

Case study on the people and the climate

[Sociology](#), [Immigration](#)



Introduction

Increasingly difficult geographic conditions and harsh climatic conditions coupled by climate change have emerged as key causes of migration as persons affected by the crisis escape from the rigors that come with the conditions. In most cases, it is vulnerable persons who are most affected by the extreme geographical and climatic conditions and who seek to find ways of grappling with the problem. Most of the time, migration has always presented itself as a viable solution for the vulnerable persons to other areas in a bid to cushion themselves against the tough conditions. Nonetheless, migration, albeit seen as a viable option by those persons, has not been easily possible especially among the vulnerable persons. This can be attributed to a number of factors including increasing poverty that impedes such migration. In essence, these persons become trapped in the sense that they are unable to migrate to other areas even though migration may be their best solution at that time.

Topography and changes in climate have always presented difficult conditions for persons living in such areas. Usually, these occurrences are as a result of natural imperatives as well as human activities for a long period of time. Major conditions such as floods, hurricanes, cyclones, typhoons and drought among others have been the result of climate change. This has forced the inhabitants of such areas to devise ways of escaping the harsh conditions. One of the sure ways of doing this has been migration by these persons out of these areas. However, migration has not always been possible owing to the socio-economic position of persons caught by the harsh conditions. The negative environmental concerns make it difficult for these

persons to cope and get the resources required to enable their migration to other areas. As such, the persons are said to be trapped in these areas. This paper shall examine a case study in a bid to espouse on this very concept and explore the question as to whether these persons are trapped. Further, it shall grapple with the question as to whether migration of these vulnerable persons affected by environmental changes is the only viable option out of the quagmire. Vulnerability refers to the likelihood of experiencing harm and loss as a result of the climatic and geographic conditions. As such, vulnerable persons are affected by climatic and geographical conditions and are forced to migrate or search for alternative means of survival. This paper provides a detailed review of two case studies on migration in Rural Eastern Oklahoma and Northern Ethiopia in an attempt to illuminate on how such conditions influence migration patterns and how such persons are trapped in their quest to migrate.

In the 1930s, Rural Eastern Oklahoma was faced with unusually extreme climatic conditions. This paper focuses on migrants into California at the time as well as those who remained in the area at the time. Nearly 300, 000 persons migrated out of Oklahoma with around a third of them entering into California. The migrants comprised two groups. The first group comprised those who came from the rural areas of Oklahoma and settled in rural areas in California. The second cohort included those who originated around the urban centers and consequently settled around the urban areas in California. Most of the immigration was witnessed out of the eastern part of the state where cotton and corn were mainly grown. The movement of people was not constrained to that among states but also within the states. This occurred

especially with the loss of jobs by persons in the urban areas in the first half of 1930s. Similar loss of jobs was also rife in areas where mining and oil exploration took place as a result of the economic downturn in the US at the time of the Depression. Most of the people who lost jobs migrated to Eastern Oklahoma to practice subsistence farming due to availability of several small farms for rent. The number of migrants was augmented by farmers who got displaced from the semi-arid part of western Oklahoma that was occasioned by a prolonged drought in 1933 in the area. Unfavorable climatic conditions were instrumental in spurring migration of persons out of the area as shown by widespread failure of the main crops cotton as a result of prolonged drought and flooding from the year 1934-1936.

Indeed, the cotton crop failure in those years impacted greatly on the rural population of the eastern Oklahoma since cotton was the main cash crop and its failure resulted in scarcity of money which necessitated barter trade.

Another reason of the massive impact caused by cotton failure was the fact that most of the tenant farm families had to change their place of habitat.

The patterns of migration at this particular point were mainly influenced by the capital endowments of the rural households. In the early 1930s, nearly 60, 000 people, originally from Oklahoma, were migrants in California and availed lots of information concerning the job opportunities in the new area of migration. Similarly, these persons helped their counterpart migrants to find places of habitation and jobs as well as cope with the hostile inhabitants of California. Few of the migrants had economic capital whilst the majority, who were tenant farmers, sold draft animals and other possessions so as to finance their trip to California.

