Political Ecology of Climate Conflict Research: Methodological Pathways

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International Conference on

Climate Change, Social Stress and Violent Conflict

November 19-20, Klima Campus, University of Hamburg

Hamburg, Germany

Menu

- Climate as a 'Threat'
- Antecedents of Climate Conflict Research
- Critique of Ecoviolence Models
- Limitations of Climate Conflict Research
- Future Research Directions

Climate as a 'Threat'

- *"… the Darfur conflict began as an ecological crisis, arising at least in part from climate change."*

  - United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon (2007)

- *"this [Darfur] is the first climate war" – Stephan Faris, Atlantic Monthly (2007)*

- *"… The impact of climate change is considered to be directly related to the conflict in the region, as desertification has added significantly to the stress on the livelihoods of pastoralist societies, forcing them to move south and to find pasture." – United Nations Environmental Programme, Sudan: Post-Conflict Environmental Assessment (2007)*

Elements of Climate as a 'Threat'

- *Desertification*
- *Environmental degradation leading to scarcity*
- *Migration*
- *Farmer-Herder Conflict over Scarce Grazing and Water Resources*
- *Political marginalization and underdevelopment of Darfur*

Climate as a 'Threat'

- *Incidence of internal conflicts is being attributed to the independent agency of climate change as climate conflicts*
- *Based on resource scarcity and climate-induced migration a future of climate conflicts is said to be likely*
- *Current studies on climate conflict have centered on scarcity and migration as the focal points of their causal mechanism*

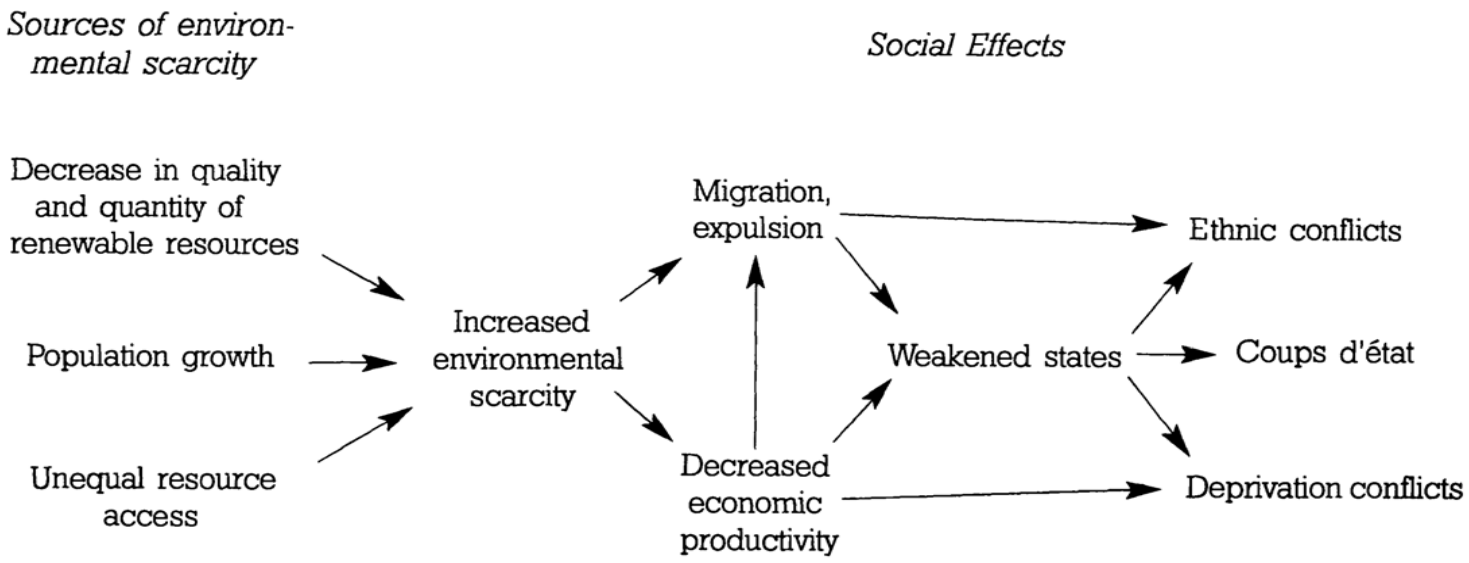
Antecedents of Climate Conflict Research

- *Reasons to survey previous environmental security research*
  - *Key concepts and theoretical frames being used today originate in this earlier research (Detraz and Betsill, 2009; Hartmann, 2009)*
  - *These foundational models of ecoviolence continue to have influence*
  - *Insights gained from the critique of this earlier research can inform our understandings of the alternatives for present research*

