can be transferred to other social contexts. This is a task subsequent chapters seek to provide.

The idea behind dependability is to "keep an audit trail which entails ensuring that complete records are kept of all phases of the research process" (Bryman 2016: 384). This study's audit trail includes notes from all preparatory meetings, a record of alterations to research questions and themes of interest, verbatim interview transcripts and email correspondences detailing participant selection. In line with the Norwegian centre for research

data's stipulations, the records of interaction with participants, as well as the raw data (notes, recordings, transcripts) will be deleted once the research project is finalised.

The last criteria for data trustworthiness is confirmability, which involves sincere efforts on part of the researcher to restrict "personal values or theoretical inclinations sway[ing] the conduct of the research and the findings deriving from it" (Bryman 2016: 386). This relates to *confirmation bias*; instances where a researcher allows their own perceptions to influence their findings (Bryman 2016). In studies where an individual researcher works independently, confirmation bias is difficult to uncover, but attempts have been made to avoid this. One strategy was using an interview guide approved prior to its practical use, by my academic supervisor, the Norwegian centre for research data and in the case of the focus groups, by the 'hosting' organisation (who also attended the sessions). Secondly, I recruited Syrian participants from three different social contexts to ensure a mixed set of perceptions. Lastly, I kept a running dialogue with professionals from the humanitarian, development and security fields to maintain a balanced perspective on the significance and rigour of my research.

Along with trustworthiness, sound social research should pursue criteria for authenticity. Broadly speaking, this requires consideration of the political impact of the research, by asking whether participant perceptions have been fairly depicted, and whether participation has in some way been beneficial to participants, for example by encouraging them engage in action for positive change or a better understanding of their own situation in relation to the topic of study. Participant validation is again relevant to this criterion, as is my use of interactive methods and pursuit of mutual learning throughout the research process. A concrete example of the latter is my involvement in assisting CARE International Turkey to understand how climate change and environmental issues may be integrated into their community-based work with displaced Syrians in Turkey. I held an online workshop session with CARE's community outreach team in May 2021, with the aim of sharing relevant experience and knowledge for them to be able to teach and learn about climate change and the environment, with other Syrian community members. The presentation I produced for the workshop will be used as a template in CARE's future training sessions on these topics.

2.2 Sampling

A *sample* is a portion of a wider population, in my case Syrians, that one chooses to research (Bryman 2016). To address my research questions, I required data reflecting the perceptions and experiences of individuals who lived in Syria between 2005 and 2011. This sampling criteria was introduced because of the centrality of drought[3], displacement[4] and unrest[5] to the Syria-climate conflict thesis within this timeframe. In this way, my research questions and research interest navigated the sampling strategies chosen for this study. This is usually the case in qualitative research, where *units* (people, organisations, documents etc.) are selected strategically on the basis of research focus, and in a non-random way (Bryman 2016). This is called *purposive sampling*, and is a form of *non-probability sampling*. Bryman (2016) argues that context and participants serve as the two levels of sampling. For my study, three areas (Syrians in Turkey, Syrians in Norway, and Syrians in Syria) were selected for the context level, and individuals in each area for the participant level. This strategy allowed me to examine contrast and accord between and within the three sampled areas. My sample consists of 79 participants; 60 displaced Syrians living in Turkey, 15 living in Norway, and four internally displaced Syrians living in Jarabulus, on the western bank of the Euphrates river in Syria. It is also worth mentioning that all 79 participants were given a written informed consent letter in a language of their choosing (English, Arabic or Norwegian). According to Berg & Lune (2012), this strengthens the appropriateness of subjects as it both informs them about their rights as participants and what the project aims to investigate and achieve in advance.

The sampling involved a combination of *typical case* and *criterion sampling*, meaning the samples are meant to represent both an emblematic case of Syrians affected by conflict and displacement, and that met the criteria mentioned above. I deliberately avoided criteria linked to religious or political affiliation as I thought this might skew discussions over conflict triggers. I attempted to sample mainly individuals from northeastern Ḥasaka[6] (central to the Syria-climate conflict thesis) to understand their experiences with drought, internal migration

[3] Proponents of the Syria-climate conflict thesis claim extreme drought hit the Syrian governorate of Ḥasaka variously between 2005 and 2010.
[4] Proponents of the Syria-climate conflict thesis claim drought contributed to increased internal migration in Syria in 2008/2009.
[5] The last step of the Syria-climate conflict thesis' 3-step argument is the onset of unrest in Syria in 2011.
[6] Arabic transliteration (except names) follows the IJMES (International Journal of Middle East Studies) system. See *Appendix VIII* for the chart.

and their involvement in demonstrations, but due to pandemic-related restrictions that made recruitment of participants difficult, I had to employ a flexible sampling approach. Given the sensitive nature of the study topic, I also put emphasis on voluntary participation. My sample, therefore, ended up representing a broad geographical area. **Figure 2.1** below shows the geographical distribution (where they 'come from') of the focus group participants with internally displaced Syrians and Syrians in Norway. Note that 'Syrian' in this study refers to those who lived in Syria between 2005 and 2011, not Syrian citizenship or nationality. Some participants had Palestinian or Kurdish backgrounds, but were born and raised in Syria and identify themselves as Syrian. One participant was born in Norway but lived in Syria from 2001 to 2011.

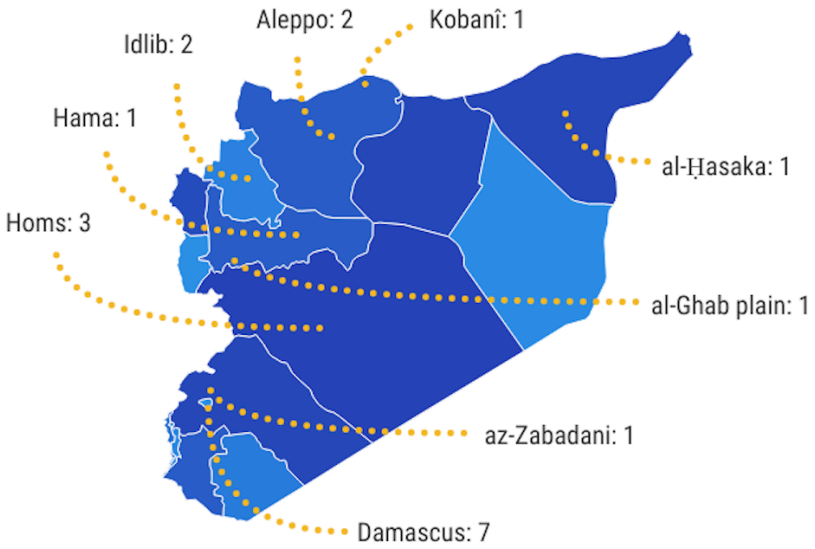


Figure 2.1: Map of Syria showing where participants from the focus group with internally displaced Syrians and Syrians in Norway (total: 19 participants) come from (map created in *Venngage*).

The original plan was to travel to Jordan, to conduct in-person interviews with Syrian refugees living in Zaatari refugee camp. COVID-19 travel and social distancing restrictions meant I had to adjust to remote/digital methods for data collection. Having completed an internship with The Norwegian Refugee Council in 2020, I was able to speak with staff working with Syrian refugees in Syria, Jordan and Lebanon about the possibility of conducting online interviews with Syrian refugees. Their response was that because of prevailing interview fatigue

amongst Syrians in association with the 10-year commemoration of the Syrian war, and COVID-19 hardships for particularly displaced persons, I was unable to recruit directly through them and therefore made use of *convenience sampling*. With assistance from the Norwegian Refugee Council I acquired contact with a *gatekeeper* working for CARE International in Turkey, who facilitated recruitment of Syrian participants living in three Turkish provinces bordering Syria; Sanliurfa, Kilis and Gaziantep. A gatekeeper is someone who mediates access between a researcher and the intended participants (Bryman 2016).

Participants in Turkey were initially skeptical of the research focus, especially because of my interest in their hometown in Syria, and questions about their migratory movements, which resembled questions they had been asked by government officials upon arrival in Turkey. To counter this, the question of where participants come from in Syria was changed to a yes-no question: "are you from al-Ḥasaka/Jazira region?", which is where the Syria-climate conflict thesis drought is meant to have hit the hardest, and been the origin of mass rural-urban migration. *Facesheet information* of participants from the three focus groups with Syrians in Turkey is illustrated in **Figure 2.2** below and **Figure 2.3** on the next page.

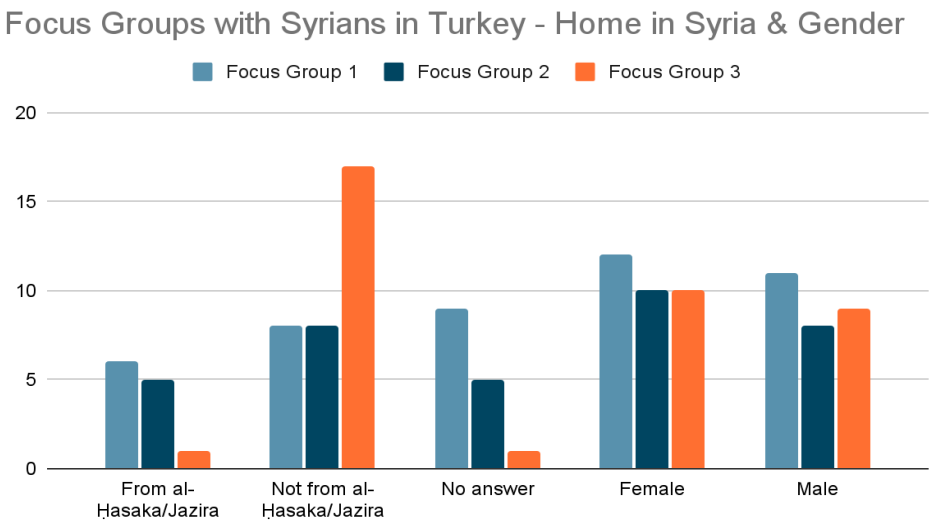


Figure 2.2: Bar chart illustrating the gender of participants from the three focus groups with Syrians in Turkey, and whether they come from Ḥasaka (yes, no, or no answer). (Made in *Google Sheets*).

Additionally, a mock focus group discussion (see Appendix I for agenda) was carried out before the remaining data collection sessions, with 23 Syrians CARE coordinators who served as another form of gatekeepers for Syrian community members in Turkey. Alongside their own participation, they provided feedback about what questions and level of detail they thought would be appropriate and would encourage others to partake. Three focus groups with Syrians in Turkey followed, the first with 23 participants, the second with 18, and the third with 19.

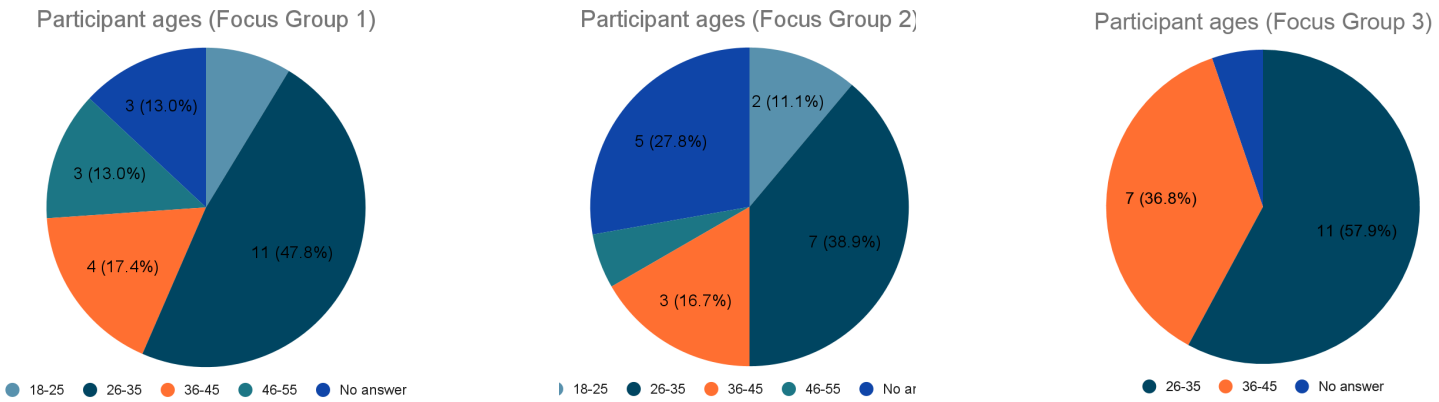


Figure 2.3: Pie charts illustrating the age groups of the participants from the three focus group discussions with displaced Syrians in Turkey (Made in *Google Sheets*).

After the three sessions with Syrians in Turkey, I felt the need for a broader population representation. Based on experience from the first three focus groups, which suggested my subject matter might be more sensitive than anticipated, especially with regard to origin in Syria, migration and conflict triggers, I proceeded with stronger emphasis on willingness and interest in participation. I also hoped to gain insights into different forms of displacement, and expanded the areas of study by recruiting Syrians who had come to Norway as refugees, and internally displaced persons in Syria. My main contact from CARE Turkey put me in touch with implementing partners in the northwestern Syrian city of Jarabulus, which resulted in a focus group consisting of four participants: a 24-year old female from Homs, a 30-year-old male from Idlib, a 29-year-old male from Aleppo, and a 25-year old male from Damascus. They all volunteered on the basis of wanting to contribute to the study.

To get hold of Syrian participants in Norway, I posted a request on two Facebook groups: *Syrian Student Association in Norway*[7] and *The Syrian Society in Norway*[8]. I detailed the project focus, its objectives, sampling criteria (over 18, lived in Syria between 2005 and 2011) and my own contact details for those interested in taking part. Those who got in touch were given additional details about the research in an information letter, and were able to ask questions. This strategy generated 15 individual interviews with four females aged 33, 33, 32 and 22 and eleven males aged 39, 29, 33, 29, 32, 27, 32, 33, 31, 22 and 22. My entire sample is summarised in **table 2.1** below.

Data Collection Session	Female	Male	Total
Focus group I: displaced Syrian coordinators living in Turkish Gaziantep and Sanliurfa	12	11	23
Focus group II: displaced Syrian community members living in Turkish Gaziantep	10	8	18
Focus group III: displaced Syrian community members living in Turkish Kilis	10	9	19
Focus group IV: internally displaced Syrians in Syrian Jarabulus	1	3	4
Individual interviews: displaced Syrians in Norway	4	11	15
Total sample size: 79 Syrian individuals			

Table 2.1: Summary of the entire sample of this study, consisting of 79 Syrian participants who participated in one of four focus group discussions, or one of 15 individual semi-structured interviews.

Around 2.9 million Syrians fled to Turkey after the war (Staněk 2017). Here they live under a temporary protection and asylum law, but are considered 'guests' (Ozkaleli 2018). In Norway, Syrians are the seventh largest immigrant group with young men making up the largest portion (Statistics Norway 2018). This can explain why the group of interviewees from Norway who volunteered their participation in this study, consist mostly of men aged between 20 and 35. UNHCR (2020) estimates that 6.6 million people are displaced within Syria's borders.

[7] Translated from Norwegian/Arabic: Syrisk Studentforening i Norge الطلبة السوريين في النرويج
[8] Translated from Norwegian/Arabic: Det Syriske Samfunnet i Norge الجالية السورية في النرويج

2.3 Data Collection

The remote-based digital data collection was carried out between January 22nd and April 12th 2021 on the video communication platform, *Zoom*. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Archibald et al. (2019) studied the viability of Zoom as a tool for qualitative data collection, and found that its ease of use, data management setup and security options gave positive experiences for both researchers and participants. Of particular relevance to my study was their finding that this video-conferencing platform enables researchers to reach "geographically dispersed individuals in contexts with limited resources" and allows participants to refrain from answering (poll questions, chat, and spoken questions) if they wish (Archibald et al. 2019: 2). Considering also the widespread global use of Zoom after the onset of the pandemic over a year prior to my data collection period, the platform presented a feasible instrument to use as an alternative to face-to-face encounters. The methods I employed were a series of interactive focus groups and semi-structured interviews. For the group sessions, invaluable facilitation and assistance was provided by key contacts and coordinators from CARE International Turkey, and Arabic interpreters, Haybat Hacham and Ihsan Abdallah. All three focus group sessions with Syrians in Turkey were carried out in Arabic, with 'live' translation to Norwegian. The focus group with Syrians in Syria had an Arabic interpreter present, but most of the discussion took place in English, based on the participants' preference. For the individual semi-structured interviews, participants decided themselves whether they preferred to conduct their interview in English or Norwegian (nine chose Norwegian, and six English).

2.3.1 Preparation

Early on in the planning of my data collection, it became apparent that my interview guide would touch upon themes that might cause distress or unexpected reactions from participants. I realised the data collection sessions could for example revive traumatic memories from the conflict in Syria, the loss or injury of loved ones, or painful experiences with displacement. My research questions also posed the possibility of having to bring up delicate issues such as politics, religion, and experiences with the Syrian regime. With these concerns in

mind, I employed a couple of strategies to make sure my data collection was conducted in a responsible manner and to avoid any unnecessary distress for the participants who after all, build the foundation of this dissertation.

Lynn Nygaard (2017) suggests that handling or avoiding retraumatisation for research participants can be achieved by allying oneself with a psychologist. In line with this, I reached out to a clinical psychologist in Norway whose experience includes work with traumatised patients who have fled conflict situations, and many from Arabic-speaking countries who required the services of an interpreter. In January 2021, we scheduled a telephone call to discuss what interview techniques were most suitable for my research design, and how to deal with potentially difficult situations that might arise, for example strong emotional reactions. I described the participants I would be working with (ages, background), the planned setting (interviews/focus groups) and how I planned to carry out the sessions (platform, level of interaction, topics). Her advice covered all these aspects, some of which I will detail now due to the influence it had on my data collection.

Generally, there is little danger of retraumatisation by talking about painful experiences, as long as the environment feels safe and there is trust within the group. To establish a safe environment for the participants, especially those involved in group sessions, she recommended 'setting the stage' at the beginning by emphasising what 'rules' apply for the session. Everyone present has a duty of confidentiality, including the interpreter. It should also be made clear that the interpreter's role is to translate exactly what is said by both researcher and participants. They will not themselves be involved in discussions, and will use the third person upon additional comments, e.g., "the interpreter did not understand the question". This is important because the Arabic language has several distinguishable dialects. Both the interpreters have Arabic as their mother tongue, but neither of them are Syrian. Their origins are, however, easily decipherable to native Arabic speakers, so it was important that their background did not 'colour' the discussions.

The psychologist also proposed ways to formulate questions in non-intrusive ways, for instance, by explaining why the researcher is interested in certain information, and specifying that participants have the full right to 'pass' on questions without having to give an

explanation. She also recommended a 'familiar face' to be present during the group sessions, and somebody who could offer counsel afterwards. During all the focus groups, a CARE-coordinator who was well acquainted with the group, attended and offered follow-up. The mock focus group with Syrian coordinators in Turkey also contributed to ensuring my data collection would be executed according to the *do no harm* principle.

2.3.2 Interview Guide

For all data collection sessions I followed a semi-structured interview guide organised around six key themes directly related to my research questions: climate change definitions, reactions to the Syria-climate conflict thesis, climate change/drought in Syria between 2000 and 2011, internal migration in Syria, conflict triggers and the climate-conflict nexus. For each theme, I planned a subset of related questions, but based on an intention to create free discussions steered by the participants themselves, these questions mainly functioned as an aid or probe when necessary (Bryman 2016). My interview guide contained an elaboration on my part of the Syria-climate conflict thesis to ensure that the reactions I recorded were based on a sound understanding of the thesis. I also allowed for a high level of interaction between the researcher and participants, acknowledging that some of the claims within the Syria-climate conflict thesis are complex and would likely spur clarifying questions from the participants. This was with Kanazawa's (2018: 321) argument in mind, that "you are engaged in a social interaction with the person[s] being interviewed, not grilling them for information". Most sessions started with me explaining the study's objectives and the main tenets of the Syria-climate conflict thesis, and an 'easy' question to open up the discussion: "what does climate change mean to you?", but in some cases the participants commented on the thesis directly after my explanation of it. Although the same five themes were covered in all sessions, my interview guide was a "work in progress" that changed slightly along the way, based on emerging themes of interest, and experience with what types of questions/themes worked and in what order (Kanazawa 2018: 319). See Appendix II and III for the interview guides.

2.3.3 Online Focus Group Discussions

Focus groups were the preferred format for the participants living in Turkey and Syria because they could engage in discussions together with others they were already acquainted with and trusted. A group session was also more practical to organise across two different time zones. Although I was anticipating internet troubles, no such issues arose. The length of each session varied from 60-75 minutes to allow sufficient time to address all the themes in my interview guide, build trust in the groups and for translation. The four focus groups were recorded (upon permission) using Zoom's built-in recording function, meaning I could later revisit the chat log, video and sound recording for the sake of transcription and analysis. The focus group method presents an opportunity to observe interaction within the group, including expressions of similarities and dissimilarities in participants' reactions and perceptions (Bryman 2016). It also allows a researcher to observe how meaning around a certain event or phenomenon is collectively constructed (Bryman 2016), which to me was of particular interest.

There are limitations associated with the focus group method, for instance the tendency for some participants to dominate in discussions, and for them to discuss at length issues not directly relevant to the research focus (Bryman 2016). Both of these challenges were faced in the four focus groups, and handled with flexible moderator involvement. As moderator, I would continuously evaluate the need for steering conversations back to more 'relevant' subjects, or engaging less active participants if it felt suitable. In the end, these issues were not concerning. The participants were also clearly familiar with discussion sessions on Zoom and had no problems using the chat, poll and raise hand functions.

2.3.4 Individual Semi-Structured Interviews

The semi-structured interviews with Syrians in Norway were also conducted on Zoom. Each session lasted approximately 60-75 minutes and all were recorded via Zoom. The interviews followed the same interview guide themes as the focus groups, but made more use of the specific sub-questions as the one-to-one setting allowed for more detailed discussion of the various topics. Questions were both close-ended and open-ended to accommodate a

sound balance between participant and researcher interests (Kanazawa 2018). It was usually necessary to keep asking follow-up questions to stimulate the flow of details and impressions. Additionally, new emerging themes, based on the participants' own interests, conjured several follow-up questions. Because I was interested in narratives and discourse, I asked participants for background details, justifications of voiced opinions and explanations of how situations changed. According to Bryman (2016: 590), "what distinguishes the use of interviews in a narrative inquiry context from conventional qualitative interviewing is that there is a deliberate attempt to elicit stories rather than an exclusive focus on interviewees' experiences. The Syria-climate conflict thesis was also explained in a 'story' form, so that it was easier to comprehend. In line with Bryman's (2016) recommendations for qualitative interviewing, I used language that was clear and intelligible, and prepared answers for why I was interested in the study topic.

2.3.5 Secondary Sources

As with any study, a substantial literature review has played an important role in establishing the focus, framework, analysis and context of this dissertation, a task made even more necessary because physical fieldwork was not possible. The literature review process started in May 2020, a year prior to the dissertation submission, and covered a wide range of subjects, amongst others: political ecology, the climate-migration-conflict nexus, the Syria-climate conflict debate, securitisation of climate change, decolonisation and Orientalism. To avoid forgetting important contributions, making the overview accessible and for the sake of organisation, I kept a continuous record in *Google Docs* of literature studied. In line with Berg & Lune's (2012) recommendations, these documents summarised key arguments, included full references and were organised into themes. It also allowed me to search for keywords and find relevant information quickly and easily throughout the study.

2.4 Data Analysis

As I have already emphasised, this study looks at subjective perceptions of reality, truth and knowledge, and potential explanations of them. I focus on a specific narrative and the discourse it is situated in (what I call a discursive narrative). As a research project, however, it is important to remember that "findings acquire significance only when you have reflected on, interpreted, and theorized your data. You are not there as a mere mouthpiece" (Bryman 2016: 584). I have chosen an analytic pathway combining *narrative analysis* and *coding*, to best be equipped for this task. The analysis has been iterative, meaning data collection and analysis have been interwoven and simultaneous, and analytical work has been an ongoing process that started before all data collection sessions were complete. In this way, I could grasp emerging patterns and themes along the way, alter methods to explore further these emerging themes, and follow good practice guidelines for the analysis of qualitative data (Bryman 2016). The focus on narratives, therefore, serves as both data collection and analysis. I will start off with an explanation of narrative analysis and how it was done, and thereafter, the same for coding.

Narrative analysis is an approach that accentuates the stories people share with the researcher throughout the research process, and is generally used to explore one of two factors: language or contents. I have focused on the latter in order to explore not only what Syrians say happened (with relation to drought, migration and conflict), but also how they interpret and make sense of what happened. The analytical approach is derived from a belief that people understand life events in terms of continuity: we often recite our experiences as storylines. In political ecology, narrative analyses often demonstrate deviations between dominant narratives and 'local' ones (Svarstad & Benjaminsen 2020). Bryman (2016) explains that participant responses in qualitative interviews are the 'stories' that a narrative analysis studies. In doing so, the researcher should look for what functions stories have for the teller (Coffey & Atkinson 1996, cited in Bryman 2016), and potentially what purposes they serve. It is also insightful to analyse why narratives arise in the way they do (Kanazawa 2018). By probing participants for explanations of their responses, and explicitly asking why they thought things happened in a certain way, I was able to generate raw material for analysis of both events and

their function, as seen from Syrian perspectives. Another important component of narrative analysis is exploration of competing narratives about particular occurrences, for example by studying how "groups and individuals contest the legitimacy of others' interpretations of events" (Brown 1998, cited in Bryman 2016: 591). This was particularly interesting for my study as I was interested partly in Syrian reactions to the Syria-climate conflict thesis, which can be seen as a competing narrative of the Syrian conflict, rooted in a different context or discourse.

Discourse, a concept explored further in the analytical framework chapter, is relevant to narrative analysis. Kanazawa (2018: 237) explains that "discourse takes some set of ideas and weaves them into a narrative that provides a particular interpretation of events", meaning ideas provide the building blocks of both discourse and narratives. Discourses contribute to framing narratives, so a narrative analysis should also aim to link stories to wider discursive frameworks, as I have done by linking the Syria-climate conflict narrative to environmental security discourse and 'the' Syrian narrative (based on my data) to Orientalism and decolonisation discourse. A prevalent goal of discourse analysis is to pinpoint which narratives dominate and influence the more mainstream discussions about topics such as climate change and conflict, and why they dominate. The literature review linked to this study found that the Syria-climate conflict thesis is a narrative that dominates, particularly amongst policymakers, journalists and public figures. With relation to climate change, this is particularly important because there is still much uncertainty related to how climate change will affect human life, what should be done, and who is most vulnerable. Kanazawa (2018: 244) argues that using discourse analysis to examine environmental issues can provide vital insights by "characterizing the perspectives of various actors with a stake in how environmental issues are addressed". This is one of key reasons I chose a narrative/discourse focus in my analysis, as my ultimate goal is to more accurately understand how climate change could be dealt with as a natural and social issue.

Qualitative data collection methods tend to accumulate vast amounts of data, and need to be ordered in a structured fashion before they can be systematically analysed (Bryman 2016). This procedure, as is the case with the rest of the analysis process in qualitative research, has no clear cut standard, so the steps taken in my study have followed general guidelines. First of all, I listed all participants in a spreadsheet, gave each one a code name for sake of

anonymity, and other relevant details like their age, hometown in Syria, and migration experiences. All of the sessions were transcribed verbatim, and reviewed by highlighting interesting quotes related to narratives and their function, as well as similarities and dissimilarities within the data (Berg & Lune 2012). I repeated this process several times as data accumulated, specifically to identify emerging themes. According to Berg & Lune (2012) analytic procedures in qualitative studies look for patterns across datasets without simply reducing cases 'to their averages'. To do this, I developed codes using Strauss and Corbin's (1990, cited in Bryman 2016) *open coding* approach, which breaks the data down into thematic chunks that categorise, label, and organise. Such coding develops different concepts, which are sorted into categories. I ended up with six overarching categories: 'reactions to the Syria-climate conflict thesis', 'drought in Syria and perceived causes', 'internal migration in Syria', 'perceptions about conflict triggers', 'conflict conceptualisations', and 'perceptions about the climate-conflict nexus'. My analysis is based on these six categories, with an initial set of 16 underlying *concepts* and 54 *codes* (see Appendix IV). Borrowing from Selby et al.'s (2017a) breakdown of the Syria-climate conflict thesis, I divided the Syria-climate-conflict thesis into three main narratives, comparing each with Syrian perspectives voiced by study participants. Table 2.2 summarises my approach to the study of these three narratives. The broader analysis was directly guided by my objectives and research questions.

The Syria-climate conflict thesis	**Syrian perspectives (descriptive and interpretive)**	
Narrative 1: Human-induced climate change was a contributory factor to drought in Syria between 2005-2010.	Reactions, perceptions, and experiences?	Why? Justifications?
Narrative 2: Climate-induced drought caused mass rural-urban migration in Syria in 2008-2009.	Reactions, perceptions, and experiences?	Why? Justifications?
Narrative 3: Migrants from the drought were a contributory factor in Syria's 2011 unrest.	Reactions, perceptions, and experiences?	Why? Justifications?
Environmental security discourse	*Orientalism/Decolonisation discourse*	

Table 2.2: Overview of how the narrative analysis in this dissertation has been carried out, by outlining the main analytical questions asked in relation to each separate narrative.

2.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations have had a continuous presence throughout my study, where the aim has been to consider the possible repercussions of my research for particularly the participants (Nygaard 2017). Specific measures taken to counter potential negative repercussions include collaboration with a clinical psychologist and the mock focus group with Syrian coordinators in Turkey, described in 2.3.1 on data collection preparation. Another was producing data processor agreements (see Appendix V for agreement) with the two interpreters to ensure they were aware of the ethical issues related to this study, and what kind of conduct was expected of them as external persons granted direct access to the raw data. Before the data collection of this study began, I also submitted my research proposal along with the interview guides to the Norwegian centre for research data to ensure my research was ethically viable. Amendments to the interview guide were made in line with their feedback on sensitive personal information. The information letter, which also served as the informed consent (see Appendix VI) was produced and approved in line with their guidelines.

It has been a priority for me to make sure my data collection did not serve as a further burden to anybody during a global pandemic, and to make sure any exchanges build on mutually beneficial relationships. My dissertation should strive for ethical research by not only avoiding doing harm, but attempting to 'do good' (Banks & Scheyvens 2014). As mentioned in 2.3.2 Interview guide, I explored what perceptions displaced Syrians have of both climate change and the triggering factors of the conflict, through a data collection format that emphasised interaction between the researcher and participants. The aim has been to capture nuance through mutual learning; participants giving unique insight into their experiences and social reality, and me as researcher providing explanations about academic concepts and detailed explanation of what the Syria-climate conflict thesis. The purpose was not to 'teach' Syrians the 'right' definitions, but to explore nature-society dynamics through continuous interaction between researcher and respondents that allows for critical questions, and analyse whether perceptions change when the academic string of arguments in the Syria-climate conflict thesis is unpacked with terminology that is easily understandable.

2.6 Data Limitations

Given the restricted nature of doing research during a global pandemic, especially in a country the researcher has not been to, there are of course some data and research limitations. For example, the use of remote data collection methods might have reduced the level of trust and rapport between the researcher and participants (Bryman 2016). After the mock focus group with Syrians in Turkey, I had to make some amendments to the interview guide given the sensitive nature of the discussion topics. This might have hindered me somewhat in achieving the level of detail needed and desired in discussions with participants, and could probably have been avoided had I been physically present and the participants were more familiar with me. There is however evidence to suggest that the use of video conferencing software does not affect the level of rapport as much as previously assumed (e.g., Bryman 2016; Archibald et al. 2019). I also believe my decision was justified because it was made in order to ensure ethical treatment of participants, and a positive experience on their part. Additionally, the participants, especially in interviews, seemed to 'warm up' to me fairly quickly and appeared comfortable discussing the topics and questions that I posed.

Another data limitation relates to language and interpretation. As I have mentioned, the raw data from the focus groups and interviews were in three different languages: English, Norwegian and Arabic. Although I speak some Arabic, I was entirely reliant on interpretation help during the sessions conducted in Arabic. My main interpreter was most comfortable translating into Norwegian rather than English, meaning the focus group transcripts for the Arabic sessions have undergone two rounds of interpretation. Transcription also involved quite a bit of 'clean up' to make the transcripts intelligible. It is naturally critical for the translation processes to be reliable in order for findings to be accurate, and this can at times be difficult to uncover when the researcher is not a native speaker of the participants' language (Al-Amer et al. 2016). I believe, however, that selection of two interpreters with professional interpretation experience alleviated the prevalence of inaccuracies. Another interpretation and/or language issue is that terms and concepts may mean different things in different languages. Al-Amer et al. (2016) argue that "this can be problematic when a research project is underpinned by a

qualitative research paradigm, requiring accuracy in interpreting the data within the cultural context, as effective translation is paramount to conveying the message of the participants". For the focus groups and interviews conducted in English and Norwegian, participants were in each case using a language that was not their mother tongue. Given the opportunity to repeat this study with fewer time, travel and financial restrictions, I would strive to conduct all data collection sessions in Arabic. Having worked closely with both interpreters prior to this study, however, I believe translation and language issues were dealt with competently through continuous dialogue between them and myself.

The wide geographical representation of my sample was also made necessary because of pandemic-related restrictions. Ideally, a study of the Syria-climate conflict thesis would focus on sampling participants from key areas within the thesis; Ḥasaka governorate/Jazira region, and the cities the thesis claims received most of the drought-related migrants that were to have contributed to the 2011 unrest (mainly Damascus and Aleppo). Closer attention to the specific narratives might also have benefited from a sample with more agriculture-related sampling criteria to better understand how and why the 'agricultural collapse' unfolded in al-Ḥasaka governorate prior to the revolution. On the other hand, my sample represents viewpoints from a diverse set of places and backgrounds in Syria (several from Damascus and Aleppo), thus it could be argued this gives richer representation (Kanazawa 2018). Moreover, the war, of course, affected the entire country, not just drought-affected areas.

Lastly, I will mention an issue qualitative research is often critiqued for, namely confirmation bias or the subjective positions of the researcher influencing the data analysis (Bryman 2016). This can be especially challenging in narrative analyses because the researcher is deliberately looking for stories in the participants' responses (Bryman 2016). As previously mentioned, this is difficult for the researcher themself to unearth, although there are certain procedures one can undergo to prevent confirmation bias. For example, *negative case analysis*, which in my case involved a review of my raw data after the analysis to check for cases that seemed to contradict my findings (Kanazawa 2018). A second attempt to avoid my subjective leanings swaying the research was through respondent validation.

3.0 Background: A Brief History of Syria

Picture 1: by participant 'Amena' in the southwestern Syrian town of Zabadani. Taken in 2010.