There was a stark variation amongst those persons who migrated and those who remained in Oklahoma. In one respect, the non-migrants had stronger local social networks since the families shared their habitats and mobilized each other in performing manual jobs. As already highlighted, the failure of cotton crop meant there was no enough cash and there was a resort to barter trade as a mode of trade. Consequently, a good social status was beneficial to an individual as it facilitated the individual's ability to barter and obtain credit from merchants especially at the time when credit from financial institutions was prohibitively expensive. Similarly, infrastructural projects from the federal government were mainly awarded to those persons who enjoyed personal connections with the administrators.

In another respect, there was a fundamental difference in terms of economic capital in the form of land between migrants and the non-migrants. Land ownership in eastern Oklahoma was critical at the time as it came with several advantages. To those who remained, they enjoyed an advantage in that they were shielded from the risk of losing their residence in the event their crops failed unlike the migrant tenant farmers. Migration and increased need for farms for renting had the effect of pushing up the demand for land and the consequent charging of supplemental cash by landowners. Further, provision of subsidies by the government to persons who reduced their acreage of land under cotton had the effect of causing the landowners to evict the farmers in a quest to obtain compensation. Substantial movements of persons took place at this time as evidenced by the massive convergence of several poor persons in shack settlements in the urban areas, and along railways, highways and rivers. Despite the massive influx of Oklahomans into

California, some of the counties in the area experienced an increase in population owing to return migrations, birthrates and the migration of other farm seekers to the counties.

Migration functions as a mode of adaptation to varying climatic and geographic conditions. For a great number of households in Oklahoma, it was never a question of whether they could migrate or not as such decision was within the province of the landlord who determined whether they would move in the event of a poor harvest. According to the options available to the respective households, it was usually a matter of the place of migration and not as to whether such an event would occur. It is also worth noting that later droughts that affected the area were not marked by the same level of migration out of the area as experienced in the 1930s. This is attributable to the dynamic nature of communities and their capacity of adaptation to the conditions. More so, migrations out of this area occur even to this very day. However, the mobility of such migration and the concomitant causes are distinctly different.

This being the case, it may as well be deduced from the case study that it cannot be guaranteed that changes in both geographic and climatic conditions will necessarily result in widespread migration of the indigent. Nonetheless, the case study does discredit the fact that the potential of such changes to cause migration still exists but rather rules out any perceived direct correlation. Therefore, it follows that migration is not the only way out for the vulnerable persons as evidenced by the non-migrants who remained and fared well.

Persons who are least vulnerable are usually at a better economic position

with some social network than those who are most vulnerable. In most cases, persons who are least vulnerable they have a number of relatives in urban centers to which they would migrate if the need arose. Such persons usually have adequate financial resources to facilitate their movement from areas where there are unfavorable climatic conditions to other places. Equally important is the fact that almost all persons could be adversely affected by drought irrespective of the entitlements and the situation of the particular households. In such an event, basic needs such as water and food become scanty thus posing problems to both the most vulnerable and the least vulnerable. This notwithstanding, it is clear that households with several survival strategies usually resist migration as compared to those with a single or no strategy. It was also the case that most of the smaller families indicated that they were the first to migrate as opposed to those from large families. This could be explained by the better prospects of getting a new place for residence and the ease of raising enough money for transportation by smaller families. Most of the persons interviewed in Ethiopia cited drought as the chief cause of their migration. These persons had several strategies to avert the drought by changing consumption habits such as by changing from three meals a day to one meal per day. Other strategies included the disposal animals and other assets, use of less valuable kind of grains. A typical scenario in Tigray consisted of failure of rain in June or July or an early end of the summer monsoon in August thus putting an end to prospects of a bumper harvest. Despite the fact that they were malnourished from scarcity of food, they immediately commenced reducing their daily consumption. They collected wild fruits and sent one of their own to look for

a job. By September of the same year, the grain reserves had become depleted and the head of the family sold livestock. By December, all assets in the household were usually exhausted forcing the disposal of farm tools in the market thus availing cash for the purchase of grain for at least two months. When the last assets are disposed and it becomes imperative for them to migrate, the chances of returning after the famine are usually slim since the farmers lack the needed capital for investing in farming equipment and oxen. Two months later, it becomes onerous to obtain food thus forcing the farmers to migrate to the closest urban center in search of food and jobs. They may stay for a few years in such urban centers owing to either the lack of money to facilitate their return or the lack of adequate information on the situation in their home areas. More so, the lack of farming equipment already sold may hamper their chances of returning as such are viewed as important features of social status within the community.

