THE NEW UNIVERSITY IN EXILE CONSORTIUM

SYLLABUS

DATA, DISPLACEMENT, AND DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE:

Interpreting and Visualizing Crisis Spaces

General Information	
Name of the Course	Data, Displacement, and Democratic Governance: Interpreting and Visualizing Crisis Spaces
Code	
Accredited Hours	<table><tr><th>Lectures</th><th>Seminars</th><th>Theoretical</th><th>Practical</th><th>Total</th></tr><tr><td>—</td><td>15</td><td>—</td><td>—</td><td>15</td></tr></table>
Duration	10 sessions, 90 minutes per session
Season	Fall 2026
Prerequisites	None, no coding, GIS, or remote-sensing experience required
Program	The New University in Exile Consortium Co-lead Seminar
Medium of Instruction	English
Program Mode of Study	Online
Course Delivery	Online
Settings	[Day, Time, and Start Date to be confirmed]
Presentation of	Yilak Kebede (Ruhr University Bochum, Germany) & Abdul Momin Mansoor (University of North Dakota, USA)

Course Description

This ten-week seminar introduces participants to a set of freely available online tools that allow researchers to examine crisis-affected areas through satellite imagery, displacement records, population data, and humanitarian maps, without any coding ability, GIS license, or prior technical experience. The seminar is designed for researchers from any discipline, including history, law, journalism, sociology, and human rights, who want to bring visual and spatial evidence into their work in a grounded and honest way.

What makes this kind of work genuinely powerful is the ability to bring different sources together: to read a satellite image of a neighborhood alongside population and demographic data, to explore displacement figures in light of humanitarian records, and to ask what multiple layers of evidence, taken together, reveal about a crisis that no single source could show on its own. Drawing on cases from Afghanistan, Sudan, Ethiopia, and other conflict-affected regions, the seminar connects these methods directly to broader questions of democratic governance, humanitarian accountability, and the visibility of ordinary people living through extraordinary circumstances.

Working with real images and real data, participants will learn to move between different sources and build a fuller picture of what is happening on the ground. Emphasis is placed not only on how to use these tools, but on how to read them critically, recognizing what the evidence shows, what it leaves out, and whose experiences risk disappearing from the record entirely. The tools introduced across the ten sessions include Sentinel Hub Playground, Google Earth Engine Timelapse, UNOSAT, the IDMC Displacement Viewer, HOT drone imagery, and the Global Human Settlement Layer, all free and accessible to anyone with an internet connection.

By the end, each participant will have produced a short Image Interpretation Memo based on a crisis case of their own choosing, a practical piece of work that draws on multiple sources and reflects the skills developed across the course. This seminar holds particular meaning at a moment when conflicts in Afghanistan, Sudan, Ethiopia, and many other parts of the world continue to displace communities, destroy infrastructure, and restrict access to independent research. It is designed precisely for scholars and researchers who are living and working closest to these realities, including those in exile, and who need practical, accessible tools to keep documenting, analyzing, and bearing witness to what is happening on the ground.

Weekly Schedule (Summary)

Weeks	Focus
Weeks 1–3	Data, governance, and the political economy of crisis data
Weeks 4–6	Spatial and visual evidence: satellite imagery, spectral analysis, and displacement sites
Weeks 7–9	Integration and analysis: platform power, time-series methods, archiving, and ethics
Week 10	Synthesis: democratic futures, ethical visualization, and final reflections

Detailed Course Outline (10 Sessions)

Wk	Topic	Description	Readings
1	**Crisis, Governance, and the Political Economy of Data**	Introduces core data types and metadata literacy; examines how institutional mandates and funding shape what humanitarian datasets measure and omit.	*Specht, Mapping Crisis, Introductory Chapter (2020); Haggart & Tusikov, The New Knowledge, Introduction (2023); V-Dem Governance Indicators Explainer*
2	**Displacement, Borders, and Narrative Erasure**	Compares refugee, IDP, and stateless data across a shared border to examine how legal definitions and access constraints produce systematic undercounts.	*IDMC Global Report on Internal Displacement, excerpt (2024); UNHCR Refugee Definition Overview; ACLED Conflict Types Codebook*