Benjaminsen & Svarstad (2021) argue that the study of conflicts in particular necessitate and benefit from an approach that incorporates a historical perspective. Political ecology tends also to be rooted in a thorough "understanding of particular *places*, with their specific histories, actors, affects, and socio-environmental relations" (Le Billon & Duffy 2018: 246, emphasis in original). Therefore, based on a notion that neither ecological change nor social change is unidirectional (Robbins 2019), I believe a historical perspective is required in an analysis of climate change, migration and conflict. This chapter gives a historical backdrop to the Syrian conflict to gain a clearer picture of the context that produced both the Syrian Revolution and its later evolution. The historical outline starts with France's imperialist presence in Syria given its relevance to my later discussion, and thereafter give a brief account of the Assad family's role in Syrian history. I include descriptions of 'Syria' as a geographical, historical and political entity for the sake of situating the topic of study, providing context, whilst being conscious that the 'Syria' we know today is itself a product of colonialism. The chapter will round off with key pieces of information pertaining to the situation in Syria in 2011: what is commonly considered the onset of the Syrian war.

3.1 'French' Syria

Nous sommes les vrais Musulmans [we are true Muslims].

- Napoléon Bonaparte, in a public address in Alexandria in 1798 (Kargin 2018: 4).

By the end of the 18th century France and Great Britain had their eyes set on the 'Near East' and its 'Orient' inhabitants for the purpose of expansionist policy (Kargin 2018). Britain was at the time far superior to France in both wealth and colonial dominance, enjoying a strong hegemony in particularly India. The geopolitical position of Egypt and Syria offered France the opportunity to oust the British from their dominant position, through access to the Red Sea and establishment of military bases (Kargin 2018). The lure of cheap cotton supply and later preventing Arab nationalism from spreading to the French empire in Northern Africa also contributed to France's expansionist appetite in the region (Fildis 2011). The French military and political leader Napoléon Bonaparte was convinced no military occupation alone would secure expansion of France's regional power, and coupled his military expeditions into Egypt and later Syria with various methods to convince the Orient that a French occupation would be in their interest (Kargin 2018). Set on strengthening their popularity, France played particularly on religion to win them over. France invaded Egypt in 1798, during which Napoléon stood before Egyptians in Alexandria claiming brotherhood between France and Muslims, and that the European power had no other intent than to free its Muslim brothers from Mamluk oppression (Kargin 2018) - an elitist class in Egypt who had steadily gained dominance in the Ottoman ruling class. The same strategy applied in Syria. Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, France on the one hand sought to preserve and strengthen historic ties with Syrian Catholics (Fildis 2011) and on the other, to convince the locals that French interventions in the region were for the sake of Islam (Kargin 2018).

At the time both Egypt and Syria were under Ottoman rule in the Ottoman Empire. Shortly after the inauguration of the 20th century, European powers amplified efforts to expand their empires to Arab territories. They saw the collapse of the Ottoman Empire as an inevitable occurrence, and one it wished to take advantage of (Shorrock 1970). Another component of France's efforts to win over local hearts and minds built on this sentiment. The goal was to

convince Syrians that the French would be an aid in gaining political and administrative autonomy for Syria within the Ottoman Empire, although the real objective was to bolster French popularity and ultimately, a claim on Syria upon Ottoman collapse (Shorrock 1970). The predicted outcome became a reality shortly after World War I, probing the Allied powers to not only occupy the territory, but decide also on its future.

The geographical area known as 'Greater Syria', 'Geographical Syria' or 'Natural Syria' was without clear-cut territorial boundaries and was rather divided into administrative units known as Ottoman *vilayets* that also influenced political divisions (Fildis 2011). The Latin term *Levante*, meaning 'rising' was introduced by the French to describe this Greater Syria region, with reference to the rising of the sun in the East (Gagarin 2010), and is a term still used today to describe an approximate area encompassing present-day Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine, Israel and Turkey. Although the Levante originally included parts of the Eastern Mediterranean, its area of reference was eventually narrowed down to only Muslim countries, and after the First World War was known specifically to refer to the French mandate over Syria and Lebanon (Gagarin 2010). Despite its ambiguous geographical delineation, 'Greater Syria' was divided roughly through the middle, resulting in so-called mandates awarded to the mandatory powers, Britain and France, as part of post-war settlements at the San Memo Conference in April 1920 (Fildis 2011). One half, Palestine, went to Britain, the other half, Syria and Lebanon, went to France - a result far from the earlier French promise of autonomy.

France's 26-year mandate regime in Syria from 1920-1946 was officially established through the wartime correspondences known as the 1915-1916 *Hussein-MacMahon Correspondence*, and the *1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement*. The first correspondences refer to a series of letters between the Emir of Mecca and the British High Commissioner in Egypt during World War I, that expressed British support for an independent Arab state in exchange for Arab assistance in rivaling the Ottoman Empire ("Hussein-MacMahon Correspondence", 2020). The contents of this correspondence were contradicted by the secret agreement between France and Britain, also during World War I, by chief negotiator for the French, François Georges-Picot, and for Britain, Sir Mark Sykes. The agreement lay out the terms for a division of the Ottoman Empire into areas which were to be administered by one of the European colonial

powers ("Sykes-Picot Agreement", 2020). These wartime settlements lay the foundation for the time following the dismantling of the Ottoman Empire, during which Syria was established as a 'nation state' within the French mandate. Clause 4 of article 22 of the League of Nations Covenant describes the transition to post-Ottoman mandates:

> Certain communities formerly belonging to the Turkish Empire have reached a stage of development where their existence as independent nations can be provisionally recognised subject to the rendering of administrative advice and assistance by a Mandatory until such time as they are able to stand alone (White 2007: 69).

This was perceived by Syrians as an obvious colonial act, which served as a threat to Syrian religion, culture and language (Chaitani 2007). What were seen as 'artificial entities' based on France's perceptions of religious, ethnic and sectarian divides split up the Greater Syria area and have fueled tension between the 'entities' even since (Chaitani 2007). France's imperialist presence in Syria, especially by means of religious influence, endured through centuries, although its inception is commonly mistaken as the result of above mentioned events pertaining to World War I (Shorrock 1970). Although France's legally binding power over Syria officially began in 1923, French clerical schools, hospitals, asylums and orphanages meant France's hold on Syria dated further back (Shorrock 1970). French policies during the mandate period also created a lingering French presence that arguably still exists today (White 2007).

3.2 'Natural' Syria

The geographical positioning and rich resources of Syria posed strategic opportunities for the French Empire. Throughout the period of fluctuating powers in the region, access to and use of resources, especially water, have played a central role in society. Dating back to the beginning of the 9th millennium BCE, modern-day Syria hosted the first agricultural communities of the Middle East in what the American Orientalist scholar James Henry Breasted (1865-1935) coined the Fertile Crescent ("Fertile Crescent" 2020). The term describes an area of fertile land that stretched in a crescent-like fashion from approximately the Dead Sea to the

Persian Gulf (Scheffler 2003). **Figure 3.1** below illustrates the geography of the Fertile Crescent and how it corresponds to contemporary state borders. Although the term suggests the area as an ostensibly homogenous agricultural entity, it stretches over highly diverse geographical terrain. Scheffler (2003: 253) contends that: "once invented, however, the term provided a catchy explanatory image that could be used not only for explaining the interplay of space, culture and politics from an environmental point of view but also for advancing hidden political agendas". Despite ambiguity, the term is still used and often represents the region's significance to both Arab and European civilisation. As Breasted (1916, cited in Scheffler 2003: 253) wrote: "Civilisation arose in the Orient, and early Europe obtained it there".

Figure 3.1: The Fertile Crescent with a depiction of present-day nation states in the top right corner (Source: "Fertile Crescent", 2020, Encyclopedia Britannica).

The climate in Syria is classified as arid to semi-arid, with precipitation levels ranging from <1,400 millimetres per year in the West and <200 millimetres per year in the East (De Châtel 2014). Fifty five per cent of the Syrian land cover is considered desert, and drought is a common phenomenon (De Châtel 2014). This land is partially suited for grazing, but only 25% is arable, with below 10% of Syria's surface land used as permanent cropland (Frohlich 2016). Barnes (2009: 512) however, emphasises the diversity of Syria's geography, stating: "the lush

green of the Euphrates floodplain lies in stark relief to the sandy plains of the southeastern Badia region and the winter snow-topped mountains of the Anti-Lebanon".

Water is also an essential part of depicting Syria as a geographical entity. Bryman (2016) argues the importance of a contextual understanding of social behaviour and values, and given the centrality of water to the Syria-climate conflict thesis, I will briefly comment on this. Present day state borders envelope four major rivers: the Tigris, Euphrates, Orontes, and Yarmouk rivers, all of which also run through Turkey, Iraq and Lebanon (Sawe 2017). The Euphrates and Tigirs run along vast areas of respectively 1,740 and 1,150 miles, and are vital sources for both drinking and irrigation (Sawe 2017). On average, annual available water resources in Syria amount to approximately 14,932 million cubic metres, whilst annual demand lies around 17,828 million cubic metres (Barnes 2009). Syria's overall water resources halved in the period 2002-2008, with freshwater, groundwater and Euphrates flows from Turkey and Iraq having been in gradual decline since the late 1980s, mostly due to unsustainable use (Frohlich 2016). This clearly demonstrates problems of water shortages in contemporary Syria, where water availability is well below the United Nations' scarcity limit (Frohlich 2016). Although Syria's mostly desert geography might to external onlookers suggest natural scarcity conditions in a country experiencing population growth, Barnes (2009) argues that water scarcity in Syria is largely a product of government policies 'naturalised' by the state. Syria's natural resource problems are not simply determined by the country's naturally arid climate, but are a result of intricate and long-lived social and political factors (Barnes 2009).

Not only is water paramount to life and agriculture in Syria, so it is for the daily practice of Islam, the overarching religion of the majority in Syria. Sharīʾa law is believed by some to have initially meant the 'path to water', and based on the principle of water as public property (Daoudy 2020). Several examples can be found in the Qurān of the moral obligation to respect and conserve the environment, as well as references to the early Islamic rights of *shafa* (the right to quench thirst) and *shirb* (the right to irrigation), which demonstrate the deep roots of social-justice in Syria with respect to environmental management and water as a 'public good' (Daoudy 2020).

Key to the Syria-climate conflict thesis is the northeastern governorate of Ḥasaka, shown in **figure 3.2** below. Ḥasaka is medially positioned between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers and was previously known as 'Jazira region' - a name still used by many Syrians today (Daoudy 2020). It has long been Syria's breadbasket region, in which most of the production of strategic crops has taken place, including cereals and cotton (Selby 2020). The region also accounts for over 80 percent of Syrian oil reserves (Daoudy 2020), and hosts three different agro-ecological zones (Selby 2018). The reason for its centrality in the Syria-climate conflict thesis is the region's experience with severe drought between 2005 and 2010 (different studies pinpoint various timeframes), which is meant to have caused large-scale agricultural collapse and a humanitarian crisis that 'forcibly displaced' 200,000-300,000 people to urban centres (UN-OCHA 2009).

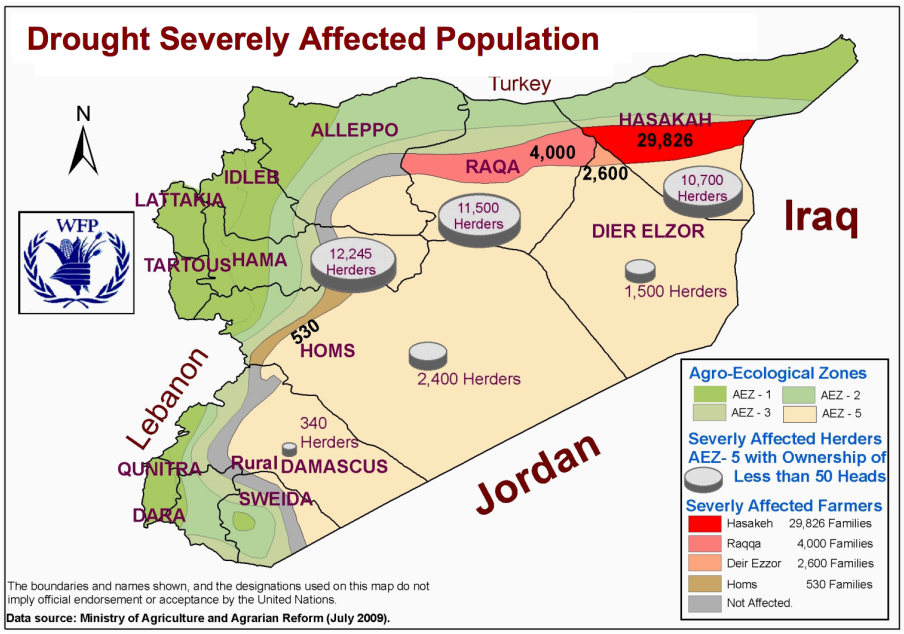


Figure 3.2: UN-OCHA's (2009: 5) depiction of those affected by drought in Syria from 2006. The hardest hit was according to the same source, the northeastern governorate of Ḥasaka (in red) with 29,826 farmer families "severly affected".

3.3 'Religious' Syria

The French legal mandate of Syria ended in October 1945, when Syria was established as a parliamentary republic and a member of the United Nations (UN). As mentioned, however, French presence in Syria loomed large for a long time after, especially because of imperial 'divide and rule' tactics that aimed to pacify Arab nationalism and legitimise France's

administration of Syria (Fildis 2012). The French knew that widespread Arab nationalism would threaten the very foundation of their power seat in the region: colonialism (Chaitani 2007). The 'nation state' was left in a fragmented condition, following religious, ethnic and sectarian lines that, although existed in Syria before French rule, had been greatly influenced by French policies during the mandate period (White 2007). The diversity of ethnic and religious makeup can only be compared with neighbouring Lebanon, whose 'independence' from colonial power was similarly retrieved and who many Syrians still regard as part of Greater Syria as it existed during Ottoman rule (Chaitani 2007). In an analysis of the composition of Syrian society, Khalifa (2013) distinguishes between three overarching categories: ethnic, religious and sectarian groups. Arabs, Kurds, Turkeman, Assyrians, Circassians and Armenians constitute the ethnic category, Muslims, Christians and Jews the religious, and Sunnis, Alawites, Druze, Ismailis and Shi'ites the sectarian (Khalifa 2013). Ethnically, 85% of Syrians are Arab and 10% Kurds, with most of the Kurdish population living in the northeast. Kurds are the only ethnic minority who have demanded independence from Syria (Khalifa 2013). Over 75% of Syria's population are Sunni Muslims, whilst 10% are from the Alawite sectarian group that Hafez al-Assad and his son, Bashar al-Assad belong to (Khalifa 2013).

France contributed to establishing religious/ethnic 'minorities' in Syria and deliberately allied itself with them to counteract majority opposition, which at the time was mostly driven by Arab nationalists (White 2007). This approach sought to create rivalries amongst colonised populations in order to justify the presence of its colonisers (Chaitani 2007). For France, an additional strategic motivation for supporting minorities was that Arab nationalism was mostly fronted by Sunni Muslims and could thus be depicted as a threat to other religious or ethnic groups (Fildis 2012). Numerical inferiority as a minority, therefore, was a political strategy for power accumulation that gained traction during France's colonial presence in Syria and during its transition to becoming a 'modern state' (White 2007). Overall, Syria's turbulent existence as an independent state was deeply coloured by its colonial past. Those in support of pan-Arab nationalism were against the division rhetoric of the French; "they regarded all ethnic groups as an integral part of independent Syria" however, France's approach had long-lasting effects, especially as strategic 'inspiration' to future Syrian President, Hafez-al Assad (Emadi 2011: 63).

The sectarian minority groups of Alawites and Druze were clear benefactors of colonial French policies (Fildis 2012). After France's departure, Syria was left with a feudal and outdated agricultural sector, and an economy highly afflicted by the aftermath of World War II, because its economy had been linked up to the French franc (Chaitani 2007). Within these difficult economic conditions, the army emerged as "a vehicle for social mobility" (Fildis 2012: 151). Those from rural minorities, especially Alawites, were the preferred army recruits in the eyes of the French given their distance from urban areas where Arab nationalism was flourishing (Fildis 2012). The Alawites' accession to power in Syria, a position they still hold, can thus be attributed to two national institutions; the military, and equally, the Baʿath party (Fildis 2012). Additionally, Baʿathists continued colonial 'divide-and-conquer' strategies to oust any competing powers that might threaten Baʿathist power in Syria (Emadi 2011).

3.4 'Baʿathist' Syria

I am first and last – and of this I hope every Syrian citizen and every Arab outside of Syria will take cognizance – a peasant and the son of a peasant.

- Hafez al-Assad, in a public address on March 8th 1980 (Barnes 2009: 521).

After a turbulent time in Syria consisting of a series of military coups after 1949 (Fildis 2012), the Baʿath party came to power in 1963 with a strong rural profile. At the time, almost 90 percent of the Syrian army were Alawites (Fildis 2012). The Baʿath party members originated predominantly from the countryside and its leadership considered rural development as key to mobilising support outside cities, where most of the population lived (Barnes 2009). The thinking was that reaping profits from the agricultural sector by means of large-scale irrigation, land reclamation and infrastructure, and power projects like the Euphrates Dam would strengthen the party's power holding and accelerate development in Syria (Barnes 2009). Food security was defined as the Baʿath party's top priority, a legacy that endured through the rule of both Hafez-al Assad and his son, Bashar al-Assad, and that came at the expense of environmental conservation (Daoudy 2020). Hafez entered the stage in 1970. His intimate

identification with his rural roots created both a personal cult based on his identity as an archetypal Syrian peasant, and an association of Baʿathism with agrarian socialism (Barnes 2009). The quote above from a public address he held in 1980 is illustrative of this. The rural symbolry surrounding Hafez al-Assad and the Baʿath party is still visible in Syria today, for example through the Baʿath connotations found in dam names, and a large poster of Hafez in a classic agricultural scene hanging over the entrance to the town of Ḥasaka (Barnes 2009).

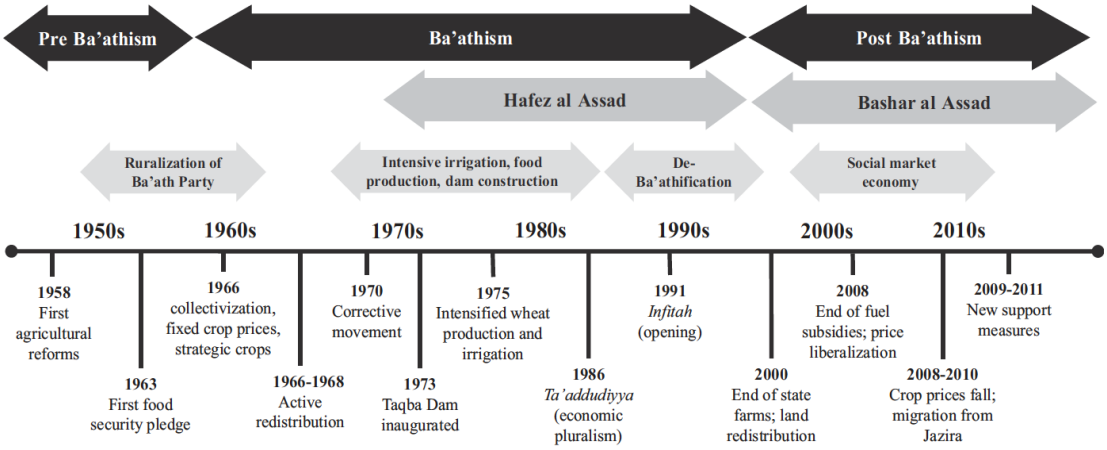


Figure 3.3: The development of Baʿathism in Syria in three phases. Key environmental policies are outlined at the bottom (Source: Daoudy 2020: 105).

Although the Baʿath party has been seated in power in Syria for over half a century now, the party politics have undergone distinct changes along the way. Daoudy (2020) divides the Baʿath party's progression into three fairly distinct periods but notes that all periods were characterised by a focus on food security and gaining rural support. See **figure 3.3** above for specific environmental policies related to each stage. Stage one from the 1950s-1960s had strong ideological underpinnings. Secular pan-Arab nationalism was the key sentiment that drove the movement during this phase, meaning the Baʿath party also won support from religious minorities, thus ending the shifting power dynamics since independence (Fildis 2012). Pre-Baʿathism ideology consisted primarily of the goals ḥurrīa (freedom) and wiḥda (Arab unity) (Fildis 2012). Stage two under Hafez al-Assad saw the sidelining of ideology in favour of strengthening Alawites community connections (Daoudy 2020). At this time, ishtirākīa

(socialism) was added to the Baʿath party's set of core values and goals (Fildis 2012), and were mostly envisioned through agrarian reform (Daoudy 2020). With the spread of inequality in Syria in the 1990s, however, Hafez introduced a set of economic liberalisation reforms that aimed at increasing economic conditions and quality of life across Syria (Daoudy 2020). His son Bashar al-Assad continued these policies rooted in a social market economy during stage three of Baʿathism from the year 2000 (Daoudy 2020). Included in these reforms were "the privatisation of state farms, trade liberalisation, and the removal of key subsidies", which left much of Syria's rural population in a state of impoverishment (Selby et al. 2017a: 238). To Selby and his colleagues, these were more important drivers of agricultural decline and rural-urban migration in Syria in the 2000s than climatic factors that I will discuss later on.

Although Baʿathist agricultural and economic policies were based on nationalist sentiment, the benefits were not aimed at the entirety of Syria's population. Indigenous Kurds were systematically excluded from the agricultural gains pursued by the Baʿathists, largely through land distribution that sought to bolster Arab domination through Arabisation (Daoudy 2020). The so-called 'Arab Belt' policy of the 1960s had the aim of Arabising the northern region of Syria, including Ḥasaka, through dispossession of land from Kurds and moving 20,000 Arab families to public housing (Daoudy 2020). The resulting number of relocated Arab families was much lower, but the ideology behind is descriptive of the long-term discriminatory attitude by Baʿathists towards the Kurdish population, including "widespread and systematic denial of economic and social rights, as well as political repression" (Selby 2018: 270). The Sunni majority in Syria also felt repressed by the Alawites' powerbase that the Baʿath party's rise to power had consolidated, and their discriminatory policies that, despite nationalist appearance, mostly benefited the minority Alawite group (Fildis 2012). What had been created was a split and unequal society. "In a country where two-thirds of the population are Sunni, these facts severely alienated the Alawite regime from its subjects" (Fildis 2012: 155).

Bashar al-Assad came to power in 2011, after the death of his father in June 2000. Hafez al-Assad had made sure to tidy way for his son's accession, removing any officials he percieved as a threat to his son's takeover (Emadi 2011). In a presidential referendum, Bashar won 97.2 percent of the votes, as the one and only candidate (Emadi 2011). Early on, he

promised an ambitious set of reformations that were intended to improve living conditions for people across Syria, for example easing restrictions that were in place on the media (Emadi 2011). Particularly noticeable, were his economic reforms that significantly promoted the private sector. Bashar al-Assad was set on building support with Syria's Sunni majority, whilst sumaltenously maintaining the power dominance of Alawites in Syria (Emadi 2011).

3.5 'Revolutionary' Syria

> Almost lost in this din are the voices of the original grassroots-revolution of Syria: nonviolent, nonsectarian, noninterventionist, for the fall of the Assad regime and for the rise of a democratic, human-rights upholding Syria that is bound by the rule of law.
>
> - *Mohja Kahf in 'The Syrian Revolution, Then and Now' (2014: 557).*

The initial revolutionary movement in Syria was rooted in the inequality and oppression created by the Baʿathist party and its prejudiced leanings. Daoudy (2020) argues it was neither religious, sectarian divides nor as some claim, climate change, that sparked the Syrian Revolution, but rather, the desired termination of repression, corruption, and injustice. The first mobilisations in early 2011 started in unorganised form and were aimed at reforming Syria, towards a respect for human rights and democracy (Kahf 2014). As the regime violently cracked down on these mobilisations, the revolutionary aims rapidly renavigated toward bringing down Syria's corrupt and repressive elite - the regime of Bashar al-Assad (Kahf 2014). There is disagreement as to the specific time and place of the 'start' of the uprising, with some arguing that groups of people first gathered in Damascus on March 15th to show support of pro-democracy uprisings taking place in Tunisia and Egypt, whilst others say the revolutionary spirit really took off in southwestern Darʾā three days later (Daoudy 2020). Nevertheless, a nonviolent popular uprising sweeped the country in the first months of 2011, largely driven by generations under the age of 40 (Kahf 2014). Despite this peaceful beginning, the situation quickly took a turn for the worse after the al-Assad regime and its army met demonstrators with crude backlash, and eventually, after other actors entered the scene contributing to the outbreak of civil war and a regional proxy war (Daoudy 2020). This escalation was in high gear towards the

end of 2011 and beginning of 2012. In her analysis of the Syrian Revolution, Syrian Mohja Kahf (2014) argues that the end of 2011 also saw the formation of entities within the revolutionary movement that opened up for external political, military and humanitarian support. She claims that these entities "became entry-points for foreign powers attempting to push their own agendas into a revolution sprung from Syrian grievances" (Kahf 2014: 557), and have been the root of numerous power struggles both in and out of opposition movements. Table 3.1 summarises some key events related to the civil unrest that erupted in 2011, including central arguments from the Syria-climate conflict thesis on pre-2011 events, and developments post-2011 that produced insurgency, counterinsurgency, civil war and proxy conflict. Around 2013 and 2014 the Islamic State (IS) also entered the conflict. With Bashar still standing, despite strong opposition to his enduring rule, the entrance of IS to Syria raised concerns of who might follow if Bashar were to fall. There was naturally also growing concern over the devastation wrought by protracted conflict in Syria. Kahf (2014: 562), however, argues that there is no "worse" than the legacy left behind by the Assad regime's long lasting dictatorship in Syria.

Pre-conflict phase: Key precursory events in the Syria-climate conflict thesis (2005 – 2011)			
2005-2010 – Severe multiyear drought(s) in particularly al-Ḥasaka area.	**2008-2009** – Mass migration from Ḥasaka to urban centres (particularly Damascus, Aleppo, Darʾā).	**2009-2011**[9] – Climate-induced population pressures stress living conditions in urban centres.	**2011** - Civil unrest spreads from areas particularly affected by migrants from the drought.
Phase one conflict: Demonstrations, civil uprising and defections (January – July 2011)			
Jan 14th – Tunisian Ben Ali forced to flee Tunisia after popular protests.	**Feb 11th** – Egyptian Hosni Mubarak resigns after popular protests.	**Mar 15th** – Demands for democratic reformations in Syrian Damascus and Aleppo.	**Mar 18th** – Protests in Darʾā after the arrest and torture of 15 teenage boys.
Phase two conflict: Armed insurgency, counterinsurgency, civil war and proxy conflict (July onwards 2011)			
May-Jun – Escalating violence between Syrian regime and opposition groups.	**Jul 29th** – Formation of 'Free Syrian Army'.	**2012** – Increased international involvement. A proxy conflict develops.	**2014** – The Islamic State (IS) enters Syrian war, launching increased international involvement.

Table 3.1: Summary of key events pertaining to the 2011 unrest in Syria (Sources: Daoudy 2020; Kahf 2014; Emadi 2011; Selby et al. 2017a; Gleick 2014; Kelley et al. 2015; Werrell et al. 2015).

[9] This timeframe is not precisely delimitied or theorised in the Syria-climate conflict thesis, but is suggested in its claim that post-drought pressures 'fuelled' the 2011 unrest.

4.0 Analytical Framework

Picture 2: Submitted by 'Abu' who did not participate in the study, but wanted to contribute with photographs. The picture is taken in 2017, in a small village outside Idlib.

Having chosen to research the Syria-climate conflict thesis through a political ecology lens, I will begin this chapter by relaying key points from the field of political ecology that inform, frame and influence my research. Itself an interdisciplinary field, my dissertation will lean on contributions from a variety of study fields, and follows calls from Hampson et al. (2020) to study climate change and migration with a perspective that builds on theory from environment studies, security, peace and development studies. The focus of this dissertation is on narratives related to the climate-migration-conflict nexus and the Syrian Revolution. I therefore also see fit a brief review of how narratives and discourse are academically defined, followed by three sub chapters that delve deeper into security discourse with the Syria-climate conflict thesis as a specific example of a discursive narrative, Orientalism discourse, and finally, decolonisation discourse. The main purpose of this chapter is to: dispel myths, explain competing conceptual frameworks, and clarify the focus of my dissertation (Lune & Berg 2017).

4.1 Political Ecology

Conflict and power are the two most recurrent terms in political ecology research (Le Billon & Duffy 2018), making it an apt lens to apply to this dissertation. Political ecology is a field of study that conceptualises the environment as fundamentally social and argues that nature and society are co-produced (Robbins 2019). It is dominated by social sciences, but builds on contributions from both social and natural science in an interdisciplinary fashion (Benjaminsen & Svarstad 2021). Political ecology is neither a theory nor a method, but rather a particular way of inspecting environmental issues with an emphasis on power relationships, narratives and links between local situations and global influences (Benjaminsen & Svarstad 2021). According to Paul Robbins (2019) its practitioners do political ecology, often yielding texts. In a talk at the Second Biennial Conference of the Political Ecology Network (POLLEN), he also argued that political ecology is done in a particular way, striving to: look under the hood, do things and go out there to "talk with the farmers" (Robbins 2018).

Political ecology's historical and theoretical roots stem from Marxist political economy, cultural ecology and poststructural theory in its investigations of conflict and environmental change, however, its practitioners are deliberately conscious of the dangers of *environmental determinism* when it comes to causation between the two (Le Billon & Duffy 2018). Frequently the focus of political ecology studies is deconstructing mainstream narratives about the environment and development, in order to create counter-narratives that more effectively reveal embedded power issues, structural inequality as well as both political and historical aspects (e.g., Swift 1996; Adger et al. 2001; Benjaminsen 2016). Robbins (2019) describes this approach as the 'hatchet' and the 'seed', whereby the hatchet refers to the critical deconstruction of dominant environmental narratives, and the seed to a new or alternative narrative. The seed, with its prescriptive character, makes political ecology an explicitly normative field of study that does not claim to be objective or neutral (Robbins 2019). Despite having been critiqued for not sufficiently emphasising the seed (e.g., Walker 2007), or making the hatchet policy-relevant (e.g., Walker 2006), political ecology tends to say something about how things *ought* to be done, and in a way that engages with the community being studied. In

a seminal article critiquing the dominant 'desertification' narrative, Swift (1996: 90) describes the political ecology perspective as "more attuned to the concerns and strengths of the losers, more plausible, more participatory, based on better science, and more likely to result in better land management". Political ecology seeks to make explicit the ecological nature of politics and the political nature of ecology, and apply this to accounts of environmental problems that are often both ahistorical and apolitical (Robbins 2019). This requires close concentration on both context and structure. "From a political ecology perspective, the effect of environmental change on society (including conflict) is *always* socially mediated, and environmental factors are generally considered as context (or consequences) rather than cause" (Le Billon & Duffy 2018: 240, emphasis in original).

4.1.1 Ten Syntheses of Political Ecology

In a recent book introducing their approach to political ecology, Tor A. Benjaminsen & Hanne Svarstad (2021) lay out ten syntheses they postulate are central to contemporary political ecology, whilst simultaneously emphasising the fluid and continuously evolving nature of the field. These ten syntheses help describe what values, ideas and tools are prevalent in political ecology studies, and thus are highly useful to the analytical framework of this dissertation. The first synthesis is labelled 'social and natural sciences' and encompasses the combination of tools and knowledge from both scientific spheres, alongside a critical assessment of what constitutes scientific knowledge. The second synthesis is 'three aspects of environmental governance', which relates to management of the environment with three key aspects: use, conservation and distribution. Thirdly, we have the 'normative and empirical analyses' synthesis. Environmental sustainability, justice and human rights are mentioned in this synthesis as norms central to political ecology's normative focus. Participation is a popular topic of study in this regard, as is the examination of which norms and values inform knowledge claimed to be 'objective' or 'neutral'. The fourth synthesis is 'agency and structure' and refers to identifying actors as well as social and economic structures that shape the way the environment is understood, and how environmental problems are dealt with. The authors

mention Giddens' (1984) 'structuration theory' as a way to describe how this synthesis also looks at which decisions are restricted, and which ones made available to different actors based on the structures at play. 'Realism and social constructivism' is the fifth synthesis that discusses different perspectives on what reality is. Political ecology often utilises a middle ground between empirical investigations and social constructions of a phenomenon in what can be described as either 'critical realism' or 'soft constructionism'. The next synthesis is named 'different types of power' and refers to perhaps the most central tenet of political ecology: power. The same authors, along with Ragnhild Overå (Svarstad, Benjaminsen & Overå 2018), have previously critiqued political ecology for falling short in its theorisation of power despite ample description of how power is used. Their resulting argument is that the synergy of power perspectives found in political ecology is one of the strengths the field enjoys. The seventh synthesis is 'linkages between different geographical levels' where we find an elaboration of how the field relates the local, national and global scopes in its studies. Internal and external influences and structures are viewed as equally important and their relationships to one another intentionally sought after in political ecology research. 'Temporal connections' is the next synthesis, which essentially boils down to the role of time in political ecology. Temporal perspectives help understand evolving trends, historical changes and contexts out of which conflicts have or may emerge. Number nine is 'linking different types of knowledge and scientific methods' and speaks specifically of political ecology's preference for qualitative methods in order to understand the "total picture . . . pieced together by different bits of knowledge collected from interviews with different actors and written sources" (Benjaminsen & Svarstad 2021: 21). The tenth and final synthesis is 'critical and constructive contributions' referring to how political ecology findings often combine critique and subsequent prescription is what was mentioned earlier as the hatchet and the seed.

Whilst all syntheses make valuable contributions, Benjaminsen & Svarstad (2021) state that practical delimitations are necessary and that studies incorporating all ten syntheses are a rarity. In line with their recommendations to accentuate different syntheses according to individual studies, I proceed in this dissertation with a specific focus on syntheses one, three, five, eight and nine although I believe all ten inform the study to varying degrees.

4.2 Narratives & Discourse

Narratives play a key role in political ecology, as they do in this particular study. A narrative is a story that follows a beginning, middle and end chronology, usually involving a distinct set of actors or groups of actors (Adger et al. 2001). As with conventional stories, narratives bear key messages, storylines and characters, recited through the use of certain rhetorical instruments like metaphors (Adger et al. 2001). There is some divergence in the literature with regard to the role of sequence within narratives. Roe (1991; 1995; 1999), whose contributions to the theorisation of environmental and development narratives are considered highly influential, views narratives as the unfolding of a particular set of events, triggered by a particular set of circumstances. He argued that oftentimes, narratives, especially those related to development, have a prescriptive rather than normative character: they describe what will happen rather than what should happen (Roe 1991). They serve as simplified scenarios that aid decision-making in uncertain conditions (Roe 1999). His critique of 'development narratives' was rooted in their poor empirical foundation, such as that of what he argued is the most famous development narrative: "Everything works … except in Africa" (Roe 1999: 2).