In Northern Ethiopia, the coincidence of the civil war and drought disrupted the carrying out of trading and other non-farming activities. The conflicts at the time also inhibited access food aid to the villages. At the same time, selling of animals was not profitable since everyone was selling their livestock creating excess supply. On addition, the animals were also weak owing to shortages of food and water. The most vulnerable during these periods were children who were susceptible to diseases. In some instances, a number of households who had some non-agricultural income resisted migration though they did not have several strategies. Similarly, in some events, even several strategies could not save the occasion of migration as persons experienced lack of water forcing them to walk several miles in

search of it.

As evident from these case studies of Rural Oklahoma and Northern Ethiopia, the attendant features that characterized the harsh conditions that brought to bear on the persons in these areas inhibited migration for a number of persons. For instance, in Northern Ethiopia, the selling of animals became an unprofitable venture owing to shortages of food and water, and excess supply. This made it difficult for the persons affected to migrate. It can, therefore, be said that they got trapped in their areas.

Conclusion

Climate change and difficult geographic conditions may lead to a decrease in the ability of vulnerable persons to live a productive life thus depriving them of the resources necessary to effect migration. Changes in the environment and these conditions have the effect of depleting the social, financial and physical resources that are requisite for movement. Consequently, vulnerable persons remain trapped in their areas with little or no room for migration owing to the constraints mentioned.

It then becomes necessary to answer the question as to whether migration is the only viable option for the vulnerable persons out of the hazards occasioned by climatic and geographic conditions. It is the contention of this paper that migration alone is no sufficient means of confronting the problem. As already discussed, it is not humanly possible for all persons to migrate to other areas due to their prevailing economic conditions. A more viable option would be to provide a legal mechanism for protection of persons displaced by changes in the environment. Climate change affects the vulnerable people the hardest as they lack the adaptive capacity as outlined in this

discourse. Therefore, there arises the need for legal empowerment where the law acts as a buffer by substituting their lack of social and financial capital with concrete rights.

Bibliography

Croll, J. (2013). *Discussions on Climate and Cosmology*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Diamond, J. (2013). *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Survive*. New York: Penguin Books Limited.

Gallup, J. L. (2005). *Is Geography Destiny?* New York: World Bank Publications.

Gardiner, S. (2010). *Climate Ethics: Essential Readings*. New York: Oxford University Press.

McAdam, J. (2012). *Climate Change, Forced Migration, and International Law*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Piguet, É. (2011). *Migration and Climate Change*. Cambridge University Press.

Smelser, N. J. (2012). *Usable Social Science*. University of California Press.

Statler, M., & Penuel, B. K. (2010). *Encyclopedia of Disaster Relief, Volume 1*. New York: Sage.

Arndt, F. R. (2012). *The Culture of Citrus Fruits Under the Climatic and Geographical Conditions Pertaining to the Murray Valley*. Chicago: HardPress.

Atlas. (2011). *Atlas of Climate Change*. New Jersey: Earthscan Publications.

Crosby, A. J. (2004). *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900*. London: Cambridge University Press.

<https://assignbuster.com/case-study-on-the-people-and-the-climate/>

McMahon, M. (2007). *Hartmann's plant science: growth, development, and utilization of cultivated plants*. London: Pearson Prentice Hall.

McMichael, A. J. (2003). *Climate Change And Human Health: Risks And Responses*. New York: World Health Organization.

Weisman, A. (2012). *The World Without Us*. Chicago: Ebury Publishing.

White, G. (2011). *Climate Change and Migration: Security and Borders in a Warming World*. London: Oxford University Press.

Yohe, G. W. (2010). *Societal Adaptation to Climate Variability and Change*. New York: Springer.