Wk	Topic	Description	Readings
3	**Humanitarianism, Power, and the Conflict Data Ecosystem**	Cross-examines ACLED and UCDP conflict data for the same country and month; introduces the decolonial data audit as a critical method.	*Thatcher & Dalton, Data Power, chapter excerpt (2022); Specht, Mapping Crisis, chapter on humanitarianism and data (2020); Decolonial Audit Worksheet*
4	**Satellite Imagery, Infrastructure, and Visual Damage Assessment**	Instructor-led navigation of before-and-after Sentinel-2 imagery across true-color, NIR, and SWIR composites, with attention to resolution and revisit-rate limits.	*UNITAR–UNOSAT Satellite Evidence Guide; Sentinel Hub Band Combinations Explainer*
5	**Mapping Displacement Economies, Resource Struggles, and Environmental Damage**	Applies NDVI, NBR, and NDWI spectral indices to agricultural, forested, and urban sites and links the findings to food-security indicators.	*Trends.Earth User Manual; IDMC Severity Assessment Methodology (2019); NDVI/NBR/NDWI Explainer*
6	**Visual Politics, Displacement Sites, and Humanitarian Witnessing**	Comparative analysis of three sites with differing levels of documentation, asking what combination of access, donor priority, and mandate determines visibility.	*Bigo, Isin & Ruppert (eds.), Data Politics, chapter excerpt (2019); Humanitarianism and Witnessing Reader*
7	**Platform Suppression and Search Invisibility**	Case studies of content removal, missing datasets, and geo-blocking; distinguishes deliberate suppression from the absence of data collection.	*Data Politics, chapter on platform power (2019); Platform Content Moderation Policies Reader*
8	**Time Series Analysis — Participants Begin Their Own Case Study**	Guided time-series analysis combining night-lights, NDVI, built-up surface, and fire-activity data with displacement figures to trace temporal patterns.	*Trends.Earth Land Productivity Guide; NASA Black Marble User Guide*

Wk	Topic	Description	Readings
9	**Archiving, Ethics, and Publication-Ready Evidence**	Covers image annotation, caption writing, and source archiving; participants weigh how publication could help or harm the populations documented.	*Hepp, Jarke & Kramp (eds.), New Perspectives in Critical Data Studies, chapter excerpt (2022); Ethical Visualization and Displacement Data Reader*
10	**Democratic Futures, Ethical Visualization, and Final Reflections**	Synthesis discussion connecting the seminar's methods to humanitarian accountability and democratic governance; participants complete their final deliverable.	*Specht, Mapping Crisis, Conclusion chapter (2020); Democratic Governance and Humanitarian Accountability Reader*

Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

Upon successful completion of this seminar, participants will be able to:

	Intended Learning Outcome	Bloom's Level
ILO1	Explain core data types and metadata conventions, and analyze how institutional mandates and funding shape what humanitarian and governance datasets measure and omit.	Understand / Analyze
ILO2	Compare multiple crisis datasets (displacement, conflict, food security) to identify specific gaps, undercounts, or methodological divergences.	Analyze / Evaluate
ILO3	Apply free, web-based tools (Sentinel Hub, Google Earth Engine, UNOSAT) to interpret satellite imagery and articulate its technical and political limitations.	Apply / Analyze
ILO4	Analyze why some crisis sites are well documented while others remain invisible, drawing on concepts of humanitarian access, donor priority, and platform governance.	Analyze
ILO5	Evaluate platform suppression mechanisms — content filters, API limits, and takedown requests — and distinguish them from the absence of data collection.	Analyze / Evaluate

	Intended Learning Outcome	Bloom's Level
ILO6	Produce and ethically archive a short analytical deliverable that connects spatial and statistical evidence to humanitarian accountability and democratic governance.	Apply / Create