This conceptualisation of narratives is interpreted by some as more a 'storyline', which alone is not a narrative, but has a crucial purpose within discourses (e.g., Benjaminsen & Svarstad 2021). Proponents of this way of thinking, see narratives as the 'expressive means' to convey key messages within a discourse (Adger et al. 2001). In other words, narratives are used rhetorically to communicate discursive messages. A discourse refers to a shared set of notions of an issue that provides an interpretive lens through which to see things (Kanazawa 2018). They are a "specific ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categorizations … through which meaning is given to physical and social realities" (Hajer 1995: 8). The French philosopher and historian of ideas, Michel Foucault (1926-1984), is commonly associated with the establishment of the type of discourse analysis that focuses on power relationships, and how discourse works to both preserve and challenge these power relationships (Kanazawa 2018). He defined discourses as "ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledges and the relations between

them" (Weedon 1987: 108). Foucault was interested in the production and practice of discourses; how a shared set of ideas can be institutionalised in society and redistributed through communication in order to establish control (Escobar 1984). As Foucault wrote in his influential 'Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison' in 1979, "discourse will become the vehicle of the law: the constant principle of universal recoding" (Foucault 1977: 112). His concept of governmentality can serve as a disciplining force upon 'weaker' societal factions who abide by dominant discourse and power in fear of retaliation (Fletcher 2010, cited in Svarstad & Benjaminsen 2020). Dominant discourses that have particular influence over policymaking and practice, can be seen as leading discourses, in which the actors professing the discourse's key ideas exercise discursive power (Benjaminsen & Svarstad 2021). The building blocks of discourse are therefore shared ideas, rhetorical devices such as narratives, and power relations. Proponents of the same discourse can be considered epistemic communities who have the same beliefs about facts and concepts surrounding a phenomenon (Hulme 2011). Haas (1992, cited in Hulme 2011: 258) argues that "epistemic communities and the knowledge they produce do not form in isolation from wider social, institutional, and political setting". For this reason it is important to view epistemic communities (proponents of a particular view), narratives (the stories they tell) and discourse (their shared beliefs) together.

A combination of narratives and discourse is found in Benjaminsen & Svarstad's discursive narrative concept, which describes "a story about a specific case of an issue, where the case is interpreted through the perspectives of a discourse" (Benjaminsen & Svarstad 2021: 69). This term focuses more closely on actors, and has greater specificity than Roe's above-mentioned 'narrative' definition. This is because discursive narratives move beyond general claims of what will happen under given circumstances, to also encompass claims about what has or is happening in relation to a specific case of an issue (Benjaminsen & Svarstad 2021). This combination of key elements from both narratives and discourse makes it useful to my analysis, as it helps define how different narratives are produced about the same case and issue, based on their discursive belonging. I define my specific case as Syria, the issue as conflict triggers, and the Syria-climate conflict thesis within the environmental security discourse as a specific discursive narrative. This study presents a counter-discursive narrative.

4.2.1 Environmental Security Discourse

The Oxford English Dictionary definition of 'security' refers to the state of being safe, or the activities involved in ensuring a country's or individual's protection. Traditionally, the realm of security and security studies consisted mainly of existential military threats. Nation states were the referent objects, essentially protecting themselves from other states. Its general framing was based on the so-called 'four S's': states served as reference subjects, strategy was strictly military, positivist science was the driving force behind decision-making, and the Cold War was the desired status quo (Jackson 2020). Security discourse has, however, been hotly debated among scholars since the Cold War, with diverging perspectives on whose interests are best served under different framings of security (Daoudy 2020). In what Paul Jackson (2020) labels a 'deepening' of security studies as the Cold War came to a close, the individual gradually came more into focus as the referent object, accompanied by a broadening of the 'security' definition from solely physical protection from crime and conflict, to also including confidence about what opportunities the future holds. This was heavily influenced by a series of reports labelled 'Voices of the Poor' published by the World Bank in the 1990s, which directed attention towards what security means for those living in poverty. Also non-conventional threats like the environment began to inhabit the list of issues intimating national security, as they were seen as equally 'threatening' as military, nuclear and economic threats (Dalby 2013).

The development of 'environmental security' was fuelled by a notion that resource scarcity and conflict are closely linked: ultimately, that scarcity will drive or cause migration, famine, poverty and conflict (Dalby 2013). Thomas F. Homer-Dixon is amongst the best-known proponents of the scarcity conflict thesis. Before the turn of the 21st century, he wrote that during the next decades, five general types of conflict were plausible outcomes to expect in developing countries, as a result of environmental scarcity (Homer-Dixon 1999). These predicted conflict outcomes included disputes over environmental degradation, ethnic clashes as a result of climate-induced migration, civil strife arising as people's livelihoods deteriorate, interstate war over resource scarcity such as water, and North-South conflicts resulting from quarrels over appropriate climate mitigation and adaptation efforts (Homer-Dixon 1999). Thus,

from the onset in the 1980s, Marwa Daoudy (2020) argues, environmental security was defined in purely realist terms, meaning its supporting narratives were about the danger and inevitability of conflict under conditions of dwindling resources. Post-realist conceptualisations of security were more about freedom to rather than freedom from, for instance freedom from repression, want and religious or ethnic oppression rather than solely freedom from war (Daoudy 2020). Conventional security definitions are challenged for their state-centric perspectives and inability to incorporate emerging vulnerabilities in the face of global change, like for example the unequal distribution of adverse climate change impacts on those who have contributed the least to its causes (Dalby 2013). In a similar vein, political ecology has critiqued security studies for environmental determinism and overly reductionist and positivist approaches (Le Billon & Duffy 2018). According to Jackson (2020), such critical strands within the security discourse continue today, focusing their critique on four key questions: who is security for, what does security do politically, and how can we practice progressive security?

I. Environmental Determinism

The danger of environmental determinism has been mentioned twice now, as a particularly thorny issue in the study of the climate-conflict nexus. The essential problem with determinism is granting gravitational significance to the environment or climate in predicting the future and/or human behaviour. Selby & Hoffman (2014) argue that security discourse on climate change is highly environment/climate-centric and often neglects the very social contexts from which environmental and climate impacts emerge, despite the discourse claiming that climate impacts only happen in interaction with other factors. They sum this up by critiquing the environmental/climate security discourse for "its overwhelmingly environmentally determinist world-view [which] ascribes causal primacy to environmental resources - and especially to presumed resource scarcities - in generating societal stress, breakdown and conflict" (Selby & Hoffman 2014: 748). For a long time, scientists have explained human behaviour with environmental and climatic contexts - theories of an environmentally deterministic character are no novelty. During the era of colonialism, climate conditions were used to explain the rise of European civilisation, with its mild climates that were favourable to

the restrictive tropical conditions elsewhere (Dalby 2017). Such theories even worked as alibis for European imperial powers who failed to handle disasters such as famine (Dalby 2017).

Environmental determinism is often correlated with *Malthusianism*, or the thinking of Thomas Robert Malthus (1766-1834) on population pressure. His famous thesis is that the poor populations of the world will grow beyond what the world's natural resource base can provide for, and inevitably be the cause of humanity's demise (Benjaminsen & Svarstad 2021). In other words, in his theory the fault lies with the poor, for their growing numbers and pressing food production beyond its capabilities. Karl Marx believed this was a masked defense of capitalist class structures and a strategy for placing the responsibility for poverty on the people afflicted by it (Benjaminsen & Svarstad 2021). This critique, however, did not stop Malthusianism from regaining traction in the 1960s in a modern form: *Neo-Malthusianism*. The most prominent Neo-Malthusians are ecologists Paul Ehrlich, with his 1968 book '*The Population Bomb*', and Garrett Hardin with his 1968 article '*The Tragedy of the Commons*'. Marxist political economy critiques, many within the field of political ecology, have hotly debated both Malthusian and environmentally determinist theses (Benjaminsen & Svarstad 2021). Selby & Hoffman (2014) regard a large portion of the security discourse on climate change as Malthusian, on the basis of its dire future forecasts and habit of positing the global poor as both subjects and resources of climate-related conflict. A further critique is the tendency for climate security narratives to paint displaced persons as culprits of migration and/or conflict outcomes (Weinthal et al. 2015).

II. The Securitisation of Climate Change

Securitisation is a term used to describe the process of lifting an issue 'above' ordinary politics, in a way that compels priority and justifies extraordinary response (Warner & Boas 2019). Once securitised, an issue is perceived as a threat or of importance to national or international security, such that it must be handled with tools available to security practitioners. Climate change is among the latest issues to have been securitised; an act for which the security discourse has been the host of ardent deliberation, especially over the potential consequences. The intent of securitising climate change is to ensure preparedness, incite action, and to emphasise urgency (e.g., Burrows & Kinney 2016). Werrell et al. (2015) state that

their ultimate goal with securitisation and its application to the Syrian war is to mitigate destabilising trends and protect individuals, states and the international community from the adverse effects of environmental insecurity. The securitisation accounts found in mainstream channels such as the media also have climate change action as their paramount goal (Daoudy 2020). Despite ostensibly sound intent, as well as the near consensus reached in peer-reviewed research on the existence, gravity and acceleration of climate change, several scholars point to the possible ramifications of securitising climate change.

Jackson (2020) argues that securitisation is an inherently political act, as it is the act itself that makes the issue a security concern. His point here is that what security means is actually not so important, but rather what it does, which in some instances may mean the suspension of normal rules of engagement. This could include generation of military responses inappropriate to the problem it is meant to remedy (Dalby 2013). The fear is that military factions may be called upon to exercise a response outside of normal political rules - rules which are generally agreeable to public opinion. As Warner & Boas (2019: 1473) put it: "rules, procedures and accountability may be side-lined to an extent that otherwise would be inadmissible". The other root of scepticism towards the securitisation of climate change is its potential influence on policy and institutions based on questionable theories about what might happen, rather than what has happened (Selby et al. 2017a). Usually, there is slim evidence to justify these 'maybe' narratives. As Selby et al. (2017a: 233) argue: "historically . . . public and policy discourse on the security and geopolitical implications of climate change has been well ahead of, and often at variance with, the available scientific evidence". Examples of such scenarios are described by Weinthal et al. (2015) who contend that securitisation narratives have been used in both the Middle East and Europe to warrant military border enforcement and interdiction in anticipation of undesired climate-induced migration.

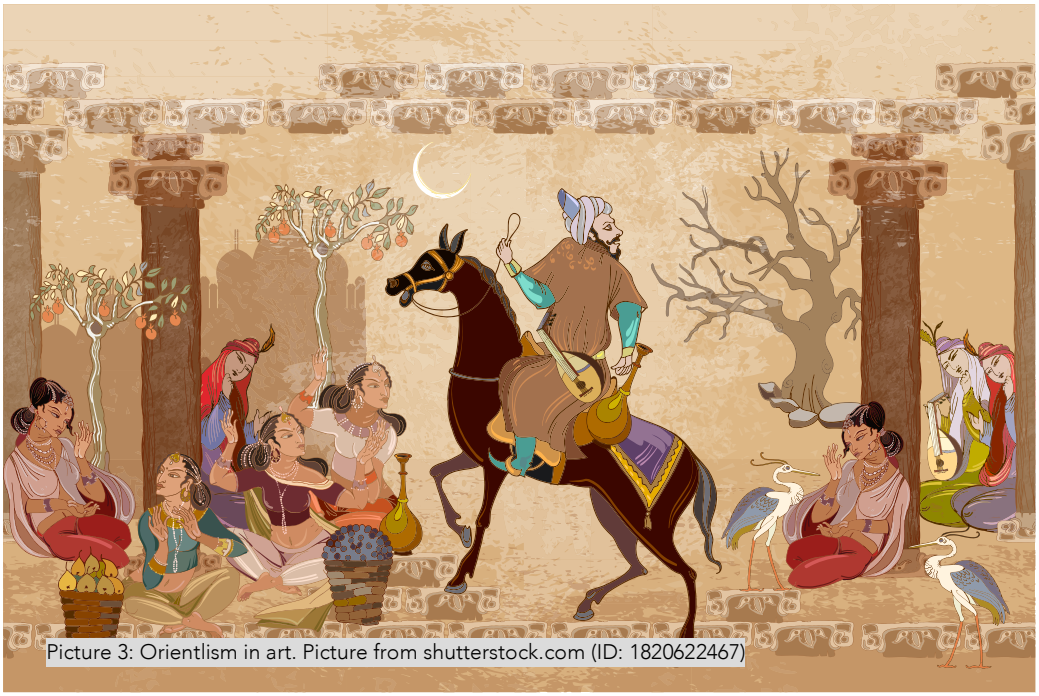
It is these kinds of policy implications and 'us versus them' framings that urge Daoudy (2020) along with others she names 'critical environmental and security thinkers' such as Simon Dalby, Jon Barnett and Richard Matthews, to call for a deepening of the theoretical framing of security, and scrutinise whose interests are best served, or whose perspectives excluded, in different applications of securitisation. Although the academic debate surrounding critical

security is coloured by fragmentation, Jackson (2020) argues that there is one key exception: scholars agree that local communities are not adequately included in the debate, and that reflections over insecurity tend largely to be based on the thinking of scholars rather than those living in insecure environments. Citing Rowley and Weldes (2012) he adds that texts calling for discussions about 'real people in real places' do so without sufficiently attending to how these 'real people' conceptualise security and its counterpart, insecurity.

4.2.2 Orientalism Discourse

Sie können sich nicht vertreten, sie müssen vertreten werden [They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented].

- *Karl Marx in 'The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte' (1852, cited in Said 1978: 21).*



Picture 3: Orientlism in art. Picture from shutterstock.com (ID: 1820622467)

Given the tendency for climate change discourse to be dominated by Western actors in the 'developed world' talking about poverty-stricken actors in the 'developing world', I wish to turn to a discussion of *Orientalism* discourse, as it essentially relates to how the West talks about 'the rest'. In his classic book, Orientalism (1978), Edward Said (1935-2003) generates a

framework for understanding the 'knowledge' produced about the Orient; the peoples of the Near East, better known today as the Middle East, by the Occident; colonial powers of mainly Britain and France, and later the United States. His deconstruction of the narratives fronted within the Orientalist 'field of expertise' seeks to demonstrate how this knowledge reflects an imperialist zeal embedded in the depiction of the Orient as a degenerative, homogeneous, backward, yet exotic people. A key point of Said's is that the Orientalism of which he speaks, and the pioneering roles of Britain and France within Oriental studies, is gleaned from a 'particular closeness' between the two colonial powers, and the Orient; a particular historical relationship. Through analysis and reference to a wide range of what he calls Orientalist text, Said claims that Orientalist discourse has manufactured an illusory separation between the Orient and Occident, whereby the former needs to be represented by the latter. He argues that Orientalism is predicated on 'exteriority', meaning the author or producer of the text is the agent that enables the Orient to speak, and in a way that makes it coherent to the Occident. This argument applies also, especially in more recent times, to subdivisions of the Orient, such as 'Arabs' or 'Muslims'. It is in this regard that Said cites Karl Marx. In his essay on the Bonaparte dynasty in Europe in the mid 19th century, Marx describes small-holding peasants of French society as incapable of self-representation because they do not constitute a class. The citation is not meant to frame Marx' work as Orientalist, but rather to show how even 'liberal cultural heroes' are influenced by for instance views on imperialism and race, without this necessarily being directly visible to the audience. The imaginary 'Orient-Occident' binary to which Said refers is an imaginative geography, but infuses the relationship with lopsided power dynamics that favour the Occident. It also provides a benchmark for comparison: if the Orient are degenerative, the Occident must be progressive. In Orientalism and successive commentaries on the topic, Said attempts to demonstrate the power relations at play, and what gains were made for European culture by "setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self" (Said 1978: 3).

Said's semantic discussions of Orientalism include a plethora of important perspectives, among which that of Orientalism as a discourse. Leaning on the work of Foucault, Said urges a discourse view of Orientalism in order to see the systematic mechanisms that allowed

Orientalist discipline to control, produce and dominate the Orient in ways ranging from political, ideological to scientific. "Orientalism, therefore, is the Western discourse of an imaginary place called the Orient which was located, or rather *constructed in narratives*, in European colonies in North Africa, Middle East and Asia" (Patel 2007: 26, emphasis added). Diverging slightly from Foucault's beliefs surrounding the role of the individual text or author in producing discourse, Said places great emphasis on exactly this in his analyses of Oriental discourse. Said's view is that the individual author, with their own subjective leanings and background, greatly influences the discourse conveyed in their text. Their texts also individually convey clear discursive messages. In other words, Orientalism discourse can be found in single texts and by individual authors; it is not dependent on a large quantity of 'texts' or individuals. Individuals situated within disciplinary practices, produce knowledge that makes it "difficult for individuals to think outside them" (Patel 2007: 25).

Orientalism is officially defined as a scientific discipline, or an assembly of thought and expertise, produced by 'intellectuals' or 'Orientalists' that profess 'true' knowledge about 'the other'. What interests Said is really the vigor, endurance and consistency of Orientalism and its foundational ideas about the Orient, without there actually being such a thing as a 'real' Orient. To explain this persistence, Said borrows the Italian Marxist philosopher, Antonio Gramsci's (1891-1937), concept of hegemony, which postulates that the ideas, institutions, values and perceptions of the ruling class dominate civil society in way that makes this dominant view the accepted and 'consented to' cultural norm. Continued investment in the Orientalism economy helps keep alive the notion of European culture as superior in comparison to 'the rest', and thus, ensures maintenance of Europe's cultural hegemony. Said argues that knowledge cannot truly operate outside of power and politics, yet science holds a problematic need to be non-political. "The adjective "political'' is used as a label to discredit any work for daring to violate the protocol of pretended suprapolitical objectivity" (Said 1978: 10). His point here is not only that Orientalism discourse grants discursive power to the Occident, but also that it in a sense obliterates the Orient as a human being. In 'Orientalism Reconsidered' (1985) Said argues this obliteration creates a silent other; a group that needs expert representation because of its incapability to represent itself. Repeatedly, Orientalist texts describe Islam as unable to

represent, understand or be conscious of itself. Said argues that certain texts explicitly claim that 'Muslims themselves are the worst source of their own history' (Said 1985: 7). His central argument is that Orientalist discourse is inherently colonial; it is never 'pure', 'true' or without embedded ideological prejudice or intent (Patel 2007).

Associated with Said's concept is environmental Orientalism, which also operates around a binary - between the abundant and scarce nature of the Orient's environment (Hoffman 2018). As a concept it relates to both environmental determinism and the climate-conflict nexus, essentially posing natural conditions as determinants of human society and behaviour, based on Orientalist imaginations of nature here vs there (Hoffman 2018). On the one hand the Middle East and Africa present the pristine in nature, a place to extract, whilst on the other, the hostile, a source of violence. Again, the colonial connotations are clear - environmental Orientalism presents the nature and ecology of other places as hostile and scarce, where local inhabitants mismanage resources because of their inability to reach modernity, in contrast to the superior West with its well-managed ecological systems. Hoffman (2018: 96) argues "this practice of constructing pristine nature as fascinating wilderness and dangerous threat at the same time, thus, stands in the imperial tradition, inviting interventions intended to save both the natives as well as the environment mostly from themselves".

The ascendancy of Orientalism dominance by Americans after World War II has, according to Said, done little to alter the Orientalist approach, influence, or Orient-Occident divide, perhaps better described today as a West-Middle East divide. Since the 1950s the Middle Eastern region and its inhabitants have largely signified threats, instability and turbulence, which he argues has reinforced stereotypical depictions found in 'traditional' Orientalist discourse, especially in the media. This has not only secured continuation of Western dominance over the Middle East, but accentuated the 19th century academic depictions of the Orient. According to Said, the US imperialist interest in the region is on par with that of the earlier colonial powers, rooted still in strategic motivations. "The Middle East is now so identified with Great Power politics, oil economics, and the simple-minded dichotomy of freedom-loving, democratic Israel and evil, totalitarian, and terroristic Arabs" (Said 1978: 27). Thus, the Orientalist binary and supporting discourse still prevails.

4.2.3 Decolonisation Discourse

We allow justly that the Holocaust has permanently altered the consciousness of our time: why do we not accord the same epistemological mutation in what imperialism has, and what Orientalism continues to do?

- *Edward W. Said in the preface to 'Orientalism' (1978: xvi-xvii).*

The tenets of Said's critical perspective on Orientalism serve as an important theoretical tool in my study, especially as much of it relates to the discourse on decolonisation, which can be understood as anti-Orientalism, a form of countering Orientalism. To Said, such efforts present an opportunity to assemble shared perspectives in multiple different assemblies that recognise vested interests, disciplinary goals, numerous audiences and experiential influence. This stands in contrast to Orientalism as outlined above in that Orientalism pursues unity around a central authority or scientific discipline - an epistemic community. "They [anti-Orientalism endeavours] are, therefore, planes of activity and praxis, rather than one topography commanded by a geographical and historical vision locatable in a known centre of metropolitan power" (Said 1985: 14). My interpretation and application of anti-Orientalism/decolonisation is situated within the dissertation's political ecology approach, which I understand as an 'assembly' of perspectives that is pointedly transparent in its influences and ambitions. My intention is to analyse "*against* the grain" and provide arguments that are "political and practical in as much as they intend, without necessarily succeeding, the end of dominating, coercive systems of knowledge" (Said 1985: 14, emphasis in original). Decolonisation efforts call for more equitable spaces for knowledge engagement (Martin et al. 2016) and epistemic justice, which refers to an ecology of knowledge not solely based on Eurocentric perspectives (Zondi 2018). The purpose is not to contradict science, but rather to contradict "poor science" (Benjaminsen & Svarstad 2021: 236).

Recent debates about decolonisation were spearheaded by the 2015 mobilisation of university students in South Africa for the removal of the statue of Cecile Rhodes (Benjaminsen & Svarstad 2021), the Prime Minister of the Cape Colony from 1890 to 1896, who served as a monument with connotations to imperialism and slavery. The movement gained significance at

a global scale and sought to confront embedded power structures in knowledge production found in education, science and society at large; to decolonise both knowledge and power (Zondi 2018). Decolonisation is concerned with whose terms lay the foundation for mainstream or dominant narratives, and asks the key question: "whose worldviews, values, and knowledge are taken into account in academic, artistic and journalistic presentations as well as in practical politics?" (Benjaminsen & Svarstad 2021: 4). At the heart of the debate are epistemological questions about what constitutes knowledge, how it is come by and who is in a position to produce it. Benjaminsen & Svarstad (2021) consider these decolonisation questions as part of promising trends taking place in the field of political ecology.

According to Martin et al. (2016: 257-258), decolonial thinking is "distinct for its focus on the global South and for identifying mechanisms of subordination in Eurocentric scientific and political worldviews". At the centre of their discussion of decolonisation is the concept of coloniality, which refers to the subjugation of certain groups within dominating worldviews. These magisterial worldviews and concepts of knowledge are able to persist because of their institutionalisation in academia, the media and political institutions, which simultaneously inhibit 'alternative' views access. Their suggested response is the decolonisation of power, knowledge and being. Zondi (2018) urges particularly scholars of political sciences, international relations, history and foreign policy analysis to consider how their studies and frameworks implicate the coloniality of knowledge. To him, decolonisation disobeys what he calls the "mainstream's fixation with conventions . . . that create formulae rather than ways of liberating our ability to understand phenomena deeply and broadly" (Zondi 2018: 19). This is similar to Human Geographer, Mike Hulme's (2011) thesis that natural sciences concerned with predicting future outcomes of climate change hold a hegemony over more humanistic narratives of social reality, because their quantitative variables and calculations lend greater credence to the goals of policymakers interested in producing policies on the basis of future predictions. He calls this climate reductionism, a form of neo-environmental determinism flourishing in contemporary studies of climate change's impacts on human life, that grants discursive power to the model-based conventions of natural science. The result, Hulme argues, is that climate is granted greater agency than human beings, stating "these models and

calculations allows for little human agency, little recognition of evolving, adapting, and innovating societies, and little endeavor to consider the changing values, cultures, and practices of humanity" (Hulme 2011: 255).

One principal feature of decolonisation initiatives is the incorporation of recognition. In practice, this involves attempts by researchers to influence public discourse and practice, with more equitable and diverse notions of identity and culture that respect different agents and their ideas (Martin et al. 2016). German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831), established the theory of recognition as that which underlies all struggles for freedom, as such struggles are essentially expressions of the need to be recognised and respected by others (Martin et al. 2016). Recognition is in a sense the foundation for freedom. Taylor (1992: 26) argues that "due recognition is not just a courtesy we owe people. It is a vital human need". Martin et al. (2016: 258) describe the above-mentioned coloniality concept as "a mechanism of recognition injustice that creates structural oppression over marginalised sectors of society whose alternative worldviews become devalued and stigmatised".

In their study of potential fruitful overlaps between political ecology and environmental justice, in which recognition is a key perspective, Svarstad & Benjaminsen (2020: 6) contend that recognition is most useful for justice outcomes if it interacts with decolonisation perspectives "to foster decolonial epistemologies and thereby to decolonize recognition". For the decolonisation of recognition theory, they suggest senses of justice as an additional aspect that more concretely describes how recognition may work in practice. Senses of justice is concerned with what perceptions, ideas and narratives individuals have about an issue that has affected them. Vital to this notion is that perceptions are not simply represented by outsiders like scholars, but that these individuals have the opportunity to express their views themselves, and in a sense, narrate their own realities and experiences (Svarstad & Benjaminsen 2020). For researchers this involves listening - not simply speaking on others' behalf.

4.3 The Climate-Migration-Conflict Nexus

This dissertation is essentially a study of the link between climate change and conflict, or nature and society at a higher level. Geographer William Riebsame posits that in order to justify climate as a determinant of social phenomena like violent conflict, one needs "causal chains that link climate to specific elements or behaviours of biophysical and socioeconomic systems" (Riebsame 1985: 72, cited in Hulme 2011: 253). The literature refers to both the 'climate-migration-conflict' nexus and the 'climate-conflict' nexus. Although the migration term is often omitted, the nexus theorises a three-tiered sequence of events, in which migration plays a key role. I will therefore dedicate a subsection to the role of migration.

Studies in support of a positive correlation between climate change and increased conflict tend to make use of the threat multiplier theory rooted in security discourse. In accordance with this theory, conflict outcomes may result from the following sequence: a climate-induced occurrence such as a drought, works as a 'stressor' to aspects of human life, for instance, livelihoods, inequality, and food security, causing socioeconomic strain, and often mass rural-urban migration, that collectively increases the possibility of conflict, especially on the receiving end of the population movements (Daoudy 2020). The climate-induced event can manifest itself in a variety of forms, ranging from slow-onset events such as desertification, to fast-onset events like extreme weather or natural disasters (Bradley & McAdam 2012). The former is usually a measurement of precipitation and temperature variability over time, and the latter extreme measurements of these anomalies (Abel et al. 2019). The 5th assessment report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change assigned medium confidence to the likelihood of poverty, food insecurity and other socioeconomic conditions worsening in response to climate change (IPCC 2014). Research on the climate-migration-conflict nexus conceptualises conflict as a form of violence. Civil, state-based, and armed conflicts tend to be the preferred outcome variable to study, but there are calls for more nuance when discussing conflict outcomes, as well as its counterpart, peace (e.g., Vesco & Buhaug 2020).

Following the threat multiplier theory, climate change events risk exacerbating already stressed conditions. In other words, scenarios where climate change works as a 'driver' of

conflict is mostly applicable to certain conditions or particular contexts. Violent outcomes are both time and context dependent (Abel et al. 2019; Burrows & Kinney 2016). Faist & Schade (2013) claim that these sorts of climate-related threats predominantly concern the developing world where socioeconomic stress and structural disadvantage are already acute. The threat multiplier theory, however, emphasises the global scale these threats apply to. Warner & Boas (2019: 1472) argue that the theory is used to demonstrate how climate change can "spiral out of control and as a 'threat multiplier' have impact across the globe". The imperative for intervention by the developed world rests on a belief that such spiralling is likely to reach its final destination in wealthier countries, especially in the form of migration (Içduygu & Nimer 2020). Thus, the global South will bear the immediate brunt of climate change impacts, but the global North will eventually face the consequences by having to host increasing numbers of migrants. Içduygu & Nimer (2020) describe this as a politicisation of predicted migration, a narrative oftentimes used to 'warn' the developed world of potentially creating similar scenarios to that of 2015, during the so-called 'refugee crisis' in Europe.

4.3.1 The Role of Migration

Abel et al. (2019) argue that a growing number of media headlines profess an association between climate-induced conflict in the Middle East and Africa and the European refugee crisis, without necessarily possessing the empirical foundation to do so. These reports, they argue, are based on a narrative that climate change creates scarcity and distribution alterations to resources such as water, and that this in turn generates conflict, and thus migration, or migration and thus conflict. Weinthal et al. (2015) give several examples of how such narratives have produced securitised policies of links between migration and water and migration and climate change. Premised on already existing concerns over the scarcity of water resources, Israel and Jordan have for example imposed restrictive migration policies to inhibit further competition over scarce resources, and Jordan has used a securitised discourse to "attract international assistance for large-scale hydrological infrastructure, including the Read Sea-Dead Sea Water Conveyance project and desalination plants" (Weinthal et al. 2015: 295).

These examples illustrate the important role played by migration in the climate-migration-conflict nexus, its significant impacts on policy, and why climate change in the context of the nexus, is often discussed in relation to security.

In a review of the nexus literature, Abel et al. (2019) found that migration is either portrayed as a precursory factor to conflict in the form of a trigger or driver, or that migration is mediated through conflict. The former is usually found in peace and conflict studies, a field closely related to security discourse. **Figure 4.1** exemplifies these two causal relationships, whereby the grey arrows detail the sequence in which climate change drives migration, and pressures created by this migration contribute to conflict. Vesco & Buhaug (2020) label this causation relationship as transitional pathways between climate, migration and conflict.

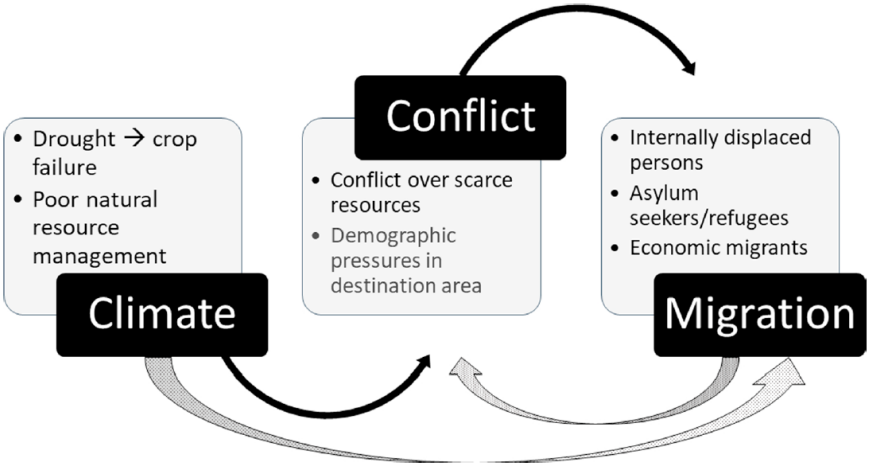


Figure 4.1: The various conceptualised links that exist in the climate-migration-conflict nexus literature (Source: Abel et al. 2019: 242)

Migration in this context may refer to population movements ranging from internal to international, and from forced to voluntary, in which urbanisation rates are often employed as a proxy for internal population movements (Abel et al. 2019). Despite divergence with regard to sequencing, the link between climate change and migration is in conventional literature on the topic presumed a linear relationship (Weinthal et al. 2015). There is no robust evidence demonstrating that climate change alone drives migration, but rather, similar to the alleged climate-conflict links, that the nature of the relationship is complex and difficult to measure or prove (Abel et al. 2019). Reuveny (2007) explains that this literature tends to classify migration

forcing into three categories: network, pull, and push forces. "Network forces affect the move from location A to location B, push forces operate in A and push people to leave A, and pull forces operate in B and attract people to B" (Reuveny 2007: 658). The classification found within nexus discussions is usually climate change as a push force of migration.

Several strands of the nexus literature argue that most climate-induced migration is anticipated within states instead of across state borders, and is likely to take place mostly in the developing world (e.g., Bradley & McAdam 2012). In keeping with this thinking, rural-urban migration is highly likely as a result of climate change events due to the way it affects agriculturally-dependent people in terms of their livelihoods and food security (e.g., Kelley et al. 2015). In pursuit of better opportunities and living conditions, they are expected to move to urban areas, contributing to combustion and hardships in overpopulated cities already struggling to provide for its inhabitants.

Withagen (2014: 326) refers to Reuveny (2005, 2007) in comment on the causal relationship between migration and violent conflict, to argue that such outcomes may emanate based on theories such as the "competition over resources, ethnic tensions, distrust and crossing fault lines (e.g., migration from rural to urban areas)". Although he states that strong evidence for a causal relationship is still lacking, he argues that application of the climate-migration-conflict nexus to the Syria case may give reason to "pay more attention to the possible link" (Withagen 2014: 325). Population movements are generally discussed within a security framework, and according to Bali (2013), this has become an increasingly prevalent phenomena in the period following multiple terrorist attacks on the West in the 21st century.

4.3.2 The Syria-Climate Conflict Thesis

The Syria-climate conflict thesis has been the recipient of much of the critique discussed in 4.2.1 on the securitisation of climate change, as it is neatly situated in environmental security discourse as an example of a viewpoint that presents climate change as a 'driver' of conflict. The main arguments within the thesis are: 1) anthropogenic climate change triggered a multi-year severe drought in Syria's Jazira region (especially al-Ḥasaka governorate), which in turn led

to an agrarian crisis, 2) this crisis forcibly moved mass amounts of people from rural to urban cities like Damascus and Aleppo, and 3) population pressures exacerbated socioeconomic stress in receiving cities, ultimately meaning migrants from the drought were a contributory factor to the 2011 unrest/civil war (Selby et al. 2017a; Selby 2018). **Figure 4.2** below illustrates the alleged stages within the Syria-climate conflict thesis.