Ecoviolence Models

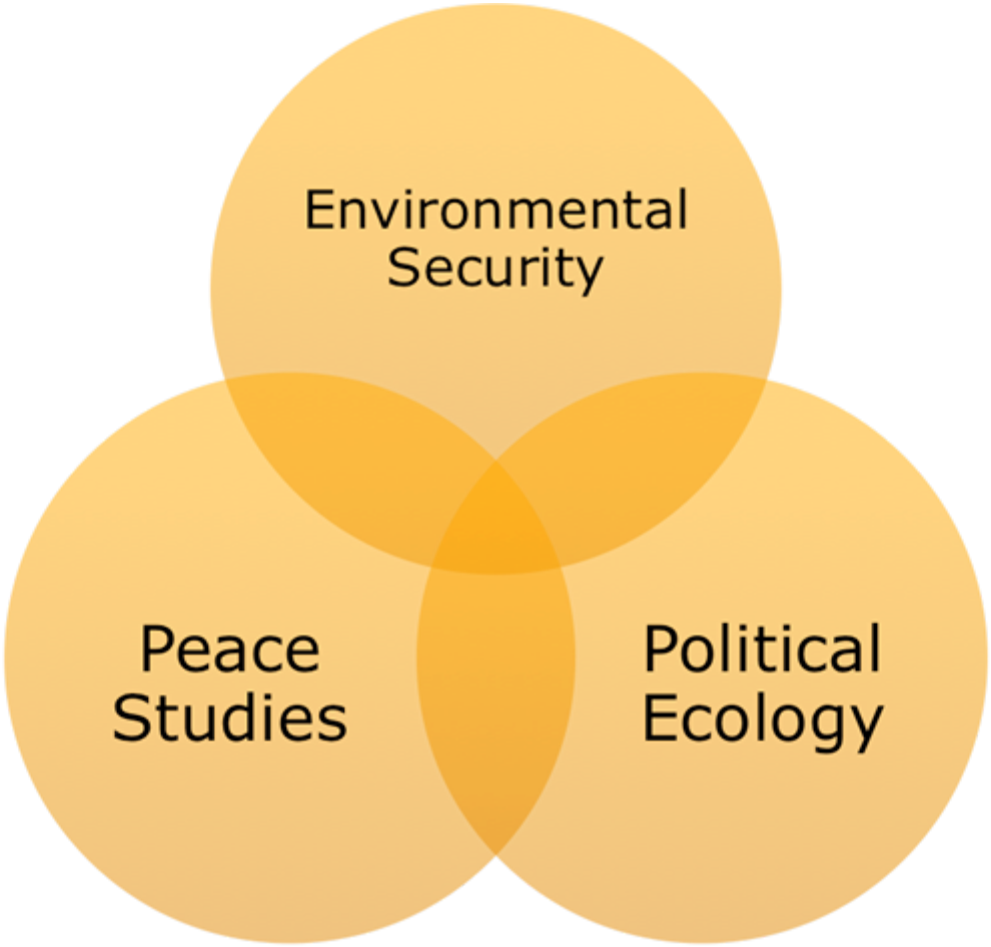
- *Toronto and Swiss Schools similar in:*
  - *Method : case study and process tracing*
  - *Defining Environmental conflict*
    - *What's the Utility of an Eco-centric frame of conflict analysis?*
  - *Framing Environmental degradation*
  - *Causal architecture*

Ecoviolence (Neo-Malthusian)



Source: Homer-Dixon (1994: 31).

Critique of Ecoviolence Models



Critique of Ecoviolence Models

- *Selection Bias and Thin Case Studies (Gleditsch, 1998; de Soysa, 2002)*
- *Empirically unable to verify environment-conflict link*
- *Resource Abundance not Scarcity (Gleditsch, 1998; Peluso and Watts, 2001; Fairhead 2003, Nordstrom, 2004)*
- *Through inscribing causal power to the environment it de-politicizes conflicts (Peluso and Watts, 2001)*
- *Demand and Supply notions of scarcity are collapsed together rendering the category analytically unusable (Peluso and Watts, 2001, Dalby 2002)*

Limitations of Current Climate-Conflict Research

- *Ancedoctal nature of the claims linking climate and conflict (Nordas and Gleditsch, 2007; Barnett, 2005).*
- *Positivist models ahistoricism and abstraction (Cramer, 2002; Richards 2006)*
- *Absence of global markets on local political and social relations (Fairhead, 2003) which would politicize climate-induced "resource" conflicts*
- *Little room for considering adaptation to scarcity*
- *Uncritically Appropriating Faulty ES Concepts*
  - *Resource Scarcity and Migration as key categories for linking climate change and violent conflict (Raleigh, Jordan and Saleyhan, 2008)*

Conceptual Shortcomings

- *Shortcomings of the Concept of "Climate Refugee"*
  - *(1) Depoliticizes economic and political causes of environmental degradation and the role of institutions in adaptive mechanisms (Hartmann, 2009; Wisner, 2004).*
  - *(2) Dehistoricizes the processes structuring vulnerability of people and landscapes to climatic weather-events and the reasons for migration*
  - *(3) Underemphasizes migration as a well established mechanism of livelihood/adaptation*

Future Research Directions

- *Sharpening analytical connections between climate – conflict can be done by:*
- *Local-contextualized interpretive analysis of case studies*
- *Historicizing concepts such as migration/scarcity*
- *Expanding the meaning of violence*
- *"Explores the production, enactments and representations of violence against humans in relation to the environment – not environmental scarcity or greed per se." (Hans-Georg Bohle, 2007)*

Political Ecology of Climate Conflict Research

- *Thank You.*