Teaching & Learning Strategies

Strategy	Purpose	Online Tool / Method
Instructor-Led Live Demonstration	Model technical workflows in real time so no prior GIS or coding skill is required.	*Sentinel Hub EO Browser, Google Earth Engine, screen-share*
Guided Hands-On Analysis	Build data literacy through direct practice with real crisis-affected datasets.	*HDX, ACLED, IDMC, UNHCR, IOM DTM, FEWS NET*
Small-Group Discussion	Encourage critical comparison of datasets and interpretation of ambiguous or contested evidence.	*Breakout discussion, live chat*
Data Log and Audit Exercises	Build habits of critical metadata reading and institutional-interest analysis.	*Data Log Template, Decolonial Audit Worksheet*
Case Study Comparison	Develop analytical skill in explaining why some crisis sites are visible and others are not.	*Preselected site comparisons (documented / limited-data / no records)*
Independent Case Study Project	Apply time-series and spatial methods cumulatively toward a final deliverable.	*Sentinel Hub, NASA Black Marble, Trends.Earth*
Ethics and Archiving Workshop	Build responsible practices for annotating, captioning, and archiving sensitive evidence.	*Wayback Machine, Zenodo or OSF*

Deliverables

Deliverable	Description

Weekly Data Log	Ongoing metadata and dataset comparison notes maintained across Weeks 1–3
Reflection and Analysis	Short written reflections tied to weekly critical-discussion prompts
Image Interpretation Memo	Final deliverable: an annotated before-and-after satellite image pair with a publication-ready analytical caption, developed across Weeks 8–9 and completed in Week 10

Course Matrix: Aligning ILOs with Content

Wk	Topic / Content	Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)
1	Crisis, Governance & Political Economy of Data	ILO1: Explain core data types and metadata conventions; analyze institutional interests shaping data
2	Displacement, Borders & Narrative Erasure	ILO2: Compare displacement datasets to identify undercounts and legal/political gaps
3	Humanitarianism, Power & the Conflict Data Ecosystem	ILO2: Compare conflict datasets and evaluate methodological divergence
4	Satellite Imagery, Infrastructure & Visual Damage Assessment	ILO3: Apply satellite tools and analyze their technical/political limitations
5	Mapping Displacement Economies & Environmental Damage	ILO3: Apply spectral indices; ILO2: Link satellite findings to food-security data
6	Visual Politics, Displacement Sites & Humanitarian Witnessing	ILO4: Analyze why some crisis sites are documented and others remain invisible
7	Platform Suppression & Search Invisibility	ILO5: Evaluate platform suppression mechanisms and distinguish them from data absence
8	Time Series Analysis — Own Case Study Begins	ILO3: Apply time-series tools; ILO6: Begin producing the analytical deliverable
9	Archiving, Ethics & Publication-Ready Evidence	ILO6: Annotate, archive, and evaluate the ethical limits of evidence
10	Democratic Futures, Ethical Visualization & Final Reflections	ILO1, ILO4, ILO6: Integrate the seminar's methods into a synthesis on governance and accountability

Appendix

Readings

- Doug Specht, Mapping Crisis: Participation, Datafication and Humanitarianism in the Age of Digital Mapping, University of London Press, 2020 (open access).
- Mirca Madianou, Techno-Colonialism: When Technology for Good Is Harmful, Polity Press, 2024.
- Jim E. Thatcher and Craig M. Dalton, Data Power: Radical Geographies of Control and Resistance, Pluto Press, 2022.
- Didier Bigo, Engin Isin, and Evelyn Ruppert (eds.), Data Politics: Worlds, Subjects, Rights, Routledge, 2019 (open access).
- Blayne Haggart and Natasha Tusikov, The New Knowledge: Information, Data and the Remaking of Global Power, Rowman and Littlefield, 2023.
- Andreas Hepp, Juliane Jarke, and Leif Kramp (eds.), New Perspectives in Critical Data Studies: The Ambivalences of Data Power, Springer, 2022.

Participant Online Handout (Most Accessible Resources)

- NASA Black Marble — blackmarble.gsfc.nasa.gov (official product page)
- Sentinel Hub Custom Scripts Tutorial — sentinel-hub.com/explore/education (no coding required)
- IDMC Severity Assessment — internal-displacement.org/publications (methodological paper, 2019)
- UNITAR–UNOSAT Satellite Evidence Guide — unitar.org (human rights applications)
- Trends.Earth User Manual — trends.earth/docs (land productivity)