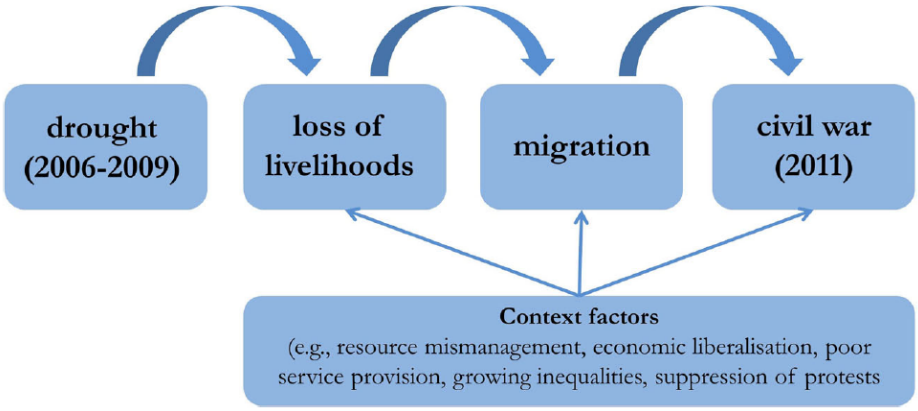


Figure 4.2: The alleged causal climate-conflict links in the Syria-climate conflict thesis (Source: Ide 2018: 348).

This subchapter outlines the building blocks of the Syria-climate conflict, which I conceptualise as a discursive narrative, by looking at three studies that provide its underpinning evidence. I round off with a review of literature critical to the application of a climate-conflict narrative to the Syrian war, most of which provide empirical critiques (Ide 2018).

I. Did We See it Coming? (Werrell, Femia & Sternberg 2015)

Mention has previously been made of the three-part set of peer-reviewed studies that claim to empirically back the Syria-climate conflict thesis. The first I will review, '*Did we see it coming? State fragility, climate vulnerability, and the uprisings in Syria and Egypt*' by Werrell et al. (2015), started out in 2012 as a 3-page briefing document out of the Washington-based Center for Climate and Security, before it was published in peer-reviewed form (Selby et al.

2017a). Its main message was that depictions of Syria's unrest as rooted solely in a brutal regime and continuation of the Arab Spring, do not tell the whole story of why and how the social contract in Syria eroded. "The al-Assad regime's brutally violent suppression of the opposition movement is rightly the main focus of attention . . . But a more well-rounded assessment of the dynamics of opposition in the country, including the possible social, environmental, and climatic drivers of unrest, will help policy-makers and opinion leaders fashion more responsible actions" (Femia & Werrell 2012: 2-3). Several journalistic pieces picked up on the messages in the briefer, Audrey Quinn & Jackie Roche's Syria's Climate Conflict comic being an apt example (Quinn & Roche 2014). Along the same lines, the New York Times' Thomas L. Friedman based his '*The Other Arab Spring'* piece on the same briefer, arguing that "the Arab awakening was driven not only by political and economic stresses, but, less visibly, by environmental, population and climate stresses as well" (Friedman 2012: para 2).

Werrell and Femia teamed up with Troy Stenberg and elaborated on their briefer document, culminating in the 2015 study. The points of convergence between the three scholars in terms of their research foci are the intersection of climate change and international security as well as climate impacts on human systems, putting them in a broad security epistemic community. Werrell et al. (2015) argue the need for integrating a broader understanding of climate vulnerability into state fragility indices like the Failed States Index and the Notre Dame Global Adaptation Index, in order to ensure stronger preparatory mechanisms and mitigation efforts, and overall be better equipped to deal with future 'destabilising' trends. Afterall, the indices 'did not see the uprisings in Syria coming'. Their thesis rests firstly on the argument that Syria experienced "one of the worst long-term droughts and most severe set of crop failures and livestock devastation in its modern history" between 2007 and 2012 (Werrell et al. 2015: 32). **Figure 4.3** displays data based on the Standard Precipitation Index that shows levels of 'extreme and severe drought' in particularly the northeastern Ḥasaka region of Syria.

Table 1. Drought, Five-year Scale, Syria from 2008 to 2012

	Annual average, SPI Drought					
	Hasakah	*Raqqah*	*Deir y Zur*	*Daraa*	*Aleppo*	*Damascus*
2008	-1.36	-1.45	-1.09	-1.33	-1.03	-0.20
2009	***-2.02***	***-2.15***	**-1.62**	***-2.14***	-1.36	-1.34
2010	**-1.74**	**-1.81**	-1.32	***-2.03***	-0.96	-1.26
2011	***-2.98***	***-2.42***	***-2.32***	***-2.18***	-1.20	-1.36
2012	***-2.05***	**-1.82**	***-2.17***	-1.24	-0.74	-0.58

Bold and italics = extreme drought; bold = severe drought
Standard Precipitation Index (SPI) (-1 = moderate drought; -2 = extreme drought)
Table produced for this article.
Source: Sternberg, unpublished data. For SPI calculation, see Sternberg 2012.

Figure 4.3: Drought in Syria on a 5-year scale, as depicted in Werrell et al. (2015: 31).

Their study argues that almost 75% of agriculture-dependent Syrians in the region experienced crop failure, that 85% lost their livestock, and that 1.3 million people were affected by this decline in precipitation levels. They argue further that these climatic factors triggered the mass displacement of up to 1.5 million people, extensive livelihoods lost, and estimates of between 9 to 13 percent of the population being driven into extreme poverty. The massive influx of rural community families into already overcrowded urban areas crippled with weak infrastructures, lay the groundwork for what they contend shows the connection between climate-induced drought and "population pressures" that resulted in water and food insecurity, as well as increased poverty (Werrell et al. 2015: 33). In addition to drought, population pressures and mismanagement of natural resources, reference is made to the Food and Agriculture Organisation's (FAO) claim that overgrazing of land also accelerated the process of land desertification in Syria. "As previously fertile lands turned to dust, farmers and herders had little choice but to move elsewhere, starve, or demand change" (Werrell et al. 2015: 34). Although they do not argue that drought caused the conflict in Syria, they argue that the diagnostic abilities of the Failed States and Notre Dame Global Adaptation indices were weakened by an underestimation of climate vulnerability in Syria.

II. Water, Drought, Climate Change, and Conflict in Syria (Gleick 2014)

The next peer-reviewed article in support of the Syria-climate conflict thesis is the renowned water scholar, Peter Gleick's, 2014 '*Water, Drought, Climate Change, and Conflict in Syria*'. The paper investigates the links between water and conflict, asserting that water and climate conditions were directly implicated in the economic deterioration in Syria that in turn, fuelled the early unrest leading to his depiction of the conflict as a 'civil war'. The backdrop for this is the framing of Syria as a water-scarce region, among the driest globally. Based on statistics from the FAO, Gleick argues that "total renewable water availability, including both renewable surface and groundwater, in the country is around 16.8$km^3\ yr^{-1}$ of which nearly 60% originates from outside of its borders'', referring to the rivers Tigris, Euphrates, Orontes, and Yarmouk (Gleick 2014: 332). Tensions over these shared water bodies have been high dating back far into the 20th century, especially with Turkey and Jordan, as they have internally in Syria due to the scarcity of the resource. Femia and Werrell's (2012) 3-page briefing document is referenced to testify to the existence of the "worst long-term drought and most severe set of crop failures since agricultural civilizations began in the Fertile Crescent many millennia ago" (Femia & Werrell 2012, cited in Gleick 2014: 332). Similar to the claims made in their report, Gleick postulates that the severity of the anthropogenic drought contributed to both economic decline and mass rural-urban migration, as well as increased water insecurity. A decrease in per capita renewable water availability from 5500m^3 per person per year in 1950, to below 760mm^3 in 2012, can according to Gleick be attributed to rapid and continuous population growth in Syria within the same timeframe. **Figure 4.4** below illustrates the population pressures that supposedly acted as a threat multiplier in particularly Aleppo, Damascus, Darʾā, Dīr az-Zūr, Hama, and Homs, the cities that bore the brunt of the drought-induced internal displacement. The livelihood losses and subsequent population movements triggered by the climate-induced drought, is meant to have multiplied already stressed systems in urban areas in a way that contributed to the outbreak of unrest and conflict. Gleick makes a direct link between these population movements and early events of the Syrian uprising in 2011. "Some of the earliest political unrest began around the town of Darʾā, which saw a particularly large influx of farmers and young unemployed men displaced off their lands by crop failures" (Gleick 2014: 335).

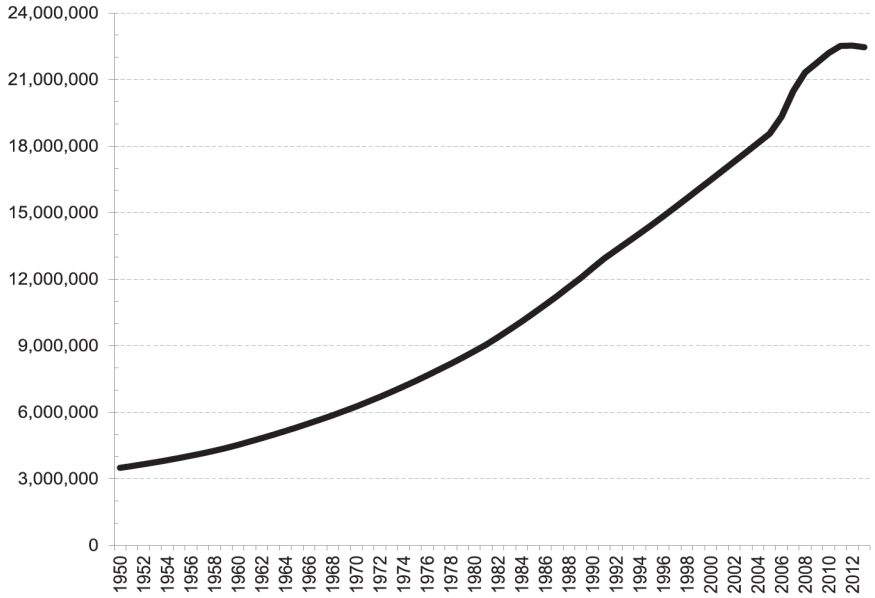


Figure 4.4: Population growth in Syria between 1950 and 2013 as depicted in Gleick (2014: 334).

The article also mentions the centrality of 'livelihoods lost' narratives in Darʿā, Hama and Dīr az-Zūr, all considered centers of the 2011 uprisings. Gleick's conclusion is that the Syrian drought attests to climatic trends predicted in the region in years to come, and that unless efforts are made to curb population growth and subsequent water insecurity, there are "even greater risks of local and and regional political instability" (Gleick 2014: 338).

III. Climate Change in the Fertile Crescent (Kelley, Mohtadi, Cane, Seager & Kushnir 2015)

The last peer-reviewed study that informs the Syria-climate conflict thesis is Kelley et al.'s (2015) '*Climate change in the Fertile Crescent and implications of the recent Syrian drought*'. Rooted in earth science and utilising climate modelling, Colin Kelley and colleagues at the California and Columbia university front the thesis that drought in Syria between 2007 and 2010 contributed to the conflict, and that there is convincing evidence suggesting anthropogenic forcing increased the probability of severe and persistent droughts in the region. Their line of argumentation follows the sequence that human interference with the Earth's climate led to severe drought and thus both agricultural collapse and mass migration,

which ultimately fueled the sentiments of the Syrian uprising. According to their data, conditions created by poor policies, unsustainable land use practices and overexploitation of water sources heightened Syria's vulnerability to severe drought, which exacerbated already existing problems of unemployment, corruption and inequality, in a far more serious manner than in neighbouring Turkey and Iraq that also experienced the drought in the Fertile Crescent region. They argue this was the case because Syria faced far more acute water scarcity and drought vulnerability than its neighbours, and depended more heavily on annual rainfall. Kelley et al. argue that between 2003 and 2008 the Syrian agricultural sector's contribution to its gross domestic product dropped from 25% to 17%. Between 2007 and 2008, wheat, rice and feed prices more than doubled, nutrition-related diseases amongst children in northeastern Syria rose, and school enrollment dropped by 80% as a result of the population movements that followed. "The total urban population of Syria in 2002 was 8.9 million but, by the end of 2010, had grown to 13.8 million, a more than 50% increase in only 8 years, a far greater rate than for the Syrian population as a whole" (Kelley et al. 2015: 3242). The Earth scientists claim that these trends fall outside the sphere of natural variability, and that both the duration and severity of the drought were made twice as likely because of anthropogenic activity. **Figure 4.5** shows the basis for their argument that long-term and statistically significant trends in precipitation and temperature are rooted in human interference with the climate system.

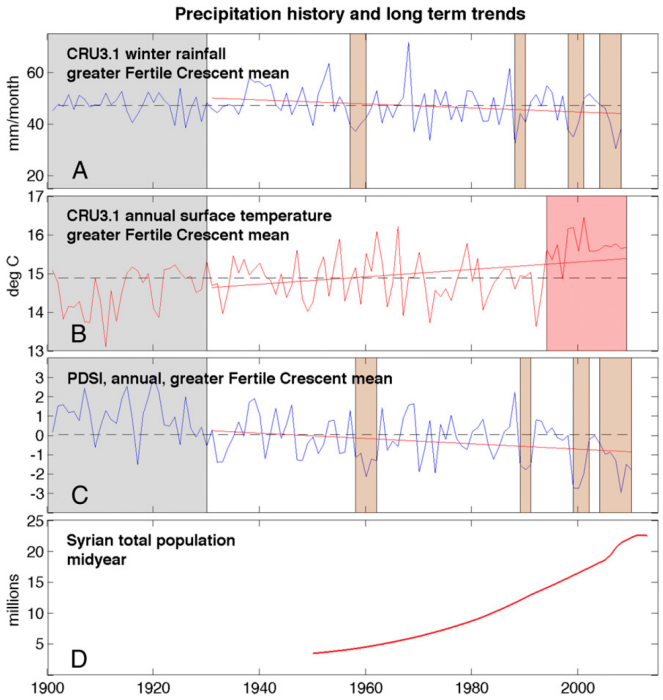


Figure 4.5: *A* shows mean precipitation of the winter months November-April. *B* shows the annual near-surface temperature with the red illustrating levels above long-term normal. *C* shows 'annual self-calibrating Palmer Drought Severity Index, and *D* the total midyear population in Syria. (Source: Kelley et al. 2015: 3242).

"Although natural variability on timescales of centuries or longer cannot be entirely ruled out for this region, the long-term observed trends and the recent increase in the occurrence of multiyear droughts and in surface temperature is consistent with the time history of the anthropogenic climate forcing" (Kelley et al. 2015: 3244). The authors bolster their viewpoints with references to literature that establishes statistical links between climate and conflict, all of which draw on the population pressure arguments presented in all three of the peer-reviewed studies in support of the Syria-climate conflict thesis. Additionally, mention is made of an interview in another piece by journalist Thomas L. Friedman, with a displaced Syrian farmer in Darʾā who to the question of whether The Syrian Revolution was about the drought, was to have answered "of course, the drought and unemployment were important in pushing people toward revolution" (Friedman 2013: para 17).

4.3.3 Critique of the Syria-Climate Conflict Thesis

Picture 4: taken by student in the Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan in 2017.

This section will briefly sketch out the core components of the voices critical and apprehensive to the Syria-climate conflict thesis. As alluded to, the thesis has been confronted

with considerable challenges. This criticism is based on both apprehension towards securitising climate change, and direct critique of framing the Syrian conflict within a climate-conflict narrative. There is also the issue that an expanding set of media coverage reports an alleged link between climate change and the violence in Syria, despite its limited and uncertain empirical evidence (Abel et al. 2019). Public discourse on both the potential violent outcomes of climate change and the Syrian Revolution have been influenced by such high profile figures as actor Leonardo DiCaprio, former US President Obama and British Prince Charles (Daoudy 2020). A debate over the thesis' underpinning evidence took place in Political Geography after Selby et al. (2017a) published their article in this journal, to which Gleick (2017), Hendrix (2017), Kelley et al. (2017) and Selby et al. (2017b) responded.

In their examination of the evidence provided by three sources discussed above, Selby et al. (2017a) summarise the body of work as informing the Syria-climate conflict thesis through three central underpinnings; 1), that Syria's drought had anthropogenic causes, 2) that the drought instigated mass rural-urban migration, and 3) that this partly climate-induced migration played an important role in the early development of conflict in Syria. Each tenet, with its accompanying evidence, is scrutinised separately before the authors conclude that they found no clear or reliable evidence to prove any of the sub-theses, and the difficulty associated with examining causal claims ranging from 'final spark', 'primary causal factor' to 'contributory factor of unknown significance'. Point one is responded to with the argument that none of the data supporting the drought severity claims are specifically about Syria, but rather the wider Fertile Crescent region, which as previously explained, includes fourteen other contemporary countries, or the Mediterranean Basin. They also point to diverging accounts on the duration and specific timeframe of the drought. In comment to severity, they find that Femia and Werrell (2012) and Gleick's (2014) insistence on especially dire drought consequences in the town of Darʾā contradict rainfall pattern data that show average trends, and criticise Kelley et al.'s (2015) use of linear statistical models to analyse dryland rainfall, which has high natural inter-annual and inter-decadal variability. These discrepancies lead Selby et al. (2017a) to render evidence on point one inconclusive: there is currently no reliable link to be found between anthropogenic activity and Syria's drought. On point two, they reach the same

conclusion of discrepancy and inconclusiveness, arguing that the mass migration described in the Syria-climate conflict thesis was neither as substantial as claimed, and is more likely attributable to economic liberalisation in Syria rather than drought. Point three is addressed with an analysis of the geographical footholds of the first demonstrations and the impetus behind the popular mobilisation. They again conclude that currently no evidence exists to establish a robust link between drought-induced migration and conflict outcomes. They also highlight the lack of ethnographic research involved, commenting "it is striking how little personal testimony is marshalled in support of the claim that drought-related migration was a factor in the Syrian uprising: Kelley et al. quote just one displaced Syrian farmer, Gleick and Femia and Werrell none at all" (Selby et al. 2017a: 240).

In a similar vein, both Marwa Daoudy (2020) (herself Syrian) and Francesca De Châtel (2014) dispute the empirical foundation provided for the Syria-climate conflict thesis, arguing that such theories obfuscate more important causal factors, and thereby may impede accountability. Based on fieldwork in Syria between 2008 and 2009, including interviews with displaced persons from drought-affected regions, De Châtel takes the argument of resource mismanagement a step further than previous mentions, by postulating that drought's adverse effects were not simply a result of mismanagement, but also the Syrian regime's failure to acknowledge and handle this mismanagement's consequences. This included neglect of the humanitarian crisis that ensued after the drought, a neglect she claims worsened already impoverished socioeconomic conditions for Syrians, and fueled the initial dispositions of those that took to the streets as demonstrators. De Châtel's proposition is that inflating the importance of climate change as a contributory causal factor to the Syrian conflict is both unhelpful and distracting, stating "an exaggerated focus on climate change shifts the burden of responsibility for the devastation of Syria's natural resources away from the successive Syrian governments since the 1950s and allows the Assad regime to blame external factors for its own failures" (De Châtel 2014: 2). The same sentiment is applied to the adverse human impacts of the drought. Although the official narrative of the regime is that intense development of irrigated agricultural in the water-scarce Syrian context is driven by population pressures and demand for food, and that water insecurity is caused by external factors like climate change,

De Châtel points out that the non-food crop cotton, receives the largest portion of irrigated water in Syria. Deliberating the role of climate change as done in the Syria-climate conflict thesis, in De Châtel's view (2014: 12) "strengthens the narrative of the Assad regime that seizes every opportunity to blame external factors for its own failings and inability to reform".

Daoudy's 2020 book 'The Origins of the Syrian Conflict - Climate Change and Human Security' voices similar views, focus on two key tenets: 1) because drought is not an inevitable consequence of climate change, it follows that climate change is not a necessary driver of conflict, and 2) that Syria is no stranger to water scarcity, and therefore, no climate-induced drought can fully explain the triggers of the 2011 rebellion. Her thesis is that climate change had an amplifying effect on poor resource management in Syria, but that Baʿathist ideology with its keen eye on agricultural development, played a much more important role in deteriorating environmental conditions in Syria. The intensive irrigation and dam construction policies fronted by the Baʿathists, put in place to pursue the goal of achieving food security and maintaining favour with its rural followers, are to Daoudy what created the vulnerability that allowed the 2006-2010 drought to ravage so seriously. Rooted within critical security studies, Daoudy employs a human-security framework for the environment that conceptualises environmental deterioration as a distinct and current human security threat that incorporates political and historical perspectives into its analyses. Part of her concluding remarks note that there currently exists "little evidence" that "climate change in Syria sparked popular revolt in 2011" but "a lot of evidence" that "suggests it did not" (Daoudy 2020: 203; Selby 2020).

5.0 Discussion of Syrian Perspectives on The Syria-Climate Conflict Thesis

We turned into numbers... Of dead, wounded, widows, orphans, displaced, forcibly displaced, missing... Unidentified.

We have lost everything... The places are no longer our places; the faces are no longer our faces.

Even our belongings and our memories are distorted.

We have become strangers in our land and strangers everywhere.

- Carole Alfarah, in the UN-OCHA photo essay 'Syria – through the eyes of its photographers'[10] (2021).

Picture 5: submitted by participant 'Amena' from southwestern Zabadani, taken in 2017.

This section seeks to describe and explain the reactions and perceptions of the Syrians who participated in this study, with relation to the Syria-climate conflict thesis. Ultimately, the thesis claims that anthropogenic drought played such a significant role in 'triggering' the 2011 unrest in Syria, that an independent thesis on the causal relationship is justified. The thesis is a discursive narrative within a security discourse, that argues a climate-conflict correlation rooted in environmental insecurity. By breaking up the thesis into three separate narratives, followed

[10] A rendition of the photo essay found on AlJazeera: https://interactive.aljazeera.com/aje/2021/syria-10-years-by-syrian-photographers/index.html

by a discussion of the climate-conflict nexus and decolonisation, this section takes a closer look at narratives and counter-narratives, to put Syrians, in this case the subjects of (in)security, in a position to define their own context, experiences and ideas. Jackson (2020: 55) says 'real people in real places' are frequently subject to processes that are poorly understood, and that scholars attempting to understand these processes should avoid imposing externally understood notions of security on people, and rather negotiate the meaning with communities. This discussion chapter hopes to do exactly that.

A note on methods

As the following findings section will be heavily aided by excerpts from the focus groups and interviews conducted with 79 Syrian participants for this study, a few comments are necessary to clarify my procedures. For the sake of confidentiality, all names used in this dissertation have been changed[11]. To meaningfully represent the diversity of perspectives represented in my data, as well as represent as many of the individual voices that made this dissertation possible, I have chosen to use quotes by several participants from the focus group and interview sessions. A list of quoted participants (using code names) and supplementary information is summarised in Appendix VII. Quotes from the sessions conducted in English are verbatim, whilst I have translated quotes from the Norwegian and Arabic (an interpreter translated the Arabic to Norwegian) sessions meticulously, attempting to represent them as closely as possible to their original form. To ensure transparency, I use the following tools for direct quotes: '(…)' to show removed words, square brackets to signify rephrasing, and parentheses for explanatory additions. Omissions in quotes are mainly of repeated words, fillers or grammar that makes the sentence difficult to understand, I have therefore removed them to more clearly express the participants' views. Here it is worth noting that the interactive relationship between the researcher and the participants is a knowledge production process that is 'twice-behaved' and in sessions facilitated by an interpreter, 'thrice-behaved' (Ozkaleli 2018). The meaning extracted from the focus group and interview sessions is formed through this interactive knowledge production process, in which more than one person contributes.

[11] Names found at random in a list of 100 top male and female names in Syria.

5.1 Initial Reactions

Overall, it is interesting to note that only two out of 79 participants in this study had heard of the suggestion that climate change might have been implicated in triggering the Syrian conflict. Many participants thought my study focus was on the climate change effects of the conflict rather than climate change as a trigger, for as 'Iman' from the focus group with displaced Syrians living in Gaziantep said: "*desertification*[12] *came after the war, not the other way around*[13]". Others laughed at the suggestion and used words such as shock, weird, funny, or simply disbelief to describe their first impressions of the study focus. A few participants located in Norway, who reached out after reading the Facebook posts, said part of their motivation for participating was to set the record straight. 'Mohammed', a 32-year-old originally from an agricultural village in the outskirts of Aleppo, said:

> I chose not to take part in any conflict or war because I felt it wasn't my war. My way of helping the population (Syrians) is by sharing experiences, stories, everything that can contribute in a positive way and tell what really happened[14].

Many also made reference to what they feel are misrepresentations of the Syrian conflict, especially relayed in the media, when stating their motive to provide 'accurate' accounts of what happened. It was clear that a few of the participants felt offended by the suggestion that climate change might have been a significant factor in driving the events set off in Syria in 2011, what most referred to as the Syrian Revolution. A 29-year-old internally displaced male, 'Usama', now living in the Syrian city of Jarabulus said:

> We are the ones living here on the ground, and we are watching the screen, the television, and all the social media, and [we see that] absolutely there is a difference between the reality and the media. (...) It seems like a cover, [that they are using this thesis as] a cover for the real reasons behind the conflict.

[12] The Arabic word 'التصحر' is translated to 'desertification'. My interpreter noted that this word has highly negative connotations in Arabic, essentially meaning an area rendered unfit for human life/society.
[13] Translated from a comment in Arabic written in the chat during the first focus group: التصحر صار من وراء الحرب وليس العكس
[14] Translated from Norwegian: *Jeg valgte å ikke delta i noe konflikt eller krig fordi jeg følte ikke at det var min krig. Min måte å hjelpe befolkningen på er å dele erfaringer, historier, alt som kan påvirke på en positiv måte og fortelle hva som egentlig skjedde*.

Another participant from the focus group with displaced Syrians in Jarabulus, 'Joram', a 35-year-old male originally from Damascus, agreed and added:

> I think it's hard for people (outside Syria) to believe people can't make allegations against their regime, which is thirsty for the blood of its own people. (...) They don't understand the circumstances that make a people rise up and make a revolution. (...) The media is always like 'keep away from the political things'.

My analysis is therefore driven by a motivation to bring Syrian perspectives to the fore, acknowledging that they are the ones who have lived through war and displacement. My intention is not to prove or disprove the Syria-climate conflict thesis, but rather analyse and discuss it from a Syrian point of view. There was a noticeable trend in all the sessions with Syrian participants that they felt a need to start by describing what life in Syria was like before the events that took place in 2011 and beyond. Accordingly, the discussion chapter is organised in a way that reflects these accounts.

5.2 A Closer Look at Narratives

Drought is not something in the hands of our government. I don't think people in Syria are so stupid to demonstrate against the government about something they cannot control.

- *33-year-old 'Nizar' from northwestern Syria, in an interview with the student on March 6th, 2021.*

5.2.1 Narrative One: The extreme drought in Syria between 2005 and 2010 was anthropogenic

Narrative one of the Syria-climate conflict thesis contends that Syria experienced multi-year severe drought(s), or abnormally low rainfall, that led to severe agricultural decline, in part triggered by anthropogenic climate change. All of the drought periods argued by the three main proponents of the thesis (Femia & Werrell 2012; Gleick 2014; Kelley et al. 2015) fall within the timeframe 2005 to 2010, and lean on Martin Hoerling et al.'s (2012) study of ubiquitous drying trends in the region, to argue that drought was partly triggered by greenhouse gas

emissions (Selby et al. 2017a). The winters of 2006-2007 and 2009-2010 are the key periods of interest in the Syria-climate conflict thesis, although its proponents disagree on the length of the drought(s) (Daoudy 2020). Selby (2018) argues rainfall was exceptionally low between 2007 and 2008 in the Jazira region, but average or above so in the west and south of Syria. He argues further that unsustainable water extraction dating far further back than 2007, played a more important role in triggering severe drought than climate change. Selby et al. (2017a) also argue that the Jazira region's dependence on groundwater sources suggest mismanagement and growing rural poverty created agricultural decline, rather than anthropogenic drought. Existence of severe drought somewhere within the given timeframe then, appears not to be cause for strife, but the degree to which severe deviations from normal rainfall patterns were a result of anthropogenic climate change, and how in any case this can be proven scientifically, is contested. In fact, although evidence exists to suggest climate change has elevated the probability of drought in Syria, it does not support claims that severe drought between 2005-2010 was a product of climate change (Daoudy 2020; Selby et al. 2017b).

Exploration of Syrian perceptions related to the first narrative involved two key questions: 1) what were your experiences with drought in Syria, inside and outside the timeframe 2005-2010, and 2) what are your perceptions about the causes of drought(s)? It was also necessary to discuss participant definitions of climate change and drought, as some were not familiar with the terminology or specifics related to these issues. Discussion of narrative one is organised into three categories: I) Drought as a natural and external phenomenon, II) Drought and water insecurity in Syria, and III) Socioeconomic and political causes of drought.

I. Drought as a natural and external phenomenon

The focus group discussions with Syrians in Turkey started off with the participants deliberating definitions and examples of climate change. The most common reference was to natural disasters, global warming and pollution resulting from excessive greenhouse gas emissions in especially Europe, the US and China. Participants referred to for instance car travel, extravagant production, industrialisation and deforestation as human activities that cause climate change, but that were more problematic in other countries than Syria. During the

third focus group, with displaced Syrians living in the Turkish city of Kilis, several of the participants described climate change as a natural phenomenon that has and will continue to manifest itself mainly in temperature changes over time, but that is not necessarily directly correlated with anthropogenic activity. Participants in the two other focus groups with Syrians in Turkey said they also perceive drought itself a natural phenomenon that is not induced by climate change, but rather a natural condition that exists in dry places such as the Middle East. In their view, drought has become more frequent in Syria, but they were not certain it was an 'anomaly'. They also expressed a view that the human role in drought is preventing rather than causing it, by taking care of and cultivating the land. 'Elias' who used to work in agriculture in Ḥasaka, and now lives in Gaziantep said: "*the Al Khabour river dried out in 1997 and that caused migration from Dīr az-Zūr towards Ḥasaka. This (people moving away from the land) caused even more drought there because nobody was left to protect the land*[15]". In another interview, 'Hasan', a 39-year-old male with an agricultural background from Homs, said "*after people leave their land to work in factories the land becomes desert because nobody is there to produce the land. Also, when people migrate they start building the city over the planet cover. The planet cover (land) becomes concrete*". These quotes demonstrate how respondents perceive humans as 'protectors' against drought rather than passive victims of nature, and that their experience with water deficits in Syria started before 2005-2010.

Alongside a perception of drought and climate change as largely natural events, some participants discussed them as 'external factors' in that they are phenomena mostly driven by forces outside human control. One interviewee, 31-year-old 'Akram' who fled from Ḥasaka in 2012 to Iraq and then to Norway, said "*it isn't the government's fault that there is no rain, it's just God's will and something they cannot control*[16]". The participants who held such views said they do not see themselves as "*science people*", and although they agree human activity has of late accelerated global warming and ozone layer depletion, they do not associate drought directly with climate change. They did, however, believe that the social consequences of

[15] Translated from Norwegian: *Al Kabour elven tørket i 1997 og det forårsaket migrasjon fra Dīr az-Zūr til Ḥasaka. Dette gjorde at det ble enda mer tørke der fordi ingen var igjen for å beskytte jorda der.*
[16] Translated from Norwegian: *Det er ikke regjeringen sin feil at det ikke kommer regn, det er bare guds vilje og noe de ikke kan kontrollere.*

drought were fully within the realm of government responsibility and that certain human activities, such as overusing resources, could worsen or increase the prevalence of drought.

II. Drought and water insecurity in Syria

Most participants acknowledged the presence and persistence of drought and water shortages in Syria. Their opinions diverged, however, on the point of whether these phenomena became unusually bad in the years before the 2011 unrest and how long Ḥasaka had been particularly vulnerable to drought. It appeared participants had different perceptions of the severity of drought and water insecurity in Syria depending on whether they came from rural or urban areas, with the former usually arguing exacerbation had taken place over a longer period. In the semi-structured interview with 'Akram' from Ḥasaka, whose family had always depended on agriculture to make a living, he described drought as a common occurrence, but something Ḥasaka had endured for a long time. His experience was that life as a farmer in Syria became difficult already around the beginning of the century:

> In Ḥasaka we rely on agriculture, and if we don't get rain we can't cultivate our land. But, my experience with drought happened many years before the war, maybe 20-25 years ago. (...) The last years before the war it was actually quite normal, drought wasn't particularly bad.[17].

During the first focus group discussion with Syrians living in Turkish Gaziantep and Sanliurfa, six out of 23 participants who were from Ḥasaka said that drought was particularly bad between 2007 and 2008. This period of drought is within the timeframes proponents of the Syria-climate conflict thesis use (2006-2011 for Femia & Werrell 2012; Gleick 2014, 2007-2012 for Werrell et al. 2015, 2005-2010 Kelley et al. 2015). 'Sara', said she had visited family in the region several times between 2007 and 2008 and experienced that: "*you could see that the desert just became bigger and bigger*[18]". She did, however, say that drought and water shortages had been worsening for a long time before this particular drought hit. Other

[17] Translated from Norwegian: *I Ḥasaka er vi avhengig av jordbruk og får vi ikke regn, får vi ikke dyrket jorda. Men, min erfaring med tørke skjedde mange år før krigen, kanskje 20-25 år siden. De siste årene før krigen var det egentlig ganske vanlig, det var ikke noe sånn spesielt ille med tørke.*
[18] Translated from Norwegian: *Man kunne se at ørkenen bare ble større og større.*

participants relayed similar experiences, arguing that drought might have been particularly severe in periods before 2011, but that the fluctuations in rainfall and general water access started around the turn of the 21st century (this experience could also be influenced by the ages of participants, most of whom were now around 30). Participants in the first focus group who were not from Ḥasaka or not directly involved in the agricultural sector, said they had noticed impacts of the 2007-2008 drought only through a slight rise in vegetable prices, but were aware that those living in the northeast had suffered significantly. They also believed rural suffering started long before the 2007 drought.

Many of these quotes are in line with De Châtel's (2014) findings that drought is an intrinsic part of the semi-arid climate in Syria, and thus no anomaly. She, however, presents evidence that there was a severe drought in northeastern Syria between 2006 and 2010 that led to both a humanitarian and agrarian crisis for the population of Ḥasaka, resulting from rapidly declining groundwater sources and increased rural poverty that started already in 2000. Selby (2018) also argues that the Ḥasaka region was already in a state of agrarian crisis by 2006, as a result of ecological and economic decline that in tandem increased the region's vulnerability to drought. Both De Châtel (2014) and Selby (2018) therefore support the severity of drought claimed in the Syria-climate conflict thesis. They also acknowledge the serious hardships the drought brought about for those with agricultural livelihoods in Ḥasaka, but in contrast to the Syria-climate conflict thesis that generally contends anthropogenic climate change was a primary cause of the drought's severity, they claim that the drought and its adverse impacts were a result of long-term, structural socioeconomic and political factors. Participants in this study appear to lean more towards this latter explanation of drought and subsequent agricultural decline.

