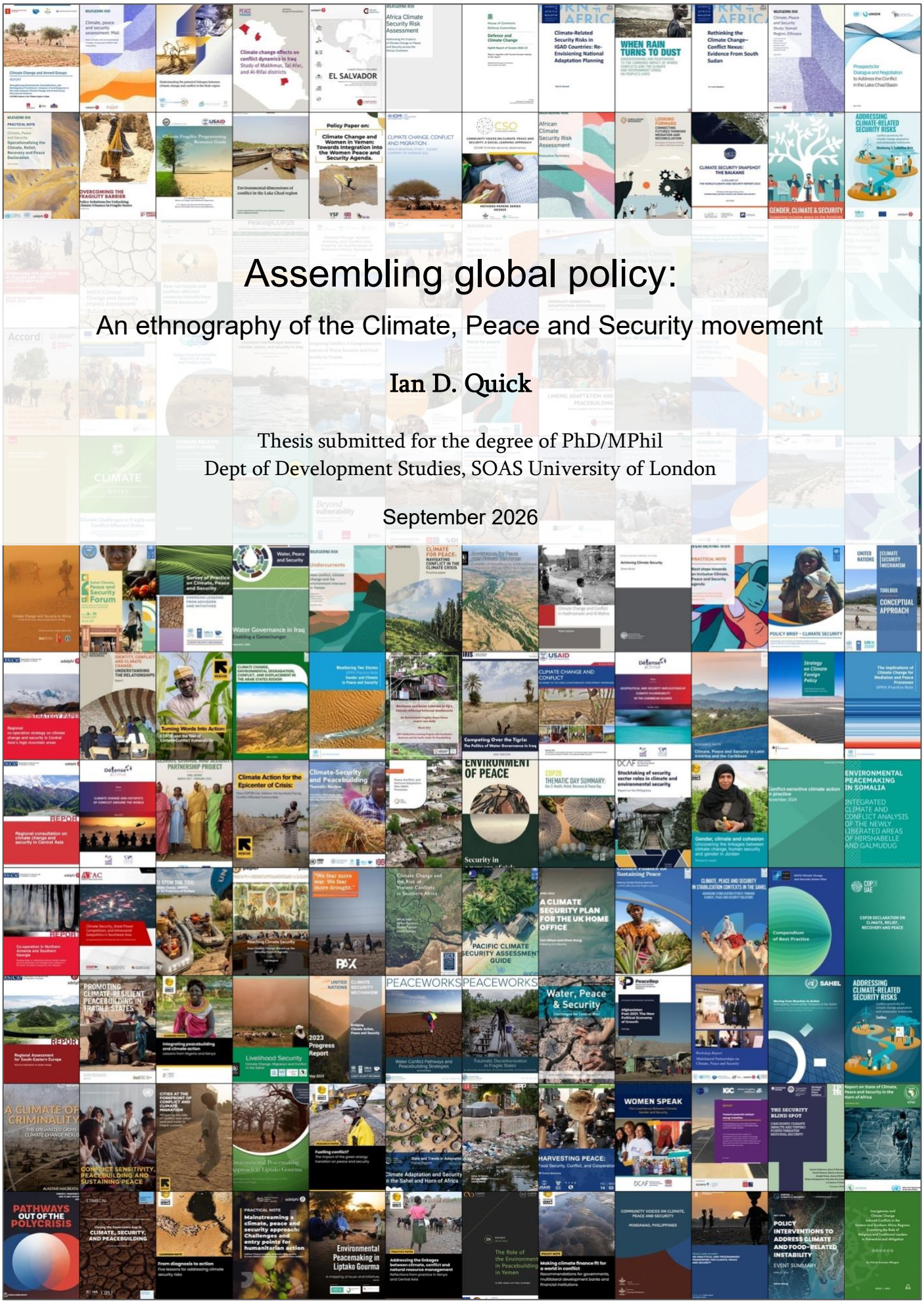

# Assembling global policy:

## An ethnography of the Climate, Peace and Security movement

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# Abstract

The thesis explores the rapid growth of policy narratives linking climate change and armed conflict, commonly referred to as Climate, Peace and Security (CPS) risks. Over the last decade such narratives have become commonplace across the development and peacebuilding sectors. They are ubiquitous in highly fragile contexts, and the moral foundation of the research is accordingly the need for "studying up" amidst powerful institutions (Nader 1994). The headline research question asks how development and peacebuilding policy actors have developed CPS policy agendas—i.e. narrowed the set of conceivable topics to those that become the focus of attention—over the period 2020-25.

Methodologically the thesis is interpretative policy research, and anchored in ethnographic participant-observation. It employed an extended case study design to observe (i) the development and extension of CPS problem narratives across the United Nations system, and (ii) the enactment of such narratives across the aid and diplomacy of a major bilateral donor. Both cases were "multi-positioned" ethnography (Mosse 2004) in that they built upon twenty years' experience with peacebuilding and "stabilisation" in ecologically fragile contexts.

At the conceptual level the thesis grapples with the challenge of theoretical fit for "de-bounding" policy challenges (Beck 1992) that cut across scales, jurisdictions, sectors and timeframes. It approaches CPS policy activities as a process of assemblage, in which heterogenous policy actors self-organised around common problem narratives. Within this schema, the analytic focus was upon (i) knowledge work that enframes climate, environment, socio-economic and political phenomena in "transportable" narratives; and (ii) assembly work to enact these problem narratives through the alignment of teams, workstreams, and resources.

The core contribution is to provide a processual account of policy change based on the interplay of external learning and convergence, on the one hand, and differentiation to meet institution-specific incentives on the other. A first set of findings follows the effects of these practices upon CPS causal narratives, with emphasis on "flattening" and decontextualisation along the chain of producing knowledge and extending it into new contexts. A second group of findings traces how CPS risk have been recognised and spatially located, given unresolvable uncertainty in analysis of the underlying complex systems, and address the interplay between "possibilistic" risk assessment and institutional interests and incentives.