III. Socioeconomic and political causes of drought

A common theme across the interview sessions was how Syria's resources were mismanaged, to the detriment of the already poverty-stricken. Scholars on both sides of the Syria-climate conflict debate partially agree that drought severity and vulnerability increased as a result of resource mismanagement, but differ on the point of how much significance this

factor had (Daoudy 2020). Although many of the focus group participants in Turkey perceived drought as resulting from mainly natural and external forces, a majority of the individual interviewees believed socioeconomic and political causes were more important. From their point of view, the drought was a direct result of a long period of poor resource management and unjust political decisions that privileged the regime and its supporters, but not those who needed it the most. A majority of the interviewees supported the sentiment of 33-year-old 'Reem' from Damascus who said: "*Syria wasn't poor, we had lots of resources, both natural and economic, but everything went to the regime*". My interpretation of such quotes is that participants were particularly referring to distribution of resources necessary to a decent quality of life, but could also be seen to reflect Daoudy's (2020) point that the religious history in Syria related to water, has produced a general sentiment in Syrian society of water as a public good.

Generally, the situation for Syrians in the agricultural sector was described as burdensome. 'Ali', a 29-year-old whose family worked in olive production in a village outside Idlib, said it was difficult to survive as a farmer without government affiliations:

> Syria had a lot of resources and production, and Syrians are hard workers, they manage. (...) The problem is that the authorities don't think about people, they just take the money for themselves and don't give anything back. I cannot remember a single Syrian who received support from the Syrian regime. We had to pay for everything ourselves: everything the soil needed, water, and to pay our workers[19].

None of the participants commented on specific policies, but the literature shows that both supporting and critical voices of the Syria-climate conflict thesis agree that especially water policies, led to extraction that far exceeded sustainable levels (Ababsa 2015). Withdrawal deficits were already a problem in Syria in the 1980s (Selby 2018). A point of disagreement, however, is the extent to which this mismanagement was a contributory factor to agricultural decline during the severe drought years (Daoudy 2020). 'Ali' and others, did argue that Bashar al-Assad's economic policies had departed from his father's and made problems such as social inequality and corruption even worse. Participants described a greater presence of foreign

[19] Translated from Norwegian: *Syria hadde masse ressurser og produksjon, og syrere er flinke til å jobbe, de klarer seg. Problemet er at myndighetene ikke tenker på folk, de tar bare pengene selv og gir ingen tilbake. Jeg kan ikke huske en eneste Syrer som fikk støtte av det syriske regimet. Vi måtte betale alt selv. Alt jorda trengte, vann, og for å betale de som jobbet for oss.*

investors in Syria during the first years of the 21st century, which brought some positive changes to Syrians generally, but mostly benefited the already privileged. They said it also pushed those dependent on agriculture into even more impoverished conditions because the sector was increasingly plagued by unemployment and insufficient income. This corresponds with other studies (e.g., De Châtel 2014) that found "economic liberalization increased corruption and further concentrated power among key insiders leading to a loss of support in the traditional rural stronghold of the Baʿathist regime" (Daoudy 2020; 10). Selby et al. (2017a) also found that intensification of rural poverty had an exacerbating effect on the rural population's vulnerability to drought.

Some interviewees mentioned increased pressure on farmers by the government to increase yields, and being somewhat 'forced' to use chemical fertilisers and pesticides to secure incomes. Often, however, these practices only further deteriorated conditions for better yields. Faced with economic struggles and lacking government support, participants said farmers had to for example illegally dig for groundwater resources to meet their water needs. Such illegal wells for groundwater sources have, according to Daoudy (2020) been a proliferating problem in Syria since the 1960s. Official numbers stated that 95,910 out of 172,687 wells in Syria were illegally dug by farmers in 2002 (Mualla & Salman 2002: 4, cited in Daoudy 2020: 123). As much as 94 percent of Ḥasaka's water needs were covered by river and groundwater sources (Ababsa 2015). There was some divergence amongst participants related to responsibility for illegal welling, with some (mostly from urban areas) pointing the finger at farmers and others at the government for "*pressurising*" farmers. Overall, though, there was agreement amongst the participants from rural and agricultural-dependent areas that Syria's water resources had undergone severe depletion over the last decades, largely because of the Baʿath party's ambitious, yet inequitable agricultural policies. They explained that under Hafez al-Assad's rule, Syria had been self-subsistent and enjoyed regional dominance when it came to agricultural production, but that the situation changed after Bashar took over. Food insecurity was a strategic goal for the Baʿath party, both under Hafez (Barnes 2009) and Bashar (Daoudy 2020), but long-term mismanagement of resources in pursuit of the food security goal produced what De Châtel (2014: 2) describes as "the dead end of the Syrian government's

water and agricultural policies". Put simply, the policies that allowed Syria to enjoy self-subsistence and develop the agricultural sector during Baʿathist rule, had seriously depleted water and land resources and driven especially the Jazira region into a state of crisis.

Another interesting theme in relation to drought was the profuse mention of dams. There are 141 dams in Syria, largely concentrated along the two major rivers of Syria, the Euphrates and Tigris (Sawe 2017). These heavily dammed rivers cut across several international borders; in Turkey, Iraq and Lebanon, and the dam projects have been subject to considerable controversy because of how they limit water flow and have been the cause of resettlement for approximately 300,000 people in Syria (Sawe 2017). 'Nizar', the 33-year-old from the Syrian Ghab plain, explained that water access, both for irrigation and other uses, was mostly decided by the political climate between Turkey and Syria. He said that: "*when Turkey decides to stop the water flow, people along the river don't have any access to water and this is a big problem*". 'Akram' from Ḥasaka gave a similar statement, saying in his view, drought and water access was more a result of Syria-Turkey relations than climate change. To him, this a more logical way to see the link between climate change and conflict, for as he put it: "*Turkey has built many dams. The rivers that come to [run through] Syria come from Turkey. We have been close to war before because of this. We had many rivers that dried up because the water flow was cut off*[20]". It is also noteworthy that Syria's massive expansion of dams and irrigation systems led to severe environmental deterioration, including soil infertility (Fröhlich 2016).

All in all, several participants acknowledged both drought and water shortages as problems in Syria long before the 2011 demonstrations. What emerged as a significant point of agreement amongst participants, was the opinion that the afflictions worsened by drought (mostly unemployment and poverty) and the 'agricultural collapse' in Ḥasaka were mostly results of unjust political decisions and poor resource management before and after the drought, rather than 'natural' forces such as drought or climate change. To them, the severity of drought was worsened by the way the regime handled the subsequent crisis in Ḥasaka.

[20] Translated from Norwegian: *Tyrkia har bygget mange demninger. Elvene som kommer til Syria kommer fra Tyrkia. Vi har vært nærme krig før på grunn av dette. Vi hadde mange elver som tørket ut fordi vannet ble kuttet.*

Discussion of narrative one raises the issue of drought definitions, and the weight of natural and/or social factors in them. Studying the relationship between climate change and drought, essentially the anthropogenic nature of drought, Cook et al. (2018: 165) use a broad drought definition: "an anomalous moisture deficit relative to some normal baseline", but point to recent research that emphasises the social nature of drought. They argue that simple cause and effect narratives between climate change and drought are extremely challenging to produce. Close interdisciplinary efforts between natural and social sciences will likely be required to understand the complex link. Proponents of the Syria-climate conflict thesis generally employ an environment-centric definition of drought, both as an event and trigger of other circumstances, where long-term drying trends serve as the main predictor of anthropogenic drought (e.g., Kelley et al. 2017). Selby et al. (2017a) point out that the severe drought in Syria of 2007/2008 was not exclusive to Syria, but also affected neighbouring Iraq and Turkey. Yet no comparable crises emerged here. This suggests there was more at play than solely climate change, at both ends of the 2007/2008 drought in Jazira. It is clear that droughts present great expenses to agriculture and human societies, and recent research demonstrates the huge impacts human institutions and policies, such as on irrigation and groundwater withdrawals, can have on the extent of these expenses (Cook et al. 2018). The Syrian perspectives presented in discussion of narrative one suggest that the agricultural decline for example Kelley et al. (2017) claim was the result of drought, seems to date far further back, and have more complex and important causes than climate change. I believe the participants' perceptions and reflections demonstrate the need for a more political ecology-aligned definition of drought, with both social and natural components. I also argue that these perceptions are vital to understanding why participants were so disagreeable to the Syria-climate conflict thesis because of its Malthusian and environmentally deterministic leanings.

5.2.2 Narrative Two: Anthropogenic drought caused mass rural-urban migration in Syria

The Syria-climate conflict thesis contends that as many as 1.5 million Syrians, or perhaps more, were forcibly displaced by a complexity of variables, including the northeastern

drought(s) in Syria (Kelley et al. 2017). The mass migration allegedly stemmed from "total crop and livestock decimation in large parts of the country" (Werrell et al. 2015: 44), which I have already referred to as 'agricultural collapse/decline'. Gleick (2014: 333) states "the combination of very severe drought, persistent multiyear crop failures, and the related economic deterioration led to very significant dislocation and migration of rural communities to the cities". According to Ababsa (2015) the mass migration left 160-220 Jaziran villages empty. On the other side of the debate, studies agree there was a link between drought and rural-urban migration in Syria, but that an estimate of 40,000-60,000 families is a more realistic number and that the Syria-climate conflict thesis grants too great an importance to drought as a migration trigger (e.g., Selby et al. 2017a). Fröhlich (2016) argues that most of the post-drought migration was in fact rural-rural, not rural-urban, whilst Selby (2018: 4) argues rural-urban migration was high before the drought, approximately 135,000 people from 2000-2005.

Qualitative data cannot generate estimations of displacement numbers. This section rather outlines the experiences and perceptions of Syrian participants with pre/post-drought migration, and its causes. The findings have been organised into two categories: I) Seasonal and temporary migration, and II) Economic, political and historical roots of migration.

I. Seasonal and temporary migration

None of the participants in this study considered themselves part of the migration numbers mentioned above, although a few had migrated to Damascus and Aleppo from Ḥasaka and others between rural and urban areas "*some years before The Revolution*". Of the participants who had experienced such movements, none attributed this directly to drought or considered it abnormally prevalent between 2005 and 2010. Experiences with rural-urban migration were, according to those who had moved themselves or knew others who had moved, described as a seasonal sort of migration, in that these population movements were considered regular, non-permanent and uncontroversial. Selby et al. (2017a) also note that seasonal labour migration from the north/northeast to the south was normal practice in Syria well before the severe drought(s). One interviewee, 32-year-old 'Mohammed', described such seasonal migration from a rural village outside northern Aleppo during his childhood. He said:

"*during primary five, I was the only pupil left in the class because everyone else had traveled, and my cousin was the only one left in primary six. That shows how many people left*[21]".

Most experience participants had with migration towards cities, though, had Damascus or Aleppo as temporary destinations, and occupational changes (usually from agriculture to factory work) or education as its goal. Others also left for temporary work in neighbouring countries such as Turkey or Lebanon. No participants mentioned rural-rural migration, but this could also have been related to my own focus (as interviewer) on rural-urban movements. In the focus group discussions with Syrians in Turkey, migration was discussed as a seasonal event where usually only the male head of the household or eldest son left to find work. As 'Zak' from the first focus group put it: "*only the man traveled to cities or neighbouring countries like Turkey to find work, but it wasn't a lot, maybe you can call it 'partial migration' for survival*[22]".

'Akram' from Ḥasaka said he thought drought did have some influence on population movements toward urban areas, but that this had been normal for a long time before 2011. He said: "*some years there was no rain and we lost our livelihood. Many [then] had to move to Damascus, some permanently, but many of them came back afterwards*[23]". Participants in the focus groups with Syrians in Turkey also said they had heard of an increase in rural-urban migration in the years before 2011, but argued it was a trend that had increased over several decades, and was triggered by poor economic opportunities and unemployment over a long period of time, rather than a direct and short-term result of low rainfall periods. Fröhlich (2016) also states that internal movements in Syria, especially from the north, were comprehensive and on the rise before severe drought years. As many of the participants in this study were in their twenties during the timeframe of interest, there were several who considered internal migration from smaller villages to cities with more study and working opportunities, as normal and uninfluenced by drought. In fact, a majority of the participants in this study had moved to cities in Syria prior to 2011 for the purpose of work or studies.

[21] Translated from Norwegian: *I 5.klasse var jeg den eneste eleven igjen i klassen fordi alle hadde reist, og fetteren min var den eneste igjen i 6.klasse. Det sier litt om hvor mange som dro.*
[22] Translated from Norwegian: *Kun mannen reiste til storbyer eller naboland som Tyrkia for å finne jobb, men det var ikke mye, kanskje man kan kalle det 'delvis migrasjon' for å overleve.*
[23] Translated from Norwegian: *Noen år kom det ikke regn og vi mistet levebrødet vårt. Mange måtte da flytte til Damaskus, noen permanent, men mange av dem kom tilbake etterpå.*

II. Economic, political and historical roots of migration

As mentioned, proponents of the Syria-climate conflict thesis do not contend drought was the sole trigger of mass migration, but rather heavily influenced by the agricultural collapse that drought allegedly created. This kind of argumentation is exemplary of the threat multiplier thesis, which claims that climatic events interact with stressors, and in certain contexts, produce migration and conflict outcomes. Considering the practical impossibility of proving whether or not drought caused migration, because any context that produces either displacement or conflict will necessarily involve interaction with socioeconomic factors (Bradley & McAdam 2012), discussion of socioeconomic and political triggers of drought need to respect this complexity. Burrows & Kinney (2016) argue one way of doing this is to understand the factors that lie behind the decision to move, as seen from the perspective of migrants themselves.

Many participants held the perception that migration decisions were a survival strategy. Participants said things like: "*if there is no water, of course you choose to move*" or "*when you cannot work, you have no choice but to move to where there is work*". 'Haya' from the first focus group thought increased rural-urban migration had to do with a generational change. She explained that young people in Syria grew up seeing their parents struggle with agricultural livelihoods, and were encouraged to seek opportunities in the private sector or through education. She said:

> People went towards education kind of, to work on education, they chose work that was easier than agriculture, (...) they migrated because of unemployment. They chose places or other countries that had better opportunities and higher incomes so they could work for a period, save money, and then come back to help their families[24].

Another general trend in the data collection sessions was the focus on poor government support in the face of unemployment and economic struggles. Many pointed out that migration was a necessary step to take because the government simply did not provide the services people needed when their income suffered as a result of unproductive cultivation

[24] Translated from Norwegian: *Folk gikk mot utdanning på en måte, å jobbe med utdanning, de valgte arbeid som var enklere enn jordbruk, de flyttet på grunn av arbeidsledighet. De valgte steder eller land som hadde bedre muligheter og høyere inntekter sånn at de kunne jobbe i en periode, spare penger, og så reise tilbake for å hjelpe familien.*

conditions, or policies that did not protect their agricultural livelihoods. Some participants for example attributed peaks in rural-urban migration before 2011 to the poor government response to drought. This is also argued in the Syria-climate conflict thesis by Kelley et al. (2015) who state that the government was unsuccessful in their response to the grievances of a vast displaced population. In an interview with 22-year-old 'Hala' from Damascus, she said: "*those with the power misuse the resources and there's no focus on what the villages need, like water and electricity. (...) When people struggle, they (the government) don't help them (the drought-affected people) get up again, to get started again*[25]". The general sentiment was that the Syrian government was indifferent to rural needs. The following quote from the interview with 'Akram' from Ḥasaka is illustrative of this. His experience was that Syria had plenty of resources, but distribution was often cause for strife in drought-prone areas.

> People complained from time to time because they didn't get help from the government when there was no rain, (...) but The Revolution didn't start because of drought in Ḥasaka. (...) Drought affected our poverty situation, but I think if resources in Syria were shared fairly drought wouldn't have been a problem in Ḥasaka[26].

'Sandra', a 33-year-old Kurdish from the northern city of Kobani, also provided interesting insights. She described how her father who owned a farm had to sometimes move to find work elsewhere. She said: "*I remember that some had to move to the city for work because they could no longer work in agriculture. Like around or before 2005. (...) They couldn't earn anything because there was no rain, drought affected people by taking away their income*[27]". Her opinion was that the economic struggles were the real root of migration, not drought, although she could only provide somewhat speculative perspectives as she was not herself from Ḥasaka. She said her impression was that the amount of rain fluctuated from year to year and the bad years could easily have been overcome with support from the authorities, but that they were reluctant to aid populations here because of the Kurdish

[25] Translated from Norwegian: *De med makten misbruker ressursene og det ble ikke fokus på det landsbyene trengte, som vann og strøm. Når folk sleit, hjalp de dem ikke med å komme opp igjen, å komme i gang igjen.*
[26] Translated from Norwegian: *Folk klaget av og til fordi de ikke fikk hjelp av regjeringen når det ikke var regn, men revolusjonen startet ikke på grunn av tørke i Ḥasaka. Tørke påvirket fattigdomssituasjonen vår, men jeg tror at hvis det hadde vært rettferdig fordeling av godene i Syria så hadde ikke tørke vært et problem i Ḥasaka.*
[27] Translated from Norwegian: *Jeg husker at noen måtte mange flytte til byen for å jobbe fordi de ikke lenger kunne jobbe med jordbruk. Rundt og før 2005 og sånn. De tjente ikke noe fordi det ikke var noe regn, tørke påvirket folk ved å ta bort lønna deres.*

majority population in Ḥasaka. She was also clear in her standpoint that drought or any subsequent migration had little to do with either demonstrations or the later conflict, but that discriminatory policies against Kurdish populations in Syria had played a part in worsening the economic impacts of drought and that this could be related to the 2011 demonstrations. In her view, the Assad regime would do anything to dismiss the needs of its Kurdish population. Again, this reflects a similar point to Selby's (2018: 11) that the Kurdish population of Ḥasaka were since the 1960s intentionally denied economic, social, and political rights due to the Syrian government's anti-Kurdish demeanor and 'Arabisation' project, which "aimed at expanding and consolidating Ḥasaka's Arab population". Selby (2018) argues that even international drought aid in 2009, partly from the United Nations, was directed at Arab populated parts of Ḥasaka, neglecting the Kurdish-affected population. The crisis created by drought, therefore, which forcibly displaced many families in Ḥasaka, could be more related to the political geography of the governorate rather than simply climate change (Selby 2018).

The prevailing response to narrative two by participants in this study is therefore that drought might have been implicated in rural-urban migration by affecting incomes and employment, but using labels such as 'drought-induced migration' or 'migrants from the drought' obfuscates the nuanced political, economic, historical and social context that made people decide to migrate. They might unhelpfully encourage a linear (Weinthal et al. 2015) or monocausal (Selby et al. 2017a) representation of the relationship between climate change and migration, which as this section has illustrated, is not the case. The discursive narrative also fails to recognise that people have moved for 'survival' - as a coping strategy. Framing population movements in the way they are done in the Syria-climate conflict thesis grants more agency to climate than humans (Hulme 2011), and expresses Malthusian tendencies by framing population movements and subsequent 'pressures' as negative and ideally, to be avoided. Moreover, based on the crisis situation of the agricultural sector already in 2006, it is likely that economic and unemployment hardships alone would have affected rural-urban movements even without drought. The extreme poverty levels that Femia & Werrell (2012) and Gleick (2014) attribute to drought were according to Selby et al. (2017b) pre-drought numbers, which in that case illustrate the extent of economic hardships for Syrians well before the drought(s).

Similar to narrative one on drought, narrative two on migration appears to rouse offense amongst Syrian participants because it fails to recognise the struggles and impoverished conditions that many Syrians were living with before people took to the streets in 2011. In their view, it obscures responsibility and accountability for these conditions and represents those who used moving as a survival strategy, as agency-less victims of nature. Although Fröhlich (2016) argues that migrants forced to move because of environmental change will rarely describe the environment as a trigger, but rather economic issues, I believe the participants' responses reflect a need for better listening to those who experienced events claimed in the Syria-climate conflict thesis. This to more adequately capture the complexity behind migration decisions. Additionally, if climate indeed was or will be a driver of migration, the typologies of migrants and their later treatment will largely depend on whether they are viewed as victims, threats, adaptive agents or political subjects (Daoudy 2020). Understanding migration triggers is thus vital, and should be done in dialogue with 'migrants' themselves. I believe a political ecology approach, which counters apolitical and ahistorical accounts of nature-society dynamics, is more suitable to understanding the role of migration within the nexus generally, and Syria case specifically. Most importantly, political ecology, with its focus on power relations and recognition, provides a more appropriate definition of migration that recognises those who move as actors with agency and voices. As the debate in *Political Geography* over migration numbers in Syria demonstrated, numbers alone will not suffice in providing accurate accounts of how, why and if migration can be tied to climatic events.

5.2.3 Narrative Three: Migrants from the drought were a contributory factor in Syria's 2011 unrest.

The Syria-climate conflict thesis lists a number of factors that contributed to the eruption of war in Syria in 2011. Amongst them: unemployment, corruption and inequality, but key to the Syria-climate conflict thesis is that climate change worsened these already stressed conditions, by e.g., instigating mass migration to cities (Kelley et al. 2015). According to Kelley et al. (2015: 3242), "the population shock to Syria's urban areas further increased the strain on

its resources". Especially urban unemployment, economic struggles and social unrest were to have been precipitated by mass migration (Gleick 2014). In sum, the argument is that migrants from the drought were a contributory factor to the violence that culminated in 2011, by pushing systems that were already pushed. Gleick (2014: 335) argues that this partly explains why the wave of Syrian demonstrations started in the city of Darʾā, "which saw a particularly large influx of farmers and young unemployed men displaced off their lands by crop failures".

Critical voices concerning narrative three state that no comprehensive studies have been done on the degree to which migration triggers violence (De Châtel 2014), and there is little evidence to suggest that demographic alterations produce conflict outcomes (Selby et al. 2017a). On the topic of demonstrations starting where drought-affected migrants were particularly numerous, there is also disagreement. Ababsa (2015: 210) argues the displaced persons coming from Ḥasaka were considered "too poor to get politicized" in Darʾā, and Daoudy (2020) that the demonstrations in Darʾā bore demands entirely unrelated to drought. Emadi (2011: 73) argues that protest rallies in Syria saw "scarce involvement of the rural poor".

A few participants believed more could have been done by the Syrian regime to prevent migration if it was so problematic, or help the migrants, who after all had moved because of unemployment or economic hardships. As the previous section described, many participants believed economic struggles were not a result of lacking government funds, but unjust distribution. They emphasised, however, that they did not see internal population movements as problematic at the receiving end. Those who had lived in urban areas had not noticed congestion as a result of population movements, other than a couple who mentioned slight increased economic stress in cities after an influx of Iraqi refugees around 2003, and Lebanese refugees after the July War in 2006 between Israel and Hezbollah. They did not, however, believe this had anything to do with the Syrian Revolution. In fact, not a single participant mentioned problems created/exacerbated by rural-urban migration or the existence of drought/climate change/migration issues during the uprising in 2011. Nevertheless, large portions of the interviews and focus groups were spent on discussing demonstration triggers. As participants were very quick to dismiss the legitimacy of narrative three, I will focus this

section on what the Syrians I have spoken to see as the most important contributing factors to unrest/conflict: I) Inequality & corruption, II) Political triggers, III) Historical triggers.

I. Inequality & Corruption

Participants described life in Syria before the war as characterised by power imbalances and extreme inequality under a dictatorship. Many stories were shared of how certain groups in society received preferential treatment based on their affiliation to the Assad regime, and that no errands could be completed without paying a bribe. Passports, marriage certificates, diplomas and any formal documents were obtained only through official and formalised corrupt channels. In his interview, 'Mohammed' told me that his first job after high school was to bribe public officials at the town hall to make case processing go faster. "*Corruption was an everyday thing. (...) We had a little office outside the town hall and an agreement with those who worked there. People came to us as middle men, with money, so they could get their documents faster*[28]". He said life was difficult for Syrians without connections in high places, and that this was an important driving force behind the demonstrations. Even public services that were officially free, for instance hospitals and schools, were part of the structural inequalities in Syria. He explained that: "*as long as you had money or knew somebody in a high position in the state, life went very well. (...) Even at hospitals you had to pay your way to proper treatment*[29]". 'Maya' from the second focus group with Syrians in Gaziantep made a similar statement, saying problems in Syria stemmed from both economic and class differences. She said: "*there were huge class differences in Syria, the rich became richer and the poor became poorer (...) These were the main reasons for the demonstrations*[30]". To this, a couple of participants from the same focus group added that they thought this was symptomatic of the regime's neglect and subordination of its own people. One said: "*we weren't treated like people before the war*[31]", and another that: "*the demonstrations started because Syrian people had no value to the authorities*[32]".

[28] Translated from Norwegian: *Korrupsjon var en hverdags sak. Vi hadde et lite kontor utenfor rådhuset og en avtale med de ansatte. Folk kom til oss som mellomledd, med penger, for å sørge for at de fikk dokumentene sine raskere.*
[29] Translated from Norwegian: *Så lenge du hadde penger eller kjente noen med en høy posisjon i staten, da gikk livet bra. Selv på sykehus måtte du betale deg til ordentlig behandling.*
[30] Translated from Norwegian: *Det var store klasseforskjeller i Syria, de rike ble rikere og de fattige ble fattigere. Dette var hovedårsakene til demonstrasjonene.*
[31] Translated from Norwegian: *Vi ble ikke behandlet som mennesker før krigen.*
[32] Translated from Norwegian: *Demonstrasjonene startet fordi syriske mennesker ikke noen verdi for myndighetene.*

According to participants, growing inequality in Syria meant larger numbers of people were left unemployed and unable to sustain a satisfactory quality of life. Especially for agricultural workers, opportunities were increasingly scant. Fröhlich (2016) states that by 2010 the percentage of Syrians employed in agriculture had reduced from 30 to 15 percent over eight years. Between 2001 and 2007, Bashar al-Assad's government had only produced 36,000 new jobs per year, resulting in a 30.3% unemployment rate, which was a far reach from its goal of 8% by 2010 (Fröhlich 2016). Additionally, two to three million Syrians were living in extreme poverty prior to the drought years (Selby et al. 2017b). This describes hard-pressed economic conditions, in addition to lacking and unfairly distributed opportunities for Syrians, well before Ḥasaka's agricultural collapse. To the participants in this study, long-term and growing inequality and corruption were far more important triggers of the 2011 demonstrations than the population pressures the Syria-climate conflict thesis claims played a role. On the topic of the migration-conflict narrative, Fröhlich (2016: 39) also notes that "it remains unclear how new migrants, often living below the poverty line, can initiate large-scale, long-lasting popular uprisings, especially in repressive autocratic regimes like Syria".

II. Political triggers

Although these inequitable circumstances had existed for a long time in their society, Syrians were afraid to speak up. In all the sessions, participants described a life in which political conversations were simply not had. When they were out in public places, on buses, in taxis, they took extra care not to say anything that might be overheard and interpreted as political or anti-regime sentiments. Interviewee 'Reem' lived in Damascus until she was 24, and explained that: "*if you say anything against the regime, then you have to expect to be taken in a day. You couldn't trust anyone with anything, because you never knew if they would tell. (...) People were living in a state of fear*". She felt that this was the case even for topics that were not directly related to the regime, but within the realm of politics. "*Like even if you're talking about France or the colonisation era. You just didn't hear anyone talking about politics. If you start talking about anything political, you know they will have an open eye on you because you are active*". In her view, the regime did not want Syrians to be involved in political discussions,

which meant Syrian society was very restricted when it came to freedom of speech and political freedom. This aggravated Syrians in the years prior to 2011, as they had no opportunities to alleviate the difficult conditions they felt were getting worse under Bashar al-Assad's rule.

The transition from this state of fear and political inaction was according to many participants inspired by the Arab Spring. This term is used to describe a series of uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa that sought to oust authoritarian regimes, and instill democracy and more equitable economic and political systems ("Arab Spring", 2021). The wave of protests started in Tunisia and Egypt after the toppling of their dictators, Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali and Hosni Mubarak in early 2011, followed by large demonstrations in Libya the same year against the regime of Muammar al-Qaddafi ("Arab Spring", 2021). In both the focus group discussions and interviews, these events were described as important triggers of the Syrian demonstrations. 'Reem', quoted earlier, said the Arab Spring: "*encouraged many people from Syria to go out and say no, stop this operation (oppressive regime), we want democracy, we want our rights*". Another interviewee, 'Mohammed' said he did not think there would have been a revolution in Syria without the inspiration that came from Tunisia, Egypt and Libya. Several participants described themselves, family and friends avidly following social media and news on developments in the region in the late months of 2010 and early months of 2011. 'Hala' from Damascus said her family gathered in the evenings for the latest updates:

> Every Friday there was a new demonstration and they named it different things. It was exciting to see what they were fighting for on that exact day. One Friday would be called like 'freedom' and then crowds of people would gather in the streets to fight for freedom. (...) People in Syria were very inspired by what happened in Libya and Egypt[33].

Several participants expressed an opinion that the Syria-climate conflict thesis does not properly capture the political and historical dimensions of the Syrian uprising. They said the feelings the Arab Spring sparked in Syrians brought together a long history of issues they had wanted to change, but not previously had either inspiration or confidence to act on. Others said the Arab Spring also gave inspiration by reminding Syrians that they were a part of a wider

[33] Translated from Norwegian: *Hver fredag var det en ny demonstrasjon som de kalte forskjellige ting. Det var spennende å følge med på hva de kjempet for akkurat den dagen. En fredag kalte de liksom 'frihet' and da samlet flokker med folk seg på gatene for å kjempe for friheten. Folk i Syria var veldig inspirert av det som skjedde i Libya og Egypt.*

Arab community. When their brothers and sisters in neighbouring countries stood up for change, they felt a responsibility to follow suit. 'Hayyan' from Damascus said:

> When the President in Egypt had to give up his power, people (Syrians) felt we could finally do something. Before that we thought they (the Syrian regime) were too strong, we couldn't get rid of them, but now we could finally make changes and that was a very strong feeling[34].

The wave of pro-democracy uprisings in the region also brought about one of the key triggers of the Syrian demonstrations, namely the graffiti incident in the southwestern town of Darʾā in March 2011. According to both news coverage of the incident and this study's participants, the words "it's your turn, doctor[35]" were spray painted onto a high school wall referring to Syria's Bashar al-Assad who is trained as an ophthalmologist (eye doctor), and inspired by the toppling of other dictators in the region. Bashar al-Assad's cousin, Atef Najib, was appointed the security chief of Darʾā towards the end of 2008, and was renowned for his hard handed ways (Tarabay 2018). After the graffiti was discovered, a group of children whose names were tagged on the same wall, were arrested and taken into custody by Najib's men. What followed is believed to have "entered the lore of the Syrian war origin story", including stories of how the children were tortured in prison (Tarabay 2018, para 24), but 'news' traveled fast and according to several participants, it was what ignited the revolutionary fire in Syria. Interviewee 'Miran' told the story like this:

> When the children's families came to ask about them, they met Atef Najib and his men. (...) He looked down on them and told them big words. He said 'you have no kids, make new ones, and if you don't know how, bring your wives and I'll produce kids for you'.

A month after the children's arrest, the body of 13-year-old Hamza al-Khateeb was returned to his family with visible marks of brutal torture (Verma 2011). "His jaw and both kneecaps had been smashed. His flesh was covered with cigarette burns. His penis had been cut off. Other

[34] Translated from Norwegian: *Da presidenten i Egypt måtte gi fra seg makten følte vi at vi endelig kunne gjøre noe. Før det tenkte vi at makten her var for sterk, vi kunne ikke bli kvitt dem, men nå kunne vi endelig gjøre endringer og det var en veldig sterk følelse.*
[35] Translated from the Arabic words spray painted on a high school wall in Darʾā: اجاك الدور يا دكتور

injuries appeared to be consistent with the use of electroshock devices and being whipped with a cable (Verma 2011, para 3). The other children were released, but Hamza's inhumane treatment caused him to become a symbol of the Syrian Revolution (Verma 2011). 'Miran' said the event created strong reactions across Syria because of the highly controversial contents of Najib's response, explaining "*these are very big, very terrible words to use, especially in the Arab world*". Another participant, 'Hala' from Damascus, said Syrians were stricken with shock because this case had to do with children. She said:

> Before, it was mostly adults who were treated badly, but this time it was children. We thought it could have been our children, that they didn't do anything wrong, why are they being punished? (...) They (the regime) crossed a line by treating children in that way. (...) Of course, this event touched us[36].

III. Historical triggers

Syrians in this study felt that fear gave the Assad regime vitality, partly due to the loom of history; how previous generations of Syrians who spoke out against the ruling Assad power had been treated. As described in the section above, any attempt at political uprising or speech against the regime was met with harsh backlash; death and prison in the most severe cases. One pivotal historical event that was mentioned by multiple participants was the 1982 Hama massacre. In an article in *The Middle East Journal* in 2016, Dara Conduit described the event as the deadliest and most violent in the Middle East's recent history. He explains that from the mid 1970s, violence between factions of the Muslim Brotherhood and other opposition groups in Syria and the Syrian regime had escalated in both frequency and dimension. This culminated in February 1982 when the Syrian army accidentally discovered evidence of a planned uprising in Hama that year, which triggered a response on part of the opposition groups including demonstrations and seizing of government buildings in Hama. On order from then Syrian President, Hafez al-Assad, the father of Bashar al-Assad, the government hit back "by besieging the city for three weeks with a level of brutality unprecedented in contemporary Syria" (Conduit 2016: 214). To this day, no formal report

[36] Translated from Norwegian: *Før var det mest voksne som ble behandlet dårlig, men denne gangen var det barn. Vi tenkte det kunne vært våre barn, de gjorde ikke noe galt, hvorfor blir de straffet? Regimet gikk over en grense med å behandle barn på den måten. Hendelsen rørte oss selvfølgelig.*

about the Hama massacre has been released, meaning there is no official information about the number of deaths or what really took place during the three weeks Hama was besieged. The event, however, is well known to Syrians, even those born long after 1982. Some scholars have even suggested the event "is so renowned that the name 'Hama' has become a 'byword for massacre'" (Seale 1989: 334, cited in Conduit 2016: 211). 'Miran', himself from Hama, said he was in shock when he saw the first reports of demonstrations in Darʾā in 2011 because he was surprised Syrians dared to speak up against the regime. He feared the demonstrators would be met with the same brutal retaliation as in 1982, explaining:

> The massacre in Hama was like a lesson. Okay, like, 'I (Hafez al-Assad) will do the same to you (Syrians) if anyone tries to do the same as in Hama.' (...) I imagined that they were going to be killed, all of them (the 2011 demonstrators).

Another interviewee, 'Zain' from Homs, said it was especially the older generations that lived in fear because of the "*catastrophe*" that took place in Hama. From his point of view, this was why the 2011 demonstrations were predominantly led by younger people and why the 2011 uprising later caused friction between younger and older generations. He said: "*as a young person I wasn't scared, really. (...) The older generation was influenced a lot by it, they didn't want it to happen again, but it's typical when you shut up then you create your own situation, your own injustice*[37]". To him, young people in Syria were tired of being suppressed by a dictatorship that used fear to keep people from resistance. He argued that the 2011 demonstrations were about putting a stop to the stronghold a violent history had held over Syrians because: "*when you (a dictator) just do what you want and nobody says anything against you, then you just continue*[38]".

Another event participants brought up that makes a historical perspective necessary in analysis of the Syrian conflict, is the shift of power in 2000 from Hafez al-Assad to Bashar al-Assad, a transition that required a constitutional change. Hafez al-Assad died on June 10th 2000, and a month later a referendum for the next Syrian president was held with Bashar as the

[37] Translated from Norwegian: *som ung var jeg ikke redd egentlig. Den eldre generasjonen var veldig påvirket av det, de ville ikke at det skulle gjenta seg, men det er typisk når du holder kjeft liksom at du skaper din egen situasjon, din egen urettferdighet.*
[38] Translated from Norwegian: *når du bare gjør hva du vil og ingen sier noe imot deg så bare fortsetter du.*

only candidate. On the ballot was a green circle for 'yes' and a grey circle for 'no' (Kifner 2000). Unsurprisingly, Bashar al-Assad won the referendum and became the 19th president of Syria, but what irked Syrians the most was that the Constitution had to be altered by lowering the minimum age for presidency to 34 years, which was Bashar's age at the time (Kifner 2000). Participants said there was "*a feeling of injustice*". 'Miran', for example, explained that Syrians were hoping for change after the death of Hafez al-Assad, who had served a long and iron-fisted rule of Syria for 30 years. When the referendum confirmed there would be no democratic transition, many were disappointed. He said:

> Syria is a Republic, not a Kingdom. How come al-Assad (Bashar) got the power from his father in just five minutes? And he's the same person, Bashar al-Assad, as his father. He says that I (Bashar) can't change the politics (in Syria) immediately, but when it came to him [becoming president], the politics and Constitution changed in five minutes.

According to 'Miran', this continued a long convention in Syria of a one-party system, where any political mobilisation outside the Assad inner circle was quelled. Moreover, despite a 'new face' representing the Syrian state, 'Miran' along with others, felt Bashar's policies did little else than sustain the oppressive regime his father Hafez had started. He put it this way:

> We have one party, Baʿath. There are other parties, but this is only to show the international community, [make them think] we have more parties. (...) We can't say the other parties are fake, but they belong to the Baʿath party. [Syrians felt] suddenly we are like in North Korea.

Some said the takeover by Bashar al-Assad initially brought optimism to the country because Syrians hoped a young and smart doctor, educated in the West, would bring about some of the changes Syrians had long been rooting for. Bashar also promised a comprehensive set of reforms to make Syria stronger and more modern. Many participants, however, shared the opinion of 'Miran' who said: "*we say in Arabic that they (the Baʿath party) have only 'shiʿār*[39]*' (a logo). It is all for show*". Participants relayed a narrative in which optimism surrounding Bashar

[39] The Arabic شعار means 'logo', in this case the Baʿath party logo.

waned after a few years of his ruling as they realised reformations mainly benefited the already privileged. For example, when the internet and Facebook came to Syria during the first decade of the 21st century, it was subject to the same stringent control and surveillance described above in 'political triggers'.

On the whole, the focus groups and interviews show that narrative three of the Syria-climate conflict thesis, that migrants from the drought contributed to the 2011 demonstrations, does not in the eyes of the Syrian participants adequately capture the inequality, corruption and oppression that had reigned in Syria for decades – the 'governmentality' that had for generations kept Syrians quiet in fear of retaliation. Nor does it sufficiently recognise the political and historical factors that, to Syrians in this study, played a central role in instigating and sustaining their 2011 attempts to bring freedom, change and democracy to Syria. All 79 participants outright rejected narrative three, more so than one and two. I believe this stems from the essence of narrative three, what Hendrix (2017: 251) argues is a much more "politically charged claim" than causality between climate and drought. Any claim made by people who did not themselves experience or 'create' the Syrian Revolution about what caused it will naturally be subject to contentious reactions by those who did experience it. Generally, the literature on the Syria-climate conflict disagrees on the specific importance drought as a transitional stressor and conflict trigger, especially in relation to other factors (Ide 2018). Kelley et al. (2017) argue that a lack of grievances related to drought does not alone stand as proof that drought was not entangled in the complex interplay of triggering variables, but I argue the personal testimony of Syrians who lived a life in Syria before 2011, partook in the demonstrations and have themselves experienced displacement and conflict, at the very least calls for an analysis that accurately weights different variables. Again, according to this study's participants, that means weighting climate change or drought sparsely. The response of Atef Najib, his security forces and the Syrian regime to the Darʾā graffiti, coupled with inspiration from the concurrent wave of uprisings in the region, are to Syrians two important political factors behind the first 2011 demonstrations in Syria. The 1982 Hama massacre and the 2000 constitutional change - historical factors. Every data collection session mentioned freedom and

equality as overarching goals of the Syrian Revolution, with the main driving forces being a long and taxing plight with oppression, inequality, corruption, and general lack of freedoms.

Gleick (2017: 249) argues that Selby et al.'s (2017a) interviews with thirty Syrian refugee families are "interesting, but they have no validity scientifically", to which Selby et al. (2017b: 254) respond by calling the statement a "contemptuous dismissal of . . . swathes of social scientific enquiry". I stand firmly by this response and urge that future studies informing the climate-conflict nexus acknowledge the imperative function, especially as a form of recognition, personal testimony has in producing knowledge about other people, other places, and others' experiences. I believe statements like Gleick's reflect Zondi's (2018) argument, discussed in 4.2.3 on decolonisation discourse, that mainstream narratives and discourse tend to obsessively adhere to fixed conventions when producing knowledge, to the detriment of pursuing deep, broad and nuanced knowledge. The preferred use of quantitative rather than qualitative research in the establishment of the Syria-climate conflict thesis is illustrative of this. Hulme's (2011) view, mentioned in the same chapter, is also interesting in this regard. He argues that quantitative methods are better suited for the creation of policies, meaning policymakers tend to prefer such research designs. The result is a form of climate reductionism, in which quantitative science that grants little value to 'local' inputs, is what drives policymaking around the issue of climate change (Hulme 2011). The discursive power of quantitative knowledge stems from acknowledgement within an epistemic community that favours predictive models, statistical sampling and 'objective' results.

With this in mind, I reiterate my insistence on a political ecology framework in analysis of the Syrian conflict, which tends to study drought consequences in a non environment-centric way, and that goes beyond resource-scarcity narratives (Selby 2018). Political ecology is also inherently normative, in that the counter-narratives it produces, contend what *should* be done, which in this case is including rather than excluding local voices. Edward Said argued in 1985 that science has a need and claim of being 'non-political' - producing a 'silent Other' who requires expert representation. Gleick's (2017) dismissal of local voices in producing reliable knowledge, and the Syria-climate conflict's general undermining of inputs from Syrians, is in my view, an act of coloniality that subordinates Syrian voices in the wider discursive debate. I do,

however, believe Ide (2018: 350) is onto something when he points out that "opportunities for fruitful and policy-relevant insights are missed due to a lack of mutual acceptance between proponents of various methods in the debate on drought and the civil war in Syria". If the pursuit of climate change solutions is indeed the goal, as it appears to be, both qualitative and quantitative studies should strive for more interactive dialogue, also between camps.

5.3 Syrian Perspectives on the Climate-Conflict Nexus

I don't see why this war started in the first place. Now, every family in Syria has a missing person or at least injured. But I feel big countries like Russia and America make the problem (war), and then they want to sell the solution (climate change).

- 29-year-old 'Said' from Damascus, now living in Norway, in an iterview with the student on March 4th, 2021.

Picture 6: submitted by 'Abu' who did not participate in the study, but wanted to contribute with photographs. The picture is taken in 2015 in Kafrsajna, outside Idlib.

This last section on the inputs of this study's 79 Syrian participants, takes a step back and looks at the entire climate-conflict nexus, in which the Syria-climate conflict thesis is situated. It builds on some of the topics addressed in the three narratives above, but focuses particularly on how the participants conceptualise what the thesis calls a 'civil war', or the alleged endpoint of the nexus. It discusses how Syrian participants explain Syria's descent into war and finally, how they perceive the causal relationship between climate change and conflict.

5.3.1 From Revolution to War

When I explained the Syria-climate conflict thesis to the focus groups with Syrians in Turkey, many participants corrected me when using the term 'civil war/conflict'. They explained that from their point of view, there is a distinct difference between the uprising in 2011 and the violent conflict situation that ensued in the later years. Vesco & Buhaug (2020: 152) define civil conflict as "a contested incompatibility between the government of a state and an organized, non-state actor involving the use of armed force". Participants critical to the term explained their view by arguing a) demonstrators in 2011 were not organised and the 'actor' consisted of Syrians across the country, and b) the surging calls for Bashar al-Assad to step down and the 'armed force' happened after the uprisings started, triggered largely by the regime's harsh response to what participants said were peaceful demonstrations. Because of these discussions, I introduced a question about how participants conceptualise the conflict into the focus group with internally displaced Syrians and semi-structured interviews with Syrians in Norway. 'Joram', still living in Syria, explained his view of the conflict evolution:

> When it (the uprising) started here in Syria, it was a revolution for me. [It was about] everything I believe in, everything I look[ed] to change in my country, I thought this was my opportunity to change it. (...) But I think between the lines, over the years it converted into civil war [because] they (the regime) pushed us to this point. (...) I mean, the killing every day, prison, chemical weapons – it all pushed us to fight the regime.

The four participants in this focus group said it was difficult to talk about because they are still living in Syria (although said they felt comfortable talking about it with an 'outsider' on Zoom), but that they want people outside of Syria to understand that the Syrian Revolution was originally about freedom. They believe a classification of the conflict as a civil war is inaccurate, and is more in service to the interests of the Syrian regime and other international actors, than to the Syrians who demonstrated in 2011. 'Joram' said: "*he (Bashar) tried to do anything to make it look like a civil war, but in fact it was people who want[ed] their rights, want[ed] to speak freely. [People] who want[ed] freedom*". 'Joram' believed the regime wanted the world to see the uprising as a civil war to avoid outside support of the "*Syrian fight for democracy*".

Interviewee 'Reem' agreed the 2011 unrest started as a revolution and developed into a civil war, also because of self-interested groups. 'Reem' said alongside the regime, groups amongst the demonstrators developed interests that diverged from the original revolutionary thinking, saying: "*when it (revolution) started, it wasn't organised. Maybe this was its weakest point because groups started fighting each other. (...) [They were] self-interested people who just wanted to have more money, become businessmen. (...) So, later it became civil war*". Those who outright opposed a civil war conceptualisation of the conflict said they were tired of reading the term in Western media because it deprived them of the chance to tell their own story. To these participants, the Western media has misrepresented both their revolution and their suffering, and failed to include Syrians when establishing the discourse. As 'Zain' said:

> I will put it bluntly: civil war is totally wrong. [It's right] there is no longer a revolution, but civil war never happened. The media, other countries, say it's a civil war, but that was only to give them a reason to step in. (...) That people from the same country (Syria), from different religions killed each other [over religion], has never happened[40].

Those who supported claims that the situation in Syria later developed into a civil war were keen to emphasise that discussions of demonstration and conflict triggers must be separated, because to them they are two different events with unique driving forces. A majority of participants did not lend support to the conflict conceptualisation in the Syria-climate conflict thesis: a civil war, because they feel it distorts the context from which the 2011 unrest emerged. In their view, the conflict situation in Syria today is far from the situation that brought Syrians to the streets in 2011. I therefore argue that the Syria-climate conflict thesis and nexus discourse generally, needs a more nuanced conceptualisation of conflict, and to clarify its outcome variable in dialogue with those who experience(d) conflict. Hendrix & Salehyan's (2012) study of climate change and social conflict (e.g., demonstrations) in Africa presents a suited example. It is important to acknowledge the politically charged nature of alleging climate-conflict links, and externally defining ensuing conflict.

[40] Translated from Norwegian: *Jeg sier det rett ut: borgerkrig er helt feil. Det er ikke revolusjon lenger, men en borgerkrig har aldri skjedd. Media, andre land, sier det var borgerkrig, men det var bare for å gi dem en grunn til å gripe inn. At folk fra samme land, fra forskjellige religioner har drept hverandre, det har aldri skjedd.*

5.3.2 Religion as a Tool

Picture 7: submitted by participant 'Amena'. Her niece, herself a Muslim, received Papá Noel from her best friend, a Christian. The picture is taken outside Amena's sister's house in Zabadani in 2014. Papá Noel traveled with the family to Europe as 'refugees'.

Related to conflict conceptualisations was the theme of religion. Participants argued religion was deliberately used by actors opposed to The Revolution to gain the upper hand, especially when it came to public/international opinion. I believe this discussion illustrates how today's Syria is a product of France's divisive colonial policies, especially pertaining to religion, and the West's Orientalist view of the Middle East and its people. In the Jarabulus focus group, 'Joram' said he never experienced any problems of religious tension in Syria before 2011. His experience was that although Alawites and affiliates enjoyed preferential treatment in Syria, people generally respected diverging religious views. Any inter-group disagreements boiled down to discriminatory or unequal treatment rather than not seeing eye to eye on religion matters. However, he believed religion was deliberately used as a tool in the years after 2011.

> It was not a war between religions, I am sure of that. I didn't hear anything about Christians fighting Muslims or anything like this. Maybe parties in Islam are fighting [each other] because the regime did that, they (the regime) took them (religious groups) as a shield and tried to use them [against each other].

He justified this by claiming that the Syrian regime purposefully took advantage of the West's turbulent relationship with Islam to warrant their actions. In his view, the Syrian regime fronted particularly controversial stories and images with Muslim perpetrators to gain international support for what the regime argued were defensive reponses or counterattacks. 'Aboud' in Jarabulus said he thought the international media was equally at fault for giving the conflict a religious character, based on a biased and stereotypical understanding of Islam. He said:

> Most of them (media) see Islam as violent, something bad. Maybe the picture isn't full for them. (...) The bad behaviours (by Islamic groups in Syria) are individual behaviours, but the Western media relate these behaviours to Islam [as a whole]. (...) The reality is totally different. Islam is something great. Islam comes from the word of peace.

'Aboud' also believed the regime saw an opportunity to use this stereotypical view of Islam to win international support. He said: "*the Syrian regime made [out it was like] this: 'there's ISIS and Islamic parties there, so we should invade these areas'. He made it as a justification to invade the areas, with bombing, killing honest people*". This kind of sentiment was expressed by several interviewees, the main point being that they believed the conflict had taken on a religious character in international discourse and narratives because of an already contentious view of the Arab and Muslim world. 'Said' from Damascus said: "*even [in] American movies, when they are filming in the Middle East, like [they depict] people with 'agal*[41]*' and [as] very stupid, with animals like donkeys or sheep. That's not true. It's like a stereotype*".

Participants who did believe religion played a role in the conflict, mostly argued that it became a problem only after 2011, and that international actors involved in Syria were a contributory factor to giving the Syrian conflict a religious character. As 'Nizar' said: "*with every American president, there was a group of extreme Muslims or Islamic groups [they were concerned about]. (...) The religious card was the last one (option), and they (the US) know it's the best [to use]*". Again, the general sentiment amongst participants was that *their* culture and revolution had been conveyed by others - in both inaccurate and Orientalist fashion.

[41] 'Agal' is a head garment worn by men, usually in the Middle East region.

5.3.3 An International Takeover

Another reason participants believed revolution turned into a violent conflict, was what some termed an "*international takeover*" that produced a "*proxy war*". A proxy war is a "a war fought between groups or smaller countries that each represent the interests of other larger powers, and may have help and support from these (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). Some believed outside parties had been involved from long before 2011, and others that their engagement came later. Common for both was that presence of foreign countries in Syria had contributed to transforming their revolution into a full blown war that was no longer a conflict rooted in Syrian interests or internal Syrian affairs. The main actors mentioned were the US, Russia, Israel, Turkey, Iran, and the Gulf states. Interviewee 'Ali' said: "*Syrians still call it a revolution. But, I think it became a war when Russia and other countries got involved. Because in the beginning Syrians only had one enemy, the regime. But eventually they had many*[42]".

Another common denominator amongst the participants who mentioned the involvement of foreign countries in Syria was the opinion that none were there to aid the Syrian population, or any form of peaceful resolution. It was evident that the Syrian participants felt that they had lost any hope of change for Syria, and no longer understood the dynamics of what has and is happening. Several expressed the opinion that countries outside Syria took advantage of the 2011 unrest to fulfill their own interests in the country and region, and that this situation is ongoing, inhibiting any end to the conflict. 'Ali' explained his view:

> USA controls the east (in Syria) and Russia the west, and they don't want to crash. The most important reason Israel [doesn't want an end to the conflict] is that they're scared of who'll come after Bashar, and that they'll do something against Israel. Syria has an important strategic position in the Middle East so nobody wants to let go. Syria is a cake, and each country wants a piece. Everyone gets a piece, except for Syrians[43].

Across the focus group and interview sessions, participants deliberated the different interests they believe have fueled the Syrian proxy war. The dominant theories were vested interests

[42] Translated from Norwegian: *Til nå vil syrere fortsatt kalle det revolusjon. Men, jeg tror det ble krig da Russland og andre land involverte seg i Syria. Fordi i starten hadde syrere kun en fiende, men etter hvert hadde de mange.*
[43] Translated from Norwegian: *USA kontrollerer i øst og Russland i vest og de vil ikke krasje. Den viktigste grunnen er at Israel er redd for hvem som kommer etter Bashar, og at de vil gjøre noe mot Israel. Syria har en veldig viktig strategisk posisjon i Midtøsten så ingen vil gi slipp. Syria er en kake og hvert land vil ha en bit. Alle får en bit bortsett fra syrere.*

related to political power, geopolitics and resources. For example, 'Nizar' from al-Ghab plain, said he thought Israel wanted Syria to descend into a protracted civil war because of Syria's strong pro-Palestine politics. He said: "*Syria was a threat, especially our political attitudes. We are against Israel and their existence in the area, there is no Israel for us, only the occupied Palestine. (...) They (Israel) don't like this, they feel Syria is like a threat*". Another interviewee, 'Mohammed', said he believed countries were there for different reasons, and had entered the Syrian scene with these motives in mind, but deliberately worked to conceal them. He said:

> It's all about power, who will give up first. Is it Russia or Turkey? (...) The only area in the Middle East that Russia controls is in Syria, so if they're out of Syria they have no legs [to stand on] in the Middle East. [Then] it will be Turkey, USA and Iran who control everything. So, that's Russia's interest. (...) The same with Iran who looks at Syria as a kind of partner. It has a lot to do with religion because there are many famous religious people from history buried in Syria, so that has big importance for Shia, and that's Iran's interest. Hezbollah is with Iran. For USA, it's oil, of course. Syria isn't the richest country in oil, but you can see where USA is now. They are in Dīr az-Zūr, they came into the game just because of IS, but that was their excuse in the beginning, because now IS is almost gone, it just isn't talked about in international media anymore. But, they (the US) are where the oil is. So, that shows clearly what their interests are[44].

As mentioned, the opinion that an international takeover had created a proxy war in Syria was coupled with the view that this situation was hindering a peaceful settlement for Syrians. In the focus groups with internally displaced Syrians, they discussed why the conflict is now in its tenth year, and without any prospects of peace. They frequently mentioned (as was done in the interviews) that they reckon there would be peace in Syria tomorrow if the conflict had not taken on the proxy character it holds today. 'Aboud' from the Jarabulus focus group said:

> All the big parties like USA, Russia, Turkey, have a benefit from the ongoing situation in Syria. They have a benefit from this suffering. (...) USA, if it decided to end the Syrian crisis or [topple] the regime, it will not take more than 24 hours to end this crisis. Okay, all of us, all the Syrian people know that (...) but Israel, USA, all the other parties protect the Syrian regime because they have a benefit from this bad ongoing situation.

[44] Translated from Norwegian: *Det handler om makt, hvem som vil gi opp først. Er det Russland eller Tyrkia? Det eneste området i Midtøsten som Russland styrer er i Syria så hvis de er ute av Syria har de ikke bein i Midtøsten. Det vil da bli Tyrkia, USA og Iran som styrer alt. Så det er Russlands interesse. Det samme med Iran som ser på Syria som en slags makker. Det har mye med religion å gjøre fordi mange kjente religionsfolk er begravet i Syria, så det har stor betydning for Shia, og det er Irans interesse. Hezbollah er med Iran. For USA, er det olje så klart. Syria er ikke det rikeste landet med olje, men man ser jo hvor USA er nå. De er i Dīr az-Zūr, de kom inn i spillet bare på grunn av IS, men det var bare deres unnskyldning i begynnelsen, fordi nå er IS nesten borte, det er bare at internasjonal media snakker ikke om det lenger. Så det viser klart hva deres interesser er.*

The other participants said they believed the Syrian Revolution was close to being successful, but was hindered by outside "*interference*". They believed the situation in the first years after 2011 had been in the demonstrator's favour, but skewed in favour of the regime when al-Assad received foreign support in the form of weapons, military forces and discursive power. To them, this was an obvious sign that the involvement of other countries had other intentions than bringing peace to Syria. 'Joram' said: "*if there were not any foreign forces, I think the regime would've fallen back in 2015, or maybe before. I think it [would've been] better if they didn't interfere in the first place, but now we are not the owners of our own destiny*".

5.3.4 Conflict as a Driver of Climate Change

In the focus group with Syrians in Kilis, 'Rifat' said: "*there are main reasons the war broke out, and many tiny [reasons]. This with climate change is one of the very small, remote reasons*[45]". This was a view shared by many, usually followed by rhetorical questions like: "*if climate change creates war, why did it only happen in Syria and not hotter places?*" or "*if drought caused the demonstrations in Syria, does that mean the whole Arab Spring was because of drought*?". Syrians in this study see drought, climate change and drought-migrants as insignificant drivers of the Syrian conflict. What was interesting, however, was the overwhelming majority of participants supporting a reverse sequence of the nexus: that conflict and migration drive climate change. As Vesco & Buhaug (2020) argue future research on the nexus should consider reverse causality to the dominant narrative, I include a section on this.

Participants were mostly concerned about the climate change impacts of conflict, rather than the opposite. A specific example, which has already been mentioned, is how some believe migration left vast areas of previously cultivated land unattended, leading to an acceleration of 'desertification'. Their perception is that drought became more acute in Syria because people migrated from agriculturally important areas like Ḥasaka. Another example was how the conflict forced Syrians post-2011 to adopt unsustainable practices, for instance to

[45] Translated from Norwegian: *Det finnes hovedårsaker til krigen, og mange små. Dette med klimaendringer er en av de veldig små, fjerne årsakene.*

generate electricity during the winters. Several also mentioned illegal cutting of trees, and pollution created by the chemical weapons, bombing and destruction that comes with warfare.

Generally, participants voiced an impression of the Syria-climate conflict thesis as a set of narratives with political underpinnings that makes its claims for political purposes. The two alternative purposes mentioned the most were 1) "*it (the Syria-climate conflict thesis) is just a cover for the regime [to hide behind]*", insinuating that the al-Assad regime use such explanations for the poor drought response and/or causing the war, to dampen their own role in triggering these crises, and 2) to invoke action on climate change. This is in line with Selby's (2020) arguments that Bashar al-Assad's regime specifically utilised the climate-conflict narrative claimed in the Syria-climate conflict thesis to mask over their own culpability in both the preceding agricultural and humanitarian crisis in the Jazira region, as well as the war. Selby (2020: para 14) claims "the Asad regime would regularly take diplomats to the northeast and tell them, 'it all has to do with global warming', blaming what was in essence a state-induced socio-ecological crisis on climatic transformations beyond its control". He argues further that this blame-shifting set off widespread endorsement of the narrative by Western commentators and policymakers with their own interests, allowing alleged climate-conflict links to endure in 'public' channels despite scholarly dispute. Participant perceptions on this can help explain the initial confusion, surprise, provocation and offense taken by several participants in response to the thesis, as they felt it undermines the human and 'unnatural' causes of the regime-induced crises. De Châtel (2014) also argues that a danger of the Syria-climate conflict thesis is the opportunity it presents to decision makers to hide behind 'external' forces such as drought.

'Reem' from Damascus said she could not imagine the Assad regime paying much attention to a thesis about climate change triggers of the unrest in Syria, unless they could use it to: "*divert attention from the real reasons*". From her perspective, the destruction of multiple Syrian cities, pollutive warfare and vast burning of fields at the hands of the government serve as evidence of the regime's neglect of the environment. She thought, however, that the alleged link between climate change and conflict in Syria is a useful strategy for the international community to lift the climate change issue to a top priority position. In this regard, it is noteworthy that the Syria-climate conflict thesis reached peak international endorsement

during the time leading up to the 2015 UN Paris conference on climate change (Selby 2020). 'Reem' suggested the thesis is used to stimulate climate change action, explaining:

> Maybe they (the international community) want to highlight the issue (climate change), make it a big deal. Because the rest of the world is not paying much attention to climate change. So they want to connect it to a serious matter. I don't mean it (climate change) is not a serious problem, but they want to connect it to (...) a problem that's been talked about very much in the world. So, when they connect this (the Syrian war) with this (climate change), they make sure that climate change will be addressed by the strong countries, and will be given more attention than before.

Similar arguments were made by other participants in the focus groups and interviewees, with the addition that Syrians now have more urgent needs to tackle before grappling with climate change. At the end of several of the data collection sessions, upon me asking if they had anything they wanted to add, participants said there are few Syrians in the world today who are not affected by the events that unravelled since 2011. Whether still in Syria, or in other countries, the memories, traumas and losses brought on by the war have left Syrians with considerable physical and psychological wounds. A few also raised the concern that many family members and friends are still in prison and unaccounted for. They do not know whether they are still alive, or what fate they have met after imprisonment. 'Usama' in the focus group with internally displaced Syrians summarised this point by saying:

> I think climate change is [an] important issue, but here in Syria we are facing more urgent needs. Now, I left my home, I left my beloved city, Damascus, I have land there. I left everything back there, so I don't have much care for [whether] the climate is getting better or not. (...) What we're all (Syrians) concerned [about] is how to get back to our homes, to our lands, to see our lives again. [We want the] killing to stop. I think those ideas are more urgent than climate change, which is happening all the time.

A general trend in all sessions was that Syrians worry a thesis alleging a link between climate change and the Syrian conflict will distract the world from more pressing issues, and impede a peaceful resolution. Participants also expressed a sense of injustice related to not defining their own situation or solution. Especially those participants now living in Norway, said they had

given up hope of peace in Syria or ever returning to their homeland. This was partly due to a feeling that they as Syrians had lost control of what started as their revolution, but also because they had now experienced first hand what they had tried to fight for in Syria a decade ago: freedom. 'Said' finalised his interview by saying:

> I hope this never happens, but if Norway has a war, I swear I will be the first one going to the military. Because I feel this is my home now. The home who gives you safety, gives you a house, a roof, that you need to be living with respect. I will always want to do something for Norway for what they gave to me.

My point with discussion of the participants' view on conflict evolution and conflict as a driver of climate change is that the Syria-climate conflict thesis, as is often the case with climate-conflict narratives (e.g the Darfur case), underplay the complexity of conflict triggers and moreover, what is meant by 'conflict' or 'unrest'. Political ecology studies of conflict tend to dig deeper in search of conflict drivers, whilst maintaining a respect for ecological factors. None of the studies referenced in my dissertation argue for sole environmental, social or political conflict triggers, but I contend that the inputs of this study's Syrian voices urge a counter-narrative to the Syria-climate conflict thesis that recognises the 'winners' and 'losers' in the dominant security-oriented narratives. Swift's (1996) counter-narrative of desertification in Africa provides an apt example, which was driven by a participatory political ecology approach. He argues that the dominant desertification narratives in Africa tended to be aligned with government and international interests, making them the winners, to the detriment of farmers and herders, who thus became the losers. I believe this argument is also applicable to the Syria-climate conflict narrative as well as the broader nexus literature. In alignment with Le Billon & Duffy (2018), I argue that the role of environmental change in the Syrian case should be considered as context or consequences, rather than cause.

5.4 Calling for a Decolonisation of the Syria-Climate Conflict Thesis

The discussion about decolonization is . . . about on whose terms stories are told.

- Benjaminsen & Svarstad in 'Political Ecology: A Critical Engagement with Global Environmental Issues' (2021: 4).

In discussion of the climate-conflict nexus and narrative one to three in the Syria-climate conflict thesis, I argued for an analysis of environmental factors in the Syrian conflict more aligned with political ecology. To achieve this, I believe the thesis is in need of 'decolonisation'. The decolonisation of narratives is presented by Benjaminsen & Svarstad (2021) as promising trends in political ecology, which as noted, tends to organise its analyses around a 'hatchet' and 'seed' dichotomy. Building on the Orientalism and decolonisation discourses described in chapters 4.2.2 and 4.2.3, this section elaborates on this study's hatchet: deconstruction of the Syria-climate conflict thesis to illustrate its colonial undercurrents, and seed: the prescriptive alternative narrative, based on participant's senses of justice. I thus subject the Syria-climate conflict thesis to anti-Orientalist critique in which the justice dimension of recognition is key, to adequately reflect viewpoints put forth by Syrian participants in this study.

5.4.1 The Hatchet: Deconstructing the Syria-Climate Conflict Thesis

The above quote illustrates the essence of decolonial thinking - whose values and knowledge are promoted in accounts of conflict and the environment with discursive power, such as those found in academic studies, journalism and policies (Benjaminsen & Svarstad 2021). The security-oriented Syria-climate conflict thesis presents one such account. 'The story' is constructed with scant input from Syrians themselves, depriving them of the opportunity to define their own situation and solutions, and moreover, to influence the leading discourse with their own worldviews and values. Despite critics arguing that decolonisation may cause more relativism, i.e., lead us astray in search for 'true knowledge' (Benjaminsen 2018), I believe a decolonisation lens leads to more accurate and nuanced knowledge that reveals embedded power issues and goes beyond speaking on behalf of others. Edward Said's Orientalism argues

that "Western cultural expressions can be seen more as reflections of the interests of Western actors, than as presentations of reality in the Orient" (Benjaminsen & Svarstad 2021:44). 'Others' are not just being spoken for, but the speakers bear with them key messages. I argue the Syria-climate conflict thesis should be viewed as a Western cultural expression of an 'Oriental reality' based on the fact that its underpinning evidence is provided by scholars from US and UK institutions[46], with only a single reference to Syrian input (in Kelley et al. 2015), taken from a journalistic article by Thomas L. Friedman. No methodological strategy was employed in any of the studies to reflect Syrian viewpoints - the only empirical backing consists of quantifiable variables, predictive models and environmentally-centric readings of the conflict. Hulme (2011) argues such procedures are more useful to policymakers than humanistic narratives of social reality, creating a form of climate reductionism that grants discursive power to proponents of quantitative findings rather than qualitative. This form of 'scientification' of narratives excludes Syrian perspectives from the conversation and provides stronger actors such as the UN and Syrian government the opportunity to promote their political agendas (Benjaminsen 2018). I contend that the policies promoted are based on a Western pursuit of climate change mitigation and avoiding potential security outcomes such as refugees, rather than policies the participants in this study appear to desire: a peaceful resolution and democratic transition in a country still tormented by war. The Orient is spoken for by the Occident, within a Eurocentric framework that subordinates certain forms of knowledge through coloniality (Martin et al. 2016). Gleick's (2017) remark on the scientific invalidity of interviews with regard to what *really* happened in Syria, is a quintessential example of how the Syria-climate conflict thesis undermines the value of Syrian people's knowledge and interests.

Additionally, I argue that the Syria-climate conflict thesis exerts strong colonial undertones that express a taken-for-granted superiority of Western thinking of all others. During France's mandate over Syria, France entered the scene with little knowledge about the cultural and social context. France believed it had to make decisions on Syria's behalf and that Syria had to be represented internationally because it was itself unable to do so - like a parent

[46] Femia & Werrell (2012): Washington Center for Climate and Security; Gleick (2014): Pacific Institute in Oakland, California; Kelley et al. (2015): University of California & Columbia University; Werrell et al. (2015): Washington Center for Climate and Security & Oxford University.

to a child (Kargin 2018). The fact that the Syria-climate conflict thesis was established, and allowed to disseminate its notions in public fora with such weak personal testimony from Syrians, is to me a reflection of a sentiment held previously by the French: Syria is not mature enough to narrate its own development. As Roe (1991; 1999) argued with development narratives, the Syria narrative can be seen as an attempt to aid decision-making related to climate change, which although most agree is happening, remains subject to uncertainty in terms of solutions. The result is a simplified explanation of a complex conflict with intricate triggers reaching far beyond climatic conditions - without much inclusion of Syria's cultural and social context. As many participants pointed out, Syria is not resource poor, but distribution is inequitable. Reuveny (2007) for example argues that under-developed societies most susceptible to climate change, will based on their underdevelopment force its inhabitants to move, making the event of conflict outcomes more likely. "Their voice will be ineffective in bringing about mitigation efforts" (Reuveny 2007: 658). Not only do such utterances suggest mitigation policies are the ultimate goal of climate-conflict narratives, but also that subordinate people in the front line of climate change impacts have dispensable voices. In analyses of climate-conflict relations it is vital to acknowledge the legacy of colonialism and the fact that climate change impacts manifest themselves in contexts highly influenced by the global political economy, and where most anthropogenic effects have been and are driven by the wealthy and powerful (often Western nations) over the last one hundred years (Dalby 2017).

Those who have publicly lent support to a climate-conflict narrative in Syria include Obama, Prince Charles and UN officials (Selby et al. 2017a). This shows how a securitised notion of climate change is currently the leading discourse among policymakers with its discursive power trickling down to discursive narratives such as the Syria-climate conflict thesis. Despite high contestation, the Syria-climate conflict thesis' discursive power is strengthened by the dominant position of the discourse it is situated in. A key problem with this is the way it can and does obscure more potent conflict triggers, which not only hinders accountability for those responsible for conflict, but also distracts us from conflict drivers we *should* be paying attention to. With a clearer focus on historical, political and social drivers of conflict in Syria prior to 2011,

perhaps the country's descent into war would not have come as such a surprise as Goodwin (2011) and Femia & Werrell (2013) contend it did, or better yet, been avoided altogether.

My critique is not of security discourse per se. I have presented examples of critical security thinkers whose work demonstrate more nuanced accounts of climate/environmental security, but there are still issues with whose values are represented, and how discursive power can be achieved without equitable and empirical backing - "poor science" (Benjaminsen & Svarstad 2021: 236). Daoudy (2020) notes that despite critical voices in environmental security discourse, Western perspectives still prevail in dominant narratives, marginalising or even silencing non-Western perspectives, in a way that "echo many of the cultural and colonial constructs of the nineteenth century, which were inspired by environmental determinism" (Daoudy 2020: 25). She argues that research needs to investigate how use of un-nuanced definitions by scholars, policymakers etc. allow biases and values to prevail that prioritise Western interests. As previously argued, this would include Jackson's (2020) imperative to negotiate security definitions with communities. The ultimate aim of securitisation, to incite action, backfires when key actors like community members are left out of the conversation.

In my view, the Syria-climate conflict thesis is riddled with Orientalist biases, such as the Orient's inability to represent themselves, take care of the environment and their alleged habit of resorting to violent conflict in the face of resource scarcity. This I see as a form of Environmental Orientalism (Hoffman 2018), which aims to maintain an image of the West as superior to the rest in environmental management, and *could* be used to slyly provide 'scientific' justification for Western intervention, for example to avoid 'climate refugees' reaching European territory. The double standards are clear, considering "society, while capable and empowered to subjugate nature on a global scale in the West, is reduced to a passive recipient of largely uncontrollable forces in the Middle East" (Hoffman 2018: 96-97). The 'civil war' conceptualisation also appears to be based on cultural and religious biases, as well as externalist perspectives, which are all key to Edward Said's Orientalism concept. The result is that Syrians are stripped of their agency and more important conflict drivers are depoliticised and pushed into the background in favour of securitised notions of climate change. Ide (2018) argues the Syria-climate conflict literature does not depoliticise the conflict

by focusing on drought as there is plenty mention of the Assad regime's faults. My critique, however, is equally based on the thesis' neglect of *listening* to Syrian voices whose sentiments in this study are that the climate-conflict narratives do depoliticise the conflict triggers.

On the topic of securitisation, it is also worth reiterating Jackson's (2020) point that what securitisation does is more important than what it means. As emphasised, one of the alleged security concerns of the climate-conflict nexus is the 'threat' it represents to Western countries who might be the recipient of millions of future climate refugees. In other words, the nexus securitises the potential outcomes of predicted climate-induced migration (Icduygy & Nimer 2020). With the fight against extremist terrorism high on the list of security threats for Western nations, as well as asylum/migration policies becoming increasingly prickly in these countries, it could be argued that climate-conflict narratives such as the Syrian case are an instrument for demonstrating the potentially devastating consequences of climate change for the West as well - an instrument to incite action. Although I fully support action on climate change, I am apprehensive to the use of scare tactics that rely on predicted outcomes and contested narratives, and that do not sufficiently acknowledge the West's dominant role in causing anthropogenic climate change that is predominantly felt now in the Global South.

Lastly, participants in this study said the Syrian Revolution was a struggle for freedom. Philosopher Hegel argued that all freedom struggles are essentially about the need for both recognition and respect of others (Martin et al. 2016). I believe the pursuit of freedom and recognition continues for Syrians today, as the participants' comments on protracted conflict, lack of support and feeling of misrepresentation suggest. The reading of justice as recognition rests on the notion that when actors are misrecognised, they become subject to social subordination (Svarstad & Benjaminsen 2020). According to Fraser (2000, cited in Svarstad & Benjaminsen 2020) misrecognition takes the form of cultural domination, non-recognition or disrespect. The Syria-climate conflict thesis expresses a form of Western cultural domination over the Middle East, non-recognition and disrespect of its inhabitants by excluding Syrians from the conversation, and focusing on conflict triggers rather than solutions. The justice prioritised through the Syrian-climate conflict thesis is environmentally-oriented, obscuring what Syrians themselves express as *their* own needs – of security, justice and recognition.

5.4.2 The Seed: Recognition

Equal recognition is not just the appropriate mode for a healthy democratic society. Its refusal can inflict damage on those who are denied it.

- Charles Taylor in 'The Politics of Recognition' (1992: 36).

In line with Walker's (2006; 2007) call for more policy and politics in political ecology, I will use this last section to lay out the 'seed' of my study. Essentially, what is the practical use of a decolonised deconstruction of the Syria-climate conflict thesis and what alternative approaches to climate-conflict studies may come out of viewing the thesis through a political ecology lens. To do so, I lean on Svarstad & Benjaminsen's (2020) decolonised notion of recognition, with senses of justice as a key component. This is for the sake of constructing what they call decolonial epistemologies; knowledge created with locals.

Senses of justice seek out narratives of marginalised groups otherwise excluded from dominating discourse. The approach asks whose recognition is desired, but also for what function (Svarstad & Benjaminsen 2020). An objective of my dissertation has been to bring Syrian voices to fore. Not only on the basis of moral imperative, but also to equip us with a more robust empirical foundation to understand this century's worst humanitarian crisis. To me it seems clear that Syrian participants in this study desire our recognition - the ones reading the news articles, influencing policy and public opinion, and the ones analysing their revolution and later, war. This for the function of being recognised as human beings that peacefully attempted to change their country. Actors working with the climate-conflict nexus, and Syrian conflict specifically, should strive to base their work on community senses of justice, which concern both conflict triggers and solutions. We must listen, not simply convey. Recognition in a decolonised sense, is achieved by studying and including local, often marginalised, voices, rather than claiming to recognise by applying external perspectives to situations involving others (Svarstad & Benjaminsen 2020). By listening, I believe it is easier to avoid stereotypical and Orientalist accounts of nature-society relations when discussing 'others' in 'other' places.

Policies and academic studies should also be more transparent about their agendas. If a securitised notion of climate change is employed, a justification of this should be disclosed.

Given the many uncertainties concerning what a warmer world will mean for human life, providing such transparent justifications will make it easier to overcome uncertainty, achieve more socially just solutions, and debunk theories that are not empirically viable. Opening up for critique of suggested narratives or predicted outcomes will likely spur more practical information to use in formation of policies, conflict resolution and public opinion.

The final component of my seed is to continue endeavours, especially scientific ones, seeking to understand the intricate relationship between nature and society using nature conceptualisations that appreciate nature's social backbone and potential impacts of their research. If there are causal links between climate change and conflict, it is vital we understand what mechanisms can be put in place to prevent or alleviate both human and environmental suffering. This should be done with candid scientific methods, sound evidence and morally viable intent. Scholars should aspire to avoid pressures from policymakers to frame results around political agendas. As Hendrix (2017: 252) noted in comment to nexus research: "both the public and policy community are keen to link abstract, probabilistic mechanisms to particular cases, and thus scholars face implicit encouragement to frame their results in terms of cases that seem to fit the causal processes they seek to model". Nature-society research should strive to establish what is needed for a symbiotic relationship between humans and the environment. It is also worth revisiting Ide's (2018: 352) point that climate-conflict research currently falls short in three important regards: "[1] limited dialogue between proponents of different methods and a lack of acceptance of contrasting approaches, [2] an overstatement of differences rather than a triangulation of findings and search for a reliable middle ground, and [3] a lack of theoretical engagement". I agree that there are points of convergence amongst proponents and critics of the Syria-climate conflict thesis and general climate-conflict nexus, that are downplayed in the debate. I therefore support his encouragement for future climate-conflict research to focus on cross-fertilisation, for as Selby et al. (2017a: 241) put it: "the case for international action on climate change is strong enough without resort to dubious evidence of its impacts on the Syrian civil war". As is becoming uncomfortably clear, we do have a crisis on our hands - an environmental crisis. And its impacts and remedies will eventually affect every single one of us.

6.0 Conclusion

My objective has been to contribute to an assessment of the climate-migration-conflict nexus as applied to the Syria conflict by investigating how Syrians perceive and react to this alleged link. A second objective has been to bring Syrian voices to the fore. Both with the ultimate aim of being better equipped to understand and deal with future nature-society relations that will likely change significantly in the face of exacerbating climate change. I have carried out my study with a political ecology lens that allowed me to explore underlying, historical, political and social issues alongside the environmental, and a qualitative research design that aided me in deciphering discursive narratives emerging from my data.

Based on four focus group discussions and fifteen semi-structured interviews with a total of 79 Syrian participants, I argue that the Syrian conflict was neither scarcity nor climate-driven as the Syria-climate conflict thesis suggests, but rather a result of coarse living conditions that generations of Syrians had endured under Baʿathist rule, that culminated in widespread uprising after key events in early 2011, such as the Arab Spring. My analysis uncovers colonial, Malthusian, and environment-centric undercurrents in the Syria-climate conflict thesis as well as in broader securitised notions of climate change. It is also critical of the widespread endorsement climate-conflict narratives enjoy in the media and 'grey literature' without, from my perspective, possessing the empirical backing to do so. Using the analytical tools of narrative analysis and political ecology, I call for a decolonisation of the Syria-climate conflict thesis with recognition and senses of justice as key components.

My main critique of the Syria-climate conflict thesis is its primary focus on anthropogenic drought and population pressures as conflict drivers. Although the thesis makes some mention of other drivers, it is evident that the three peer-reviewed articles supporting its claims, grant such significance to climate change as conflict-inducing to establish application of a climate-conflict narrative to the Syrian war. I believe the thesis' discursive power and journey into popular debate is aided by its location in the broader environmental security discourse that currently holds a leading position. I have argued that this discursive power excludes important inputs and subordinates local voices in a discussion they have every right to be a

part of. I argue further that current discursive narratives alleging climate-conflict links obfuscate accountability, undermine agency and exert Orientalist and colonial sentiment by failing to include qualitative inputs from those who have lived the phenomena they seek to explain. Such methods echo what Edward Said critiqued Orientlist scholars for: representing the Other because they cannot represent themselves.

I have no intention of undermining important research efforts on the effects of climate change on human life or why conflict arises. But I urge that future endavours are done *with* and *for* those affected, whether by climate change, conflict or both. Us-Them binaries still prevail and the West and the Rest divide lives on generations after the formal end of colonialism - and only serve to impede resolutions and solutions to the crises we have on our hands. Further, it is evident that scholars writing on the climate-migration-conflict nexus are fixated on disagreements and divides rather than potential cross-fertilisation. The magnitude of *our* global environmental crisis should pull us – from communities to scholars - together in pursuit of a vital and very common goal: the health and vitality of both environmental and human nature.

6.1 Future Research

I believe further efforts are needed in exploring the specific alleged links in the Syria-climate conflict thesis to assess the theory's applicability to other contexts. Specifically, more research is needed on the theoretical argument leading from alleged drought-migration to the onset of civil unrest. This should be done in close dialogue with those who moved from northeastern Syria in 2008/2009. I also believe more mixed-methods approaches can lead to fruitful insights into if and how climate change was a conflict driver in Syria.

On the broader topic of the climate-migration-conflict nexus, it seems more nuanced conceptualisation of conflict outcomes should be explored. Some literature suggests that climate-conflict links may be easier to prove scientifically when the conflict outcome is of a less violent sort, for example, social conflict. The topic of 'positive peace' is also a topic that presents promise within the nexus literature, but has hitherto received less attention. These topics all offer opportunities for future research, but have been beyond the scope of this study.

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MSc International Environmental Studies
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Appendix I - Agenda for Mock Focus Group

Agenda – Mock Focus Group Discussion

22nd January 2021

14:00-14:10 Introduction of research project and mock discussion: What are the aims for today?
14:10-14:30 Plenary discussion format of following questions:

Theme(s)	**Main Question(s)**	**Subtopic(s)**
Migratory Experience(s)	What experience have you had with migration over the last few years? Why did you move? Why did you move to Turkey?	Where are you originally from in Syria? Did climate change have anything to do with your migration? E.g., loss of farmer livelihood, food insecurity etc.
Droughts 2000-2011	What experience did you have with drought between 2000 and 2011? Was it an important issue to you? Why? (Explain how it was talked about) What is your opinion/ideas about what caused the drought(s)?	Where did you get information about the drought? Did it affect your household in any particular ways? Do you think humans have caused climate change/environmental problems like pollution? Do you see nature and humans/society as separate?

14:30-15:00 Breakout room, group discussion format of following questions:

Climate-Migration-Conflict thesis	*Researcher explains simply the theory that climate change played a significant role in triggering the Syrian war* – what are your reactions to this? Do you agree/disagree? Please explain. What do you think were the main cause(s) of the war in Syria?	Do you think climate change played a role? Alternatively, ask about 'nature'/'environment'
Future	What are your goals/dreams/plans/options for the future? Do you plan/hope to return to Syria? Why/why not?	What are the most important issues to you with regard to the future? Do you think climate change/the natural environment will influence your options/decisions?

15:00-15:30 Feedback session: Suggestions for improvement

- What questions worked well, and which ones did not? Should any questions/topics be changed?
- Were the questions comfortable to answer? Are they appropriately worded?
- Questions, uncertainties. Was anything unclear?
- What format did you prefer – plenary discussion or breakout rooms?
- Practical: did you have enough time to answer questions? How was the timing of the session?

= approx. 90 minutes

Appendix II - Focus Group Interview Guide (English)

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Interview Guide I – Focus Group Discussions

Approximate Time	Theme(s)	Main Question(s)	Subtopic(s)
5 mins	Introduction	Explain project focus and objectives, and how the FGD is organised. Emphasise that there are no right or wrong answers and the objective is to understand perceptions and experiences. The debate so far has not included many Syrian voices – I hope this can be an opportunity to change that.	Repeat informed consent, and ask about recording.
5 mins	Climate Change	What does climate change mean to you? Do you think climate change is an important issue? Who is it important for? Do you think climate change is caused by humans?	What do you think should be done to tackle climate change? Do you see nature and humans/society as separate?
15 mins	Climate-Migration-Conflict thesis	*Researcher explains simply the thesis simply* – what are your reactions to the thesis? Have you heard about climate change playing a role in the conflict before? Please explain. Do you think climate change was a factor in triggering the war in Syria? What do you think were the most important triggers of the conflict?	Please explain reaction. If yes, what and where have you heard about it? How important? Please explain. Please give examples.
15 mins	Drought in Syria between 2000-2011	What experience did you have with drought in Syria between 2000 and 2011? Was it an important issue to you? Why? (Explain how it was talked about) What are your perceptions about what caused the drought(s)? In your experience, what were the consequences of drought (if participants answer yes to the existence of drought)?	Was it common/uncommon? Where did you get information about the drought? Did it affect your household in any particular ways? Do you think humans have caused drought? Did you experience increasing/worsening drought in Syria before the conflict?
15 mins	Migratory Experience(s)	Have you had any experience with climate or drought-related migration over the last years? If yes, please explain what the climate-related reason was. What were your experiences with internal migration in Syria between 2000 and 2011? Do you think climate-related migration has been a big issue in Syria over the last few years? Please explain. Did this kind of migration cause problems in the places people moved to?	Did you move from a farming/agriculture area? Were you involved in agriculture? Please explain reasons for migration. Give examples. E.g., water shortages, drought etc. Did it increase?
5	Conclusion	Thank participants and explain process ahead (e.g., when the thesis will be submitted and published), that they have the right to withdraw their participation at any time etc. Refer to informed consent letter.	Respondent validation of discussion/answers. Anything participants would like to add?

= approx. 60 minutes

*State that respondents should not mention any third parties (e.g., family members) with identifiable details such as their name.

Appendix II - Focus Group Interview Guide (Norwegian)

MSc International Environmental Studies
Student: Iselin Shaw of Tordarroch, iselinshaw@gmail.com
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Intervjuguide I – Fokusgrupper

Ca. tid	**Tema**	**Hovedspørsmål**	**Delspørsmål/tema**
5 min	Introduksjon	Forklar prosjektets fokus og mål og hvordan fokusgruppen er organisert. Understrek at det ikke er noen rette eller gale svar og målet mitt er å forstå deres persepsjoner og erfaringer.	Repeter samtykke og spør om det er greit å ta opptak av fokusgruppe diskusjonen.
5 min	Klimaendringer	Hva betyr klimaendringer for deg? Tror du klimaendringer er viktig? Hvem er det viktig for? Tror du at klimaendringer er menneskeskapte?	Hva mener du burde gjøres med klimaendringer? Ser du på natur/miljø og mennesker/samfunn som separate?
15 min	Syria-klimakonflikt tesen	*Student gir en enkel forklaring av tesen* – hva er dine reaksjoner til denne teorien? Har du hørt om at klimaendringer har spilt en rolle i konflikten? Vennligst forklar. Tror du at klimaendringer bidro til å forårsake krigen i Syria? Vennligst forklar. Hva tror du var de viktigste årsakene til konflikten?	Vennligst forklar reaksjonen. Hvis ja, hva og hvor har du hørt det? Hvor viktig? Vennligst forklar. Vennligst gi eksempler.
15 min	Tørke i Syria mellom 2000 og 2011	Hva slags erfaringer hadde du med tørke i Syria mellom 2000 og 2011? Var det en viktig sak for deg? Hvorfor? (forklar hvordan det ble snakket om) Hva er dine tanker rundt hva som forårsaket tørken? Basert på dine erfaringer, hva var konsekvensene av tørken (hvis deltagere svarer ja på at det var tørke)?	Var det vanlig/uvanlig? Hvor fikk du informasjon om tørken fra? Påvirket det husholdningen din på noen måte? Tror du at tørke er menneskeskapt? Erfarte du at tørke i Syria ble verre/skjedde oftere i Syria før krigen?
15 min	Erfaringer med migrasjon	Har du noe erfaring med klima- eller tørkerelatert migrasjon i de siste årene? Hvis ja, vennligst forklar de klimarelaterte årsakene. Hva var dine erfaringer med intern migrasjon i Syria mellom 2000 og 2011? Tror du at klimarelatert migrasjon var en alvorlig sak i Syria de siste årene før krigen? Skapte denne type migrasjon problemer der folk flyttet til?	Flyttet du fra et jordbruksområde? Var du involvert i jordbruk? Vennligst forklar årsaker og gi eksempler. For eks. vannmangel, tørke osv. Økte det?
5	Konklusjon	Takk deltagere og informer om veien videre (innleveringsfrist, publisering osv.), at de kan trekke seg når som helst hvis de ønsker. Henvis til informasjons/samtykkebrevet.	Oppsummer diskusjonspunkter/svar for å sjekke at deltagere er enig i studentens tolkning. Noe deltagerne ønsker å tilføye?

= ca. 60 min

* Nevn at deltagere ikke må nevne tredjeparter (for eks. familiemedlemmer) med identifiserbare detaljer som navn.

Appendix II - Focus Group Interview Guide (Arabic)

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دليل المقابلة الأول - سوريون في تركيا

الوقت التقريبي	الموضوع	السؤال (الأسئلة) الرئيسية	المواضيع الفرعية
5 دقائق	المقدمة	شرح نقاط تركيز المشروع وأهدافه وكيف يتم تنظيم مجموعات التركيز. أكِّد على عدم وجود إجابات صحيحة أو خاطئة، والهدف هو فهم التصورات والتجارب. لم يشمل النقاش حتى الآن العديد من الأصوات السورية - وآمل أن تكون هذه فرصة لتغيير ذلك.	الموافقة المستنيرة الشفوية، واسأل عن التسجيل
15 دقيقة	تجربة (تجارب) الهجرة	هل لديك أي خبرة مع الهجرة المتعلقة بالمناخ على مدى السنوات القليلة الماضية؟ إذا كانت الإجابة بنعم، يرجى توضيح السبب المتعلق بالمناخ. هل تعتقد أن الهجرة المرتبطة بالمناخ كانت مشكلة كبيرة في سوريا على مدى السنوات القليلة الماضية (على سبيل المثال، فقدان سبل معيشة المزارعين، ونقص المياه، والجفاف، وانعدام الأمن الغذائي)؟	هل انتقلت من منطقة زراعية؟
10 دقائق	الجفاف 2000-2011	ما هي تجربتك مع الجفاف بين عامي 2000 و2011؟ هل كانت قضية مهمة بالنسبة لك؟ لماذا ا؟ (اشرح كيف تم الحديث عنها) ما هو رأيك / أفكارك حول سبب الجفاف؟	من أين حصلت على معلومات عن الجفاف؟ هل أثرت على أسرتك بأي طريقة معينة؟ هل تعتقد أن البشر تسببوا في تغير المناخ/ مشاكل بيئية مثل التلوث؟
15 دقيقة	أطروحة المناخ - الهجرة - الصراع	يشرح الباحث ببساطة النظرية القائلة بأن التغير المناخي لعب دورًا مهمًا في إشعال الحرب السورية - ما هي ردود أفعالك على ذلك؟ هل توافق / لا توافق؟ يرجى توضيح. ما رأيك في ان تغير المناخ عاملاً مهمًا في إشعال الحرب في سوريا؟	هل تعتقد أن تغير المناخ لعب دورًا على الإطلاق؟ يرجى توضيح بدلاً من ذلك، اسأل عن الطبيعة/البيئة
10 دقائق	تغير المناخ	ماذا يعني تغير المناخ بالنسبة لك؟ هل تعتقد أن تغير المناخ قضية مهمة؟ لمن هو مهم؟ هل تعتقد أن سبب تغير المناخ هو الإنسان؟	برأيك ما الذي يجب فعله لمعالجة تغير المناخ؟ هل ترى الطبيعة والبشر/المجتمع منفصلين؟
5 دقائق	استنتاج	اشكر المشاركين واشرح العملية مسبقًا (على سبيل المثال، موعد تقديم الأطروحة ونشرها)، وأن لديهم الحق في سحب مشاركتهم في أي وقت وما إلى ذلك. ارجع إلى خطاب الموافقة المستنيرة.	

تقريبا 60 دقيقة

اذكر أنه لا ينبغي للمستجيبين ذكر أي أطراف ثالثة (على سبيل المثال، أفراد العائلة) بتفاصيل يمكن تحديدها مثل أسمائهم.

Appendix III - Semi-structured Interview Guide (English)

Interview Guide II – Semi-Structured Interviews

Time	Theme	Main Points/Questions	Sub Questions
5	Introduction	Master's thesis, project focus, your contribution, the interview	
5	Your background	How old are you, your occupation or study background, why you wanted to participate in this project? Where in Syria are you from?	 Did you move from an area with a lot of farming/agriculture? Were you involved in the sector?
15	Syria Climate-Conflict Theory	*Student sums up the Syria-climate conflict thesis*. What is your immediate reaction to the thesis? Please explain. Is this a theory you have heard about before? Do you agree/disagree?	*Sum up overall impression of reaction*. Is this correct? If yes, please explain where.
20	Drought and migration in Syria before the conflict	What experience did you have with drought in Syria before the conflict? What does drought mean to you? Was it an important issue to you? Why? (How was it talked about?) What are your perceptions about what caused/causes drought? In your experience, what were the consequences of drought in Syria? Did you or anyone you know have to migrate because of drought-related issues? What were your experiences with internal migration in Syria before the conflict?	Please give examples of years/time/duration. Was drought common/uncommon? Was it getting worse/more frequent? Do you think humans cause drought? Were there other reasons for migration? Please explain. Did it cause problems? Why?
20	The Syrian Revolution, demonstrations/war	How do you conceptualise the conflict? Was it a civil war? Do you think climate played a role in triggering either the demonstrations or the war in Syria? What do you think were the most important causes of the demonstrations? What were the main/most important reasons that started the war?	Please explain. Do you think climate change was an important factor? Please explain. What were the demonstrations about? Did it change? Why do you think the demonstrations evolved into a violent conflict?
	Life in Syria	Did life change in any way after Bashar al-Assad came to power? How did you feel about the regime before the revolution?	*Students explains what they have read*.
5	Conclusion	Explain process ahead (deadline, withdrawal), contact details etc.	Any comments? Anything you want to add?

*State that respondents should not mention any third parties (e.g., family members) with identifiable details such as their name.

= approx. 70 mins

Appendix III - Semi-structured Interview Guide (Norwegian)

Intervjuguide II – Semi-Strukturerte Intervjuer

Tid	**Tema**	**Hovedtema/spørsmål**	**Delspørsmål**
5	Introduksjon	Masteroppgaven, prosjektets mål, ditt bidrag, selve intervjuet	
5	Din bakgrunn	Hvor gammel er du, hva driver du med, hvorfor ønsket du å delta? Hvor i Syria er du fra?	 Flyttet du fra et område med mye landbruk? Var du involvert i sektoren?
15	Syria-klimakonflikt teorien	*Studenten oppsummerer tesen*. Hva er din umiddelbare reaksjon på teorien/tesen? Vennligst forklar. Har du hørt om denne teorien før? (at klima spilte en rolle). Er du enig/uenig? Vennligst forklar.	*Oppsummer deres svar*. Er det riktig? Hvis ja, hvor og hvordan?
20	Tørke og internmigrasjon i Syria før konflikten	Hva slags erfaringer hadde du med tørke i Syria før konflikten? Hva betyr tørke for deg? Var det en viktig sak for deg? Hvorfor? (hvorfor ble det snakket om?) Hva er dine tanker om hva som forårsaker/et tørke? Hva tror du var konsekvensene av tørke i Syria? Måtte du eller noen du kjenner migrere internt på grunn av tørke-relaterte årsaker? Hva var dine erfaringer med internmigrasjon i Syria før konflikten?	Vennligst gi eksempler på årstall, tid, varighet. Var det vanlig/uvanlig? Ble det verre? Skjedde det oftere? Tror du mennesker forårsaker tørke? Var det andre grunner at folk migrerte? Vennligst forklar. Skapte det problemer? Hvorfor?
20	Den syriske revolusjonen/krigen	Hvordan definerer du konflikten? Var det borgerkrig? Tror du at klima spilte en rolle i å forårsake enten demonstrasjonen eller krigen i Syria? Etter din mening, hva er de viktigste årsakene til demonstrasjonene? Hva var de viktigste grunnene til at det ble krig?	Vennligst forklar. Tror du klimaendringer var viktig? Forklar. Hva handlet demonstrasjonene om? Endret det seg?
	Livet i Syria	Forandret livet seg i Syria på noen måte da Bashar al-Assad tok over makten? Hvordan forholdte du deg til regimet før revolusjonen?	*Studenten forklarer hva de har lest*.
5	Konklusjon	Forklar veien videre (kan trekke seg, frist) kontaktdetaljer osv.	Kommentarer? Noe du vil legge til?

= ca. 70 min (minn deltagere på å ikke nevne tredjeparter (for eks. familiemedlemmer med identifiserbare detaljer som navn)

Categories, Concepts & Codes

Reactions to the Syria-Climate Conflict Thesis

- Western perspective
  - People outside Syria don't understand our situation
  - Western media
  - Cover-up
  - Not helpful to Syrians
- Not factual
  - What 'really' happened
  - Media gives the wrong story
  - Let me tell you what life was like in Syria before
- Surprise
  - Never heard of alleged link
  - Climate change has never been talked much about in Syria
  - Unbelievable - please explain

Drought

- Natural phenomenon
- Drought/water shortages normal
  - Syria naturally dry
- Socioeconomic & political causes
  - Poor and unequal resource management and distribution
  - Hard to survive as a farmer
  - Farmers pushed
  - Drought severity caused by government response
  - Dams/political relations with Turkey

Conflict Conceptualisations

- Started as a revolution
  - Initially asked for change
  - Bashar to step down later
  - Self-interested groups emerged
- Not civil war
  - International interference
    - Countries entered with their own interests
    - Impeding peace
    - Benefiting from ongoing conflict
  - Religious/cultural stereotype of Middle East/Islam
  - Became one after external involvement

The Nexus

- More pressing issues in Syria
  - Western interests, not Syrian
  - Unimportant now
- Climate change conceptualisations
  - Western problem
  - Natural, cannot control
- Reverse sequence
  - War caused climate change
  - Examples

Internal Migration

- Before drought
  - Always been normal
  - Young people
- Perceived causes
  - Poverty
  - Inequality
  - For survival
  - Poor response to drought
  - Better income/opportunities
- Temporary
- Seasonal
- Not the whole family

Conflict Triggers

- Historical
  - Hama massacre
  - Constitution change
  - Long-term oppression
  - Regime didn't treat as humans
- Economic
  - Growing poverty
  - Corruption
  - No social mobility
- Political
  - Oppression
  - Desired change and democracy
  - Dictatorship
  - Want to speak up
  - Arab Spring
  - Dar ʾā graffiti

Appendix V - Data Processor Agreement (English)

Data Processor Agreement
Master's Thesis Project – Iselin Shaw of Tordarroch
"A political ecology of the Syria-climate-conflict thesis"
The Norwegian University of Life Sciences (NMBU)

Pursuant to the applicable Norwegian personal data legislation and regulation (EU) 2016/679 of 27th April 2016, Articles 28 and 29, cf. Article 32-36, the following agreement is entered into

between

Iselin Shaw of Tordarroch

(data controller)

and

(data processor)

1. Purpose of the agreement

The purpose of the agreement is to regulate the rights and obligations under the applicable Norwegian personal data legislation, and regulation (EU) 2016/679 of 27th April 2016 in respect of the protection of physical persons in connection with the processing of personal data and the free exchange of such data, as well as the repeal of Directive 95/46/EC.

The agreement is intended to ensure that personal data is not processed illegally, wrongfully, or processed in ways that result in unauthorised access, alteration, erasure, damage, loss, or unavailability.

The agreement governs the data processor's processing of personal data on behalf of the data controller, including collection, registration, compilation, storage, disclosure or combinations of these, in connection with the use of/processing in 'Iselin Shaw's master's thesis project'.

In the event of conflict, the terms of this Agreement will take precedence over the data processor's privacy policy, or terms of any other agreement entered into between the data processor and the data controller in connection with the use of/processing in 'Iselin Shaw's master's thesis project'.

2. Limiting clause

The purpose of the data processor's processing of personal data on behalf of the data controller is interpretation/translation during a focus group discussion on 15.03.21.

Personal data that the data processor processes on behalf of the data controller may not be used for any other purpose without the prior approval of the data controller.

The data processor may not transfer personal data covered by this agreement to partners or other third parties without the prior approval of the data controller, cf. point 10 of this agreement.

3. Instructions

The data processor will follow the written and documented instructions for the processing of personal data in 'Iselin Shaw's master's thesis project' which the data controller has determined will apply. Instructions are provided by email.

NMBU is obliged to comply with all obligations under the applicable Norwegian personal data legislation governing the use of 'Iselin Shaw's master's thesis project' for the processing of personal data.

The data processor is obliged to notify the data controller if it receives instructions from the data controller that are in conflict with the provisions of the applicable Norwegian personal data legislation.

4. Types of information and data subjects

The data processor processes the following personal data on behalf of the data controller:

- Name, age, location, hometown, studies, occupation, migration history.

- The data processor will only have access to this information during the focus group. None of it will be stored in their possession afterwards.

The personal data applies to the following data subjects:

- Syrian interviewees participating in the focus group discussion on Zoom on 15.03.21.

5. The rights of registered subjects

The data processor is obliged to assist the data controller in safeguarding the rights of registered subjects in accordance with applicable Norwegian personal data legislation.

The rights of the data subjects include, but not limited to, the right to information on how his or her personal data is processed, the right to request access to personal data, the right to request corrections to, or erasure of their own personal data, and the right to require restriction of processing of their personal data.

To the extent relevant, the data processor will assist the data controller in maintaining the registered subject's right to data portability and the right to object to automated decision-making, including profiling.

The data processor is liable for damages to the registered subject if errors or omissions by the data processor inflict financial or non-financial loss on the registered subject as a result of infringement of their rights or privacy protection.

6. Satisfactory data security

The data processor will implement appropriate technical, physical and organisational safety measures to safeguard the personal data covered by this agreement from unauthorised or unlawful access, alteration, erasure, damage, loss, or unavailability. For example, the data processor will not be allowed to make any recordings of the focus group discussion.

7. Confidentiality

Full confidentiality is required of all parties involved in 'Iselin Shaw's master's thesis project'. None of the information discussed during the focus group is to be shared with outside parties. This is for the protection of those involved.

8. Security Breach Notification

The data processor will notify the controller without undue delay, if personal data processed on behalf of the controller is exposed to a breach of security.

The data processor's notification should, at minimum, include information that describes the security breach, which registered subject is affected by the breach, what personal data is affected by the breach, what immediate measures are implemented to address the breach and what preventive measures may have been established to avoid similar incidents in the future.

The data controller is responsible for ensuring that the Norwegian Data Protection Authority is notified when required.

9. Return and erasure

Upon termination of this agreement, the data processor is obliged to return and erase any personal data that is processed on behalf of the data controller under this agreement. The data processor determines how the return of the personal data will take place, including the format to be used.

Erasure is to be carried out by the data processor within 2 days after the termination of the agreement. This also applies to the backup of personal data.

The data processor will document that the erasure of personal data has been carried out in accordance with this agreement. The documentation will be made available to the data controller on request.

The data processor covers all costs associated with the return and erasure of the personal data covered by this agreement.

10. Breach of contract

In case of breach of the terms of this agreement caused by errors or omissions on the part of the data processor, the data controller may cancel the agreement with immediate effect. The data processor will continue to be obliged to return and erase personal data processed on behalf of the data controller pursuant to the provisions of Section 13 above.

The data controller may require compensation for financial loss suffered by the data controller as a consequence of errors or omissions on the part of the data processor, including breach of the terms of this agreement, cf. also points 5 and 10 above.

11. Duration of the Agreement

This agreement applies as long as the data processor processes personal data on behalf of the data controller.

The agreement may be terminated by both parties with a mutual deadline of June 1st 2021.

12. Contacts

Contact persons at the data controller for any questions related to this agreement is: Tor Arve Benjaminsen (supervisor) t.a.benjaminsen@nmbu.no, Iselin Shaw of Tordarroch iselinshaw@gmail.com.

13. Choice of Law and Resolution of Disputes

The Parties' rights and obligations under this agreement are determined in full by Norwegian law. Any disputes arising out of this Agreement shall be first sought to be resolved through negotiations.

If the parties do not reach agreement through negotiations, the dispute will be resolved with binding effect by the Ministry of Education and Research. Either party may require that the dispute be sent to the Ministry.

***

This agreement is in 2 – two copies, one to each of the parties.

Place and date

Harstad, Norway 13.03.2021 (data controller)

_____

On behalf of the data controller	On behalf of the data processor
……..	……
(signature)	(signature)

Appendix V - Data Processor Agreement (Norwegian)

Databehandleravtale

I henhold til gjeldende norsk personopplysningslovgivning og forordning (EU) 2016/679 av 27. april 2016, Artikkel 28 og 29, jf. Artikkel 32-36, inngås følgende avtale

mellom

Noragric, Fakultet for landskap og samfunn (LANDSAM), Norges miljø- og biovitenskapelige universitet (NMBU)

…….

Behandlingsansvarlig: Iselin Shaw of Tordarroch (student) og Tor A. Benjaminsen (veileder)

og

…….

(databehandler)

1. Avtalens hensikt

Avtalens hensikt er å regulere rettigheter og plikter i henhold til gjeldende norsk personopplysningslovgivning og forordning (EU) 2016/679 av 27. april 2016 om vern av fysiske personer i forbindelse med behandling av personopplysninger og om fri utveksling av slike opplysninger, samt om oppheving av direktiv 95/46/EF.

Avtalen skal sikre at personopplysninger ikke brukes ulovlig, urettmessig eller at opplysningene behandles på måter som fører til uautorisert tilgang, endring, sletting, skade, tap eller utilgjengelighet.

Avtalen regulerer databehandlers forvaltning av personopplysninger på vegne av den behandlingsansvarlige, herunder innsamling, registrering, sammenstilling, lagring, utlevering eller kombinasjoner av disse, i forbindelse med bruk av/behandling i 'masteroppgave i internasjonale miljøstudier – klima-migrasjon-konflikt tesen og den syriske krigen'.

Ved motstrid skal vilkårene i denne avtalen gå foran databehandlers personvernerklæring eller vilkår i andre avtaler inngått mellom behandlingsansvarlig og databehandler i forbindelse med bruk av/behandling i 'masteroppgave i internasjonale miljøstudier – klima-migrasjon-konflikt tesen og den syriske krigen'.

2. Formålsbegrensning

Formålet med databehandlers forvaltning av personopplysninger på vegne av behandlingsansvarlig, er å levere og administrere/annen type behandling (tolketjenester) i prosjektet 'masteroppgave i internasjonale miljøstudier – klima-migrasjon-konflikt tesen og den syriske krigen'.

Personopplysninger som databehandler forvalter på vegne av behandlingsansvarlig kan ikke brukes til andre formål enn levering og administrasjon av/annen type behandling av prosjektet 'masteroppgave i internasjonale miljøstudier – klima-migrasjon-konflikt tesen og den syriske krigen' uten at dette på forhånd er godkjent av behandlingsansvarlig.

Databehandler kan ikke overføre personopplysninger som omfattes av denne avtalen til samarbeidspartnere eller andre tredjeparter uten at dette på forhånd er godkjent av behandlingsansvarlig, jf. punkt 10 i denne avtalen.

3. Instrukser

Databehandler skal følge de skriftlige og dokumenterte instrukser for forvaltning av personopplysninger i 'masteroppgave i internasjonale miljøstudier – klima-migrasjon-konflikt tesen og den syriske krigen' som behandlingsansvarlig har bestemt skal gjelde.

Noragric, LANDSAM forplikter seg til å overholde alle plikter i henhold til gjeldende norsk personopplysningslovgivning som gjelder ved bruk av/behandling i 'masteroppgave i internasjonale miljøstudier – klima-migrasjon-konflikt tesen og den syriske krigen' til behandling av personopplysninger.

Databehandler forplikter seg til å varsle behandlingsansvarlig dersom databehandler mottar instrukser fra behandlingsansvarlig som er i strid med bestemmelsene i gjeldende norsk personopplysningslovgivning.

4. Opplysningstyper og registrerte

Databehandleren forvalter følgende personopplysninger på vegne av behandlingsansvarlig i forbindelse med levering og administrasjon av 'masteroppgave i internasjonale miljøstudier – klima-migrasjon-konflikt tesen og den syriske krigen':

- Navn, alder, hjemsted i Syria, nåværende bosted i Tyrkia, jobb, migrasjonserfaringer, politisk og filosofisk oppfatning.
- Databehandler skal ikke registrere eller lagre opplysninger i forbindelse med prosjektet. Dette gjøres at behandlingsansvarlig.

Personopplysningene gjelder følgende registrerte:

- Fokusgruppe respondenter – syriske flyktninger i Tyrkia som jobber som koordinatorer for CARE International.

5. De registrertes rettigheter

Databehandler plikter å bistå behandlingsansvarlig ved ivaretakelse av den registrertes rettigheter i henhold til gjeldende norsk personopplysningslovgivning.

Den registrertes rettigheter inkluderer retten til informasjon om hvordan hans eller hennes personopplysninger behandles, retten til å kreve innsyn i egne personopplysninger, retten til å kreve retting eller sletting av egne personopplysninger og retten til å kreve at behandlingen av egne personopplysninger begrenses.

I den grad det er relevant, skal databehandler bistå behandlingsansvarlig med å ivareta de registrertes rett til dataportabilitet og retten til å motsette seg automatiske avgjørelser, inkludert profilering.

Databehandler er erstatningsansvarlig overfor de registrerte dersom feil eller forsømmelser hos databehandler påfører de registrerte økonomiske eller ikke-økonomiske tap som følge av at deres rettigheter eller personvern er krenket.

6. Tilfredsstillende informasjonssikkerhet

Databehandler skal iverksette tilfredsstillende tekniske, fysiske og organisatoriske sikringstiltak for å beskytte personopplysninger som omfattes av denne avtalen mot uautorisert eller ulovlig tilgang, endring, sletting, skade, tap eller utilgjengelighet.

Databehandler skal dokumentere egen sikkerhetsorganisering, retningslinjer og rutiner for sikkerhetsarbeidet, risikovurderinger og etablerte tekniske, fysiske eller organisatoriske sikringstiltak. Dokumentasjonen skal være tilgjengelig for behandlingsansvarlig.

Databehandler skal etablere kontinuitets- og beredskapsplaner for effektiv håndtering av alvorlige sikkerhetshendelser. Dokumentasjonen skal være tilgjengelig for behandlingsansvarlig.

Databehandler skal gi egne ansatte tilstrekkelig informasjon om og opplæring i informasjonssikkerhet slik at sikkerheten til personopplysninger som behandles på vegne av behandlingsansvarlig blir ivaretatt.

Databehandler skal dokumentere opplæringen av egne ansatte i informasjonssikkerhet. Dokumentasjonen skal være tilgjengelig for behandlingsansvarlig.

7. Taushetsplikt

Kun ansatte hos databehandler som har tjenstlige behov for tilgang til personopplysninger som forvaltes på vegne av behandlingsansvarlig, kan gis slik tilgang. Databehandler plikter å dokumentere retningslinjer og rutiner for tilgangsstyring. Dokumentasjonen skal være tilgjengelig for behandlingsansvarlig.

Ansatte hos databehandler har taushetsplikt om dokumentasjon og personopplysninger som vedkommende får tilgang til i henhold til denne avtalen. Denne bestemmelsen gjelder også etter avtalens opphør. Taushetsplikten omfatter ansatte hos tredjeparter som utfører vedlikehold (eller liknende oppgaver) av systemer, utstyr, nettverk eller bygninger som databehandler anvender for å levere eller administrere/annen type behandling 'masteroppgave i internasjonale miljøstudier – klima-migrasjon-konflikt tesen og den syriske krigen'.

Norsk lov vil kunne begrense omfanget av taushetsplikten for ansatte hos databehandler og tredjeparter.

8. Varslingsplikt ved sikkerhetsbrudd

Databehandler skal uten ubegrunnet opphold varsle behandlingsansvarlig dersom personopplysninger som forvaltes på vegne av behandlingsansvarlig utsettes for sikkerhetsbrudd som innebærer risiko for krenkelser av de registrertes personvern.

Varslet til behandlingsansvarlig skal som minimum inneholde informasjon som beskriver sikkerhetsbruddet, hvilke registrerte som er berørt av sikkerhetsbruddet, hvilke personopplysninger som er berørt av sikkerhetsbruddet, hvilke strakstiltak som er iverksatt for å håndtere sikkerhetsbruddet og hvilke forebyggende tiltak som eventuelt er etablert for å unngå liknende hendelser i fremtiden.

Behandlingsansvarlig er ansvarlig for at varsler om sikkerhetsbrudd fra databehandler blir videreformidlet til Datatilsynet.

9. Tilbakelevering og sletting

Ved opphør av denne avtalen plikter databehandler å slette og tilbakelevere alle personopplysninger som forvaltes på vegne av behandlingsansvarlig i forbindelse med levering og administrasjon av/behandling i (navn på tjeneste/prosjekt). Behandlingsansvarlig bestemmer hvordan tilbakelevering av personopplysningene skal skje, herunder hvilket format som skal benyttes.

Databehandler skal slette personopplysninger fra alle lagringsmedier som inneholder personopplysninger som databehandler forvalter på vegne av behandlingsansvarlig. Sletting skal skje ved at databehandler skriver over personopplysninger innen (fyll inn antall) dager etter avtalens opphør. Dette gjelder også for sikkerhetskopier av personopplysningene.

Databehandler skal dokumentere at sletting av personopplysninger er foretatt i henhold til denne avtalen. Dokumentasjonen skal gjøres tilgjengelig for behandlingsansvarlig.

Databehandler dekker alle kostnader i forbindelse med tilbakelevering og sletting av de personopplysninger som omfattes av denne avtalen.

10. Mislighold

Ved mislighold av vilkårene i denne avtalen som skyldes feil eller forsømmelser fra databehandlers side, kan behandlingsansvarlig si opp avtalen med øyeblikkelig virkning. Databehandler vil fortsatt være pliktig til å tilbakelevere og slette personopplysninger som forvaltes på vegne av behandlingsansvarlig i henhold til bestemmelsene i punkt 13 ovenfor.

Behandlingsansvarlig kan kreve erstatning for økonomiske tap som feil eller forsømmelser fra databehandlers side, inkludert mislighold av vilkårene i denne avtalen, har påført behandlingsansvarlig, jf. også punkt 5 og 10 ovenfor.

11. Avtalens varighet

Denne avtalen gjelder så lenge databehandler forvalter personopplysninger på vegne av behandlingsansvarlig.

Avtalen kan sies opp av begge parter med en gjensidig frist på 1.juni 2021.

12. Kontaktpersoner

Kontaktperson hos databehandler for spørsmål knyttet til denne avtalen er: Iselin Shaw of Tordarroch iselinshaw@gmail.com.

Kontaktperson hos behandlingsansvarlig for spørsmål knyttet til denne avtalen er: Tor Arve Benjaminsen (akademisk veileder) t.a.benjaminsen@nmbu.no.

13. Lovvalg og verneting

Avtalen er underlagt norsk rett og partene vedtar Oslo tingrett som verneting. Dette gjelder også etter opphør av avtalen.

***

Denne avtale er i 2 – to eksemplarer, hvorav partene har hvert sitt.

Sted og dato

På vegne av behandlingsansvarlig	På vegne av databehandler
……..	……
(underskrift)	(underskrift)

Appendix VI - Information Letter (Arabic)

هل ترغب في المشاركة في مشروع دراسة بحثية اكاديمية

تغير المناخ والهجرة والصراع المسلح رسالة ماجستير

هذا هو طلب استفسار حول إمكانية مشاركتكم في هذا المشروع البحثي. الهدف من هذا المشروع هو فهم ماذا يعني التغيير المناخي بالنسبة للسوريين المهجرين وما هو الدور الذي يعتقدون أن التغيير المناخي لعبه في هجرتهم وفي إشعال الحرب السورية. تشرح هذه الرسالة الغرض من هذا البحث وما هي المشاركة التي نتطلبها من المشتركين.

الهدف من هذا المشروع

هذا المشروع مخصص لأطروحة الماجستير في الدراسات البيئية الدولية. سيركز على ثغرات الأدلة في أطروحة الصراع المناخي في سوريا، والتي تقول إن تغير المناخ لعب دورًا مهمًا في إثارة الهجرة والحرب. في مناقشات جماعية مركزة (مجم) سوف نستكشف التصورات حول ما إذا كان تغير المناخ قد شارك في القرارات والأحداث التي أدت إلى نزوح السوريين. سنناقش أيضًا ما يعنيه تغير المناخ بالنسبة لك. هدفي الرئيسي هو ضمان انعكاس الأصوات والخبرات السورية في النقاش حول ما إذا كان تغير المناخ هو محرك الهجرة و / أو الصراع، خاصة وأن الحرب السورية غالبًا ما تستخدم كمثال على هذه النظرية.

من المسؤول عن مشروع البحث؟

قسم نوراغريك في الجامعة النرويجية لعلوم الحياة هو المؤسسة المسؤولة.

لماذا يطلب منك المشاركة؟

لأنك تستوفي معايير الاختيار وهي ان تكون من سوريا وعشت في سوريا بين عامي 2006 و2011 على الأقل وتبلغ من العمر فوق ال 18 عاما. يتم اختيار المشتركين من خلال منظمة كير الدولية في تركيا.

ماذا تعني المشاركة بالنسبة لك؟

إذا اخترت المشاركة في المشروع، فسيتضمن ذلك مشاركتك في مجموعة تركيز للنقاش عبر الإنترنت ضمن مجموعة من 15 25 مشاركا. سيُطلب منك في نهاية هذا المستند تقديم بعض المعلومات الأساسية عنك قبل مناقشة المجموعة مثل (العمر، الجنس، المهنة والسكن في سوريا. يُسمح لك بترك أي من هذه فارغة إذا كنت لا ترغب في الإجابة، ولكن يلزم التوقيع لتأكيد موافقتك المستنيرة على المشاركة في المشروع. ستستمر مناقشة المجموعة المركزة حوالي 60 دقيقة وسيكون الموضوع الرئيسي للمناقشة هو تغير المناخ وما يعنيه هذا بالنسبة لك، ومسببات الهجرة من سوريا وحرب 2011. سيتضمن النقاش أسئلة حول الجفاف في سوريا قبل الحرب، وما إذا كان وكيف أثر على حياتك. سيتم تسجيل المناقشة إلكترونيًا، فقط إذا وافق عليها جميع المشاركين.

المشاركة طوعية

المشاركة في المشروع طوعية إذا اخترت المشاركة، يمكنك سحب موافقتك في أي وقت دون إبداء الأسباب. سيتم بعد ذلك جعل جميع المعلومات المتعلقة بك مجهولة الهوية ولن تكون هناك عواقب سلبية بالنسبة لك إذا اخترت عدم المشاركة أو قررت الانسحاب لاحقًا.

خصوصيتك الشخصية كيف سنخزن بياناتك الشخصية واستخدامها

سنستخدم بياناتك الشخصية فقط للأغراض المحددة في هذه الرسالة. وسنقوم بمعالجة بياناتك الشخصية بسرية ووفقا لقوانين حماية البيانات الشخصية (اللائحة العامة لحماية البيانات وقانون البيانات الشخصية).

ـ فقط طالب الماجستير والمشرف والمترجم وفاحص رسالة الماجستير فقط يمكنهم الوصول إلى بياناتك الشخصية خلال مدة المشروع.

ـ سأستبدل اسمك وتفاصيل الاتصال بك برمز خاص. سيتم تخزين قائمة الأسماء وتفاصيل الاتصال والرموز ذات الصلة بشكل منفصل عن باقي البيانات التي تم جمعها. سوف أقوم بتخزين البيانات على خادم بحث بكلمة مرور.

ـ سأستخدم ملاحظات زووم لكتابة الجلسات أو الملاحظات المكتوبة إذا لم يتم تسجيل الجلسة.

ـ سيتم تغيير اسمك في منشور الرسالة، ولكن سيتم نشر تفاصيل حول عمرك ومهنتك وآرائك وموقعك (قبل والآن)

ماذا سيحدث لبياناتك الشخصية في نهاية مشروع البحث؟

من المقرر أن ينتهي المشروع في 30 يونيو 2021. سيتم حذف بياناتك الشخصية، بما في ذلك التسجيلات الرقمية ، في نهاية المشروع (عند اكتمال التقييم النهائي للأطروحة).

حقوقك

طالما أنه يمكن التعرف عليك في البيانات التي تم جمعها، يحق لك:

ـ الوصول إلى البيانات الشخصية التي تتم معالجتها عنك.

ـ طلب حذف بياناتك الشخصية.

ـ طلب تصحيح بياناتك الشخصية غير الصحيحة.

ـ تلقي نسخة من بياناتك الشخصية (قابلية نقل البيانات)، و

ـ إرسال شكوى إلى مسؤول حماية البيانات أو هيئة حماية البيانات النرويجية بخصوص معالجة بياناتك الشخصية.

ما الذي يمنحنا الحق في معالجة بياناتك الشخصية؟

سنعالج بياناتك الشخصية بناءً على موافقتك

بناءً على اتفاقية مع الجامعة النرويجية لعلوم الحياة والمركز النرويجي لبيانات البحث، قيمت معالجة البيانات الشخصية في هذا المشروع وفقًا لتشريعات حماية البيانات.

أين يمكنني معرفة المزيد؟

إذا كانت لديك أسئلة حول المشروع، أو تريد ممارسة حقوقك ، فاتصل بـ:

ـ الجامعة النرويجية لعلوم الحياة عبر المشرف تور ارفه بينجامينسين على الهاتف 004767231353 او على البريد الإلكتروني:

t.a.benjaminsen@nmbu.no

او التواصل مع طالبة الماجستير ايسيلين شاو اوف توردارونتش على الهاتف 004741241152 او على البريد الالكتروني:

iselinshaw@gmail.com

ـ موظفة حماية البيانات: هانا بيرنيلا جولبراندسن، عن طريق الهاتف: 004740281558. او على البريد الإلكتروني:

personvernombud@nmbu.no

- المركز النرويجي لبيانات البحث عن طريق الهاتف 004755582117 او البريد الالكتروني:

personverntjenester@nsd.no

مع خالص التحية

مسؤول المشروع (المشرف)	الطالب
Tor A. Benjaminsen	*Iselin Shaw of Tordarroch*

نموذج الموافقة

لقد تلقيت وفهمت معلومات حول مشروع تغير المناخ والهجرة والصراع وأتيحت لي الفرصة لطرح الأسئلة. أعطي موافقتي:

☐ للمشاركة في مناقشة جماعية مركزة عبر الإنترنت.

☐ تقديم معلومات أساسية قبل المناقشة (يمكن تركها فارغة إذا كنت ترغب في ذلك).

أوافق على معالجة بياناتي الشخصية حتى تاريخ انتهاء المشروع ، 30 يونيو 2021

(التاريخ وتوقيع المشترك)

Appendix VI - Information Letter (English)

Are you interested in taking part in the research project

"Climate change, Migration and Conflict – Master's Thesis"?

This is an inquiry about participation in a research project. The main purpose is to understand what climate change and drought means to displaced Syrians, and what role they think it played in triggering the Syrian war. This letter explains the project purpose and what participation will involve.

Purpose of the project
This project is for a master's thesis in International Environmental Studies. It will focus on the contents of the Syria climate-conflict thesis, which argues that climate change/drought played a role in triggering internal migration in Syria before the war, and then war. In the focus group discussions (FGDs) and semi-structured interviews, we will explore perceptions about if and how climate change/drought was involved in both migration and the demonstrations in 2011. We will discuss what climate change means to you. My main objective is the ensure Syrian voices and experiences are reflected in the debate about whether climate change is a driver of migration and/or conflict, especially because the Syrian war is often used as an example of this theory.

Who is responsible for the research project?
Noragric department at the Norwegian University of Life Sciences is the responsible institution.

Why are you being asked to participate?
The selection criteria are to have lived in Syria between at least 2005 and 2011, and be over 18 years old. Participants are recruited through the organisation CARE International in Turkey, or have volunteered to participate themselves. You will have been informed whether you are invited to participate in an FGD or an individual interview.

What does participation involve for you?
If you choose to take part in the project, this will involve that you participate in an online FGD/interview on Zoom. The session will last approximately 60 minutes, and be in Arabic (with an interpreter), English or Norwegian, depending on your preference. The main topic of the discussion will be your perceptions, experience and opinions about the role climate change played in triggering migration in Syria before the conflict, and the triggering the actual war. It will include questions about the drought(s) in Syria before the war, and if and how it/they impacted your life, your migration experience(s) and your reactions and opinions to the theory that climate change played an important role in triggering the war in Syria. The discussion will be recorded electronically, only if you agree to it.

Participation is voluntary
Participation in the project is voluntary. If you chose to participate, you can withdraw your consent at any time without giving a reason. All information about you will then be made anonymous. There will be no negative consequences for you if you chose not to participate or later decide to withdraw.

Your personal privacy – how we will store and use your personal data
We will only use your personal data for the purposes specified in this information letter. We will process your personal data confidentially and in accordance with data protection legislation (the General Data Protection Regulation and Personal Data Act).

- Only the master's student, their supervisor, the interpreter and the thesis examiner will have access your personal data during the project duration.

- I will replace your name and contact details with a code. The list of names, contact details and respective codes will be stores separately from the rest of the collected data. I will store the data on a research server with a password.
- I will use Zoom recordings to transcribe sessions, or written notes if the session is not recorded.
- Your name will be changed in the thesis publication, but details about your age, occupation, opinions and location (before and now) will be published.

What will happen to your personal data at the end of the research project?
The project is scheduled to end on June 30th 2021. Your personal data, including the digital recordings, will be deleted at the end of the project (when final evaluation of the thesis is complete).

Your rights
So long as you can be identified in the collected data, you have the right to:

- access the personal data that is being processed about you
- request that your personal data is deleted
- request that incorrect personal data about you is corrected/rectified
- receive a copy of your personal data (data portability), and
- send a complaint to the Data Protection Officer or The Norwegian Data Protection Authority regarding the processing of your personal data

What gives us the right to process your personal data?
We will process your personal data based on your consent.

Based on an agreement with The Norwegian University of Life Sciences (NMBU), NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS has assessed that the processing of personal data in this project is in accordance with data protection legislation.

Where can I find out more?
If you have questions about the project, or want to exercise your rights, contact:

- Noragric, Norwegian University of Life Sciences via Tor Arve Benjaminsen (supervisor), by email: (t.a.benjaminsen@nmbu.no) or by telephone: +47 67 23 13 53, Iselin Shaw of Tordarroch (student), by email: (iselinshaw@gmail.com) or by telephone: +47 41 24 11 52.
- Our Data Protection Officer: Hanne Pernille Gulbrandsen, by email: (personvernombud@nmbu.no) or by telephone: +47 40 28 15 58
- NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS, by email: (personverntjenester@nsd.no) or by telephone: +47 55 58 21 17.

Yours sincerely,

Project Leader	Student
Tor A. Benjaminsen	*Iselin Shaw of Tordarroch*

Consent form

I have received and understood information about the project *Climate change, Migration & Conflict in Syria* and have been given the opportunity to ask questions.

I give consent for my personal data to be processed until the end date of the project, June 30th 2021.

Appendix VI - Information Letter (Norwegian)

Vil du delta i forskningsprosjektet

”*Masteroppgave om klimaendringer, migrasjon og konflikt i Syria”?*

Dette er et spørsmål til deg om å delta i et forskningsprosjekt hvor formålet er å forstå hva klimaendringer og tørke betyr for syrere som har flyktet, og hvilken rolle de tror det hadde i å forårsake den syriske krigen. I dette skrivet gir vi deg informasjon om målene for prosjektet og hva deltakelse vil innebære for deg.

Formål
Prosjektet er en masteroppgave som tas i internasjonale miljøstudier. Prosjektet vil fokusere på innholdet i den såkalte ”Syria-klimakonflikt tesen/teorien” som argumenterer at klimaendringer/tørke spilte en rolle i å forårsake internmigrasjon i Syria før krigen og etter hvert, krigen. I fokusgruppene og intervjuene vil vi utforske tanker, erfaringer og meninger rundt det om klimaendringer/tørke var involvert i både migrasjon og demonstrasjonene i 2011. Vi vil diskutere hva klimaendringer betyr for deg. Mitt hovedmål er å sørge for at syriske stemmer og erfaringer reflekteres i debatten om hvorvidt klimaendringer forsterker/forverrer migrasjon og/eller konflikt, spesielt fordi den syriske krigen ofte brukes som et konkret eksempel på denne teorien.

Hvem er ansvarlig for forskningsprosjektet?
Noragric ved LANDSAM fakultetet ved Norges miljø- og biovitenskapelige universitet (NMBU) er ansvarlig for prosjektet.

Hvorfor får du spørsmål om å delta?
Jeg vil gjerne snakke med syrere som bodde i Syria mellom minimum 2005 og 2011, og er over 18 år. Deltagere er rekruttert gjennom organisasjonen CARE International i Tyrkia eller har meldt seg på frivillig. Du vil ha fått beskjed om det er ønskelig at du deltar i en fokusgruppe eller et individuelt intervju.

Hva innebærer det for deg å delta?
Hvis du velger å delta, innebærer det deltagelse i en online fokusgruppe eller intervju på Zoom. Disse vil vare i ca. 60 minutter, og gjennomføres på arabisk (med tolk), engelsk eller norsk, ut ifra hva du er mest komfortabel med. Hovedtemaene vi vil diskutere er persepsjoner, erfaringer og meninger rundt det om klimaendringer spilte en rolle i å trigge migrasjon i Syria før krigen, og i å trigge selve krigen. Det vil inkludere spørsmål om tørke i Syria før krigen, om/hvordan det påvirket deg, dine erfaringer med internmigrasjon, og dine reaksjoner og meninger om teorien at klimaendringer spilte en viktig rolle i å forårsake den syriske krigen. Det vil tas elektronisk opptak av diskusjonen, hvis du samtykker.

Det er frivillig å delta
Det er frivillig å delta i prosjektet. Hvis du velger å delta, kan du når som helst trekke samtykket tilbake uten å oppgi noen grunn. Alle dine personopplysninger vil da bli slettet. Det vil ikke ha noen negative konsekvenser for deg hvis du ikke vil delta eller senere velger å trekke deg.

Ditt personvern – hvordan vi oppbevarer og bruker dine opplysninger
Vi vil bare bruke opplysningene om deg til formålene vi har fortalt om i dette skrivet. Vi behandler opplysningene konfidensielt og i samsvar med personvernregelverket.

- Kun masterstudenten, veilederen, tolken og sensoren vil ha tilgang til dine personlige opplysninger i løpet av prosjektperioden.
- Jeg vil erstatte navnet ditt og kontaktdetaljer med en kode. Navnelisten, kontaktdetaljer og koder vil lagres separat fra resten. Jeg vil lagre dette på en server med passord.
- Jeg vil bruke Zoom-opptak til å transkribere intervjuer, eller skrevne notater hvis opptak ikke tas.
- Navnet ditt vil bli endret i den publiserte oppgaven, men detaljer om alderen din, jobb, meninger og hvor du bor (før og nå) kan komme med i oppgaven.

Hva skjer med opplysningene dine når vi avslutter forskningsprosjektet?
Alle opplysningene slettes når prosjektet avsluttes/oppgaven er godkjent, noe som etter planen er 30.juni 2021.

Dine rettigheter
Så lenge du kan identifiseres i datamaterialet, har du rett til:
- innsyn i hvilke personopplysninger som er registrert om deg, og å få utlevert en kopi av opplysningene,
- å få rettet personopplysninger om deg,
- å få slettet personopplysninger om deg, og
- å sende klage til Datatilsynet om behandlingen av dine personopplysninger.

Hva gir oss rett til å behandle personopplysninger om deg?
Vi behandler opplysninger om deg basert på ditt samtykke.
På oppdrag fra Norges miljø- og biovitenskapelige universitet (NMBU) har NSD – Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS vurdert at behandlingen av personopplysninger i dette prosjektet er i samsvar med personvernregelverket.

Hvor kan jeg finne ut mer?
Hvis du har spørsmål til studien, eller ønsker å benytte deg av dine rettigheter, ta kontakt med:
- Akademisk veileder, Tor Arve Benjaminsen, epost: t.a.benjaminsen@nmbu.no tel: +47 67 23 13 53, Masterstudent Iselin Shaw of Tordarroch, epost: iselinshaw@gmail.com tel +47 41 24 11 52
- Vårt personvernombud: Hanne Pernille Gulbrandsen, epost: personvernombud@nmbu.no tel: +47 40 28 15 58

Hvis du har spørsmål knyttet til NSD sin vurdering av prosjektet, kan du ta kontakt med:
- NSD – Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS på epost (personverntjenester@nsd.no) eller på telefon: 55 58 21 17.

Tor Arve Benjaminsen (Forsker/veileder)

Iselin Shaw of Tordarroch (Student)

Samtykkeerklæring

Jeg har mottatt og forstått informasjon om prosjektet *Klimaendringer, migrasjon og konflikt i Syria* og har fått anledning til å stille spørsmål.

Jeg samtykker til at mine opplysninger behandles frem til prosjektet er avsluttet

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(Signert av prosjektdeltaker, dato)

Appendix VII - Quoted Participant List

Quoted Participants

Name	Age	Gender	Description
'Iman'	n/a	Female	Iman took part in the second focus group discussion on February 12th 2021. The focus group was with Syrian community members living in the Turkish city of Gaziantep, and conducted in Arabic with an interpreter who translated from Arabic to Norwegian.
'Mohammed'	32	Male	Mohammed grew up in a small village outside Aleppo where most families had agricultural livelihoods. He fled to Turkey in 2013, and then to Norway in 2015 where he now works and lives with his family. His interview was conducted in Norwegian.
'Usama'	29	Male	Usama took part in the fourth focus group on March 15th 2021. The focus group was with internally displaced Syrians living in Jarabulus. Most of the discussion took place in English, but an Arabic interpreter was present. Usama is originally from Aleppo.
'Joram'	35	Male	Joram took part in the fourth focus group on March 15th 2021. The focus group was with internally displaced Syrians living in Jarabulus. Most of the discussion took place in English, but an Arabic interpreter was present. Joram is originally from Damascus.
'Hasan'	39	Male	Hasan is an agricultural engineer originally from Homs. He came to Norway in 2016 and has been working outside his field of training since he came to Norway. His interview was conducted in English.
'Nizar'	33	Male	Nizar holds a master's degree that was disrupted by the war. He is originally from al Ghaab plain, but now lives in Norway. His interview was conducted in English.
'Elias'	n/a	Male	Elias took part in the second focus group discussion on February 12th 2021. The focus group was with Syrian community members living in the Turkish city of Gaziantep, and conducted in Arabic with an interpreter who translated from Arabic to Norwegian.
'Akram'	31	Male	Akram is originally from the northeastern al-Ḥasaka governorate of Syria. He fled Syria in 2012, and came to Norway in 2015. His interview was conducted in Norwegian.
'Ali'	29	Male	Ali is from Idlib and moved from Syria in 2013. He came to Norway in 2015 and is now a student in Oslo. His interview was conducted in Norwegian.
'Hala'	22	Female	Hala is a Palestinian Syrian, born and raised with her family in Damascus. She came to Norway via family reunification in 2016 and is now a student in Norway. Her interview was conducted in Norwegian.
'Zak'	n/a	Male	Zak took part in the first focus group on February 4th with displaced Syrian coordinators living in Turkish Gaziantep and Sanliurfa. The discussion was conducted in Arabic with an interpreter who translated from Arabic to Norwegian.
'Sandra'	33	Female	Sandra is Kurdish and from Kobani in northern Syria. She now lives in Norway with her family. Her interview was conducted in Norwegian.
'Haya'	n/a	Female	Haya took part in the first focus group on February 4th with displaced Syrian coordinators living in Turkish Gaziantep and Sanliurfa. The discussion was conducted in Arabic with an interpreter who translated from Arabic to Norwegian.
'Hayyan'	22	Male	Hayyan is a Palestinian Syrian who grew up in Damascus. He now lives in Norway and his interview was conducted in Norwegian.
'Maya'	n/a	Female	Maya took part in the second focus group discussion on February 12th 2021. The focus group was with Syrian community members living in the Turkish city of Gaziantep, and conducted in Arabic with an interpreter who translated from Arabic to Norwegian.
'Reem'	33	Female	Reem lived in Damascus until she was 24-years-old, before moving first to the Emirates and then to Norway where she is now a student. Her interview was conducted in English.
'Zain'	27	Male	Zain is a Palestinian born in Norway, but who lived in Homs from 2001-2011. He is now living in Norway. His interview was conducted in Norwegian.
'Miran'	33	Male	Miran is from Hama and spent several years in prison.He is now living in Norway. His interview was conducted in English.
'Sara'	n/a	Female	Sara took part in the first focus group on February 4th with displaced Syrian coordinators living in Turkish Gaziantep and Sanliurfa. The discussion was conducted in Arabic with an interpreter who translated from Arabic to Norwegian.
'Aboud'	30	Male	Aboud took part in the fourth focus group on March 15th 2021. The focus group was with internally displaced Syrians living in Jarabulus. Most of the discussion took place in English, but an Arabic interpreter was present. Aboud is originally from Idlib.
'Said'	29	Male	Said is from Damascus, but now lives in Norway. His education was disrupted by the war. His interview was conducted in English.
'Rifat'	n/a	Male	Rifat took part in the third focus group on February 19th 2021. The focus group was with Syrian community members living in the Turkish city of Kilis, and conducted in Arabic with an interpreter who translated from Arabic to Norwegian.

Appendix VIII - Arabic Transliteration Chart

IJMES TRANSLITERATION SYSTEM FOR ARABIC, PERSIAN, AND TURKISH

Consonants

A = Arabic, P = Persian, OT = Ottoman Turkish, MT = Modern Turkish

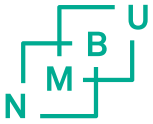
	A	P	OT	MT		A	P	OT	MT		A	P	OT	MT
ء	ʾ	ʾ	ʾ	—	ز	z	z	z	z	ك	k	k *or* g	k *or* ñ	k *or* n
ب	b	b	b	b *or* p	ژ	—	zh	j	j				*or* y	*or* y
پ	—	p	p	p	س	s	s	s	s				*or* ğ	*or* ğ
ت	t	t	t	t	ش	sh	sh	ṣ	ṣ	گ	—	g	g	g
ث	th	s̲	s̲	s	ص	ṣ	ṣ	ṣ	s	ل	l	l	l	l
ج	j	j	c	c	ض	ḍ	ż	ż	z	م	m	m	m	m
چ	—	ch	ç	ç	ط	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	t	ن	n	n	n	n
ح	ḥ	ḥ	ḥ	h	ظ	ẓ	ẓ	ẓ	z	ه	h	h	h[1]	h[1]
خ	kh	kh	h	h	ع	ʿ	ʿ	ʿ	—	و	w	v *or* u	v	v
د	d	d	d	d	غ	gh	gh	g *or* ğ	g *or* ğ	ي	y	y	y	y
ذ	dh	z̲	z̲	z	ف	f	f	f	f	ة	a[2]			
ر	r	r	r	r	ق	q	q	ḳ	k	ال	[3]			

[1] When h is not final. [2] In construct state: at. [3] For the article, al- and -l-.

Vowels

	ARABIC AND PERSIAN		OTTOMAN AND MODERN TURKISH	
Long ا or	ىٰ	ā	ā	words of Arabic and Persian origin only
	و	ū	ū	
	ي	ī	ī	
Doubled	ـِيّ	iyy (final form ī)	iy (final form ī)	
	ـُوّ	uww (final form ū)	uvv	
Diphthongs	ـَو	au *or* aw	ev	
	ـَى	ai *or* ay	ey	
Short	ـَ	a	a *or* e	
	ـُ	u	u *or* ü / o *or* ö	
	ـِ	i	ı *or* i	

For Ottoman Turkish, authors may either transliterate or use the modern Turkish orthography.



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