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Climate Change and International Relations

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On the 12th November 2015, a group of fifty students from schools across Bristol, UK, sat down to take part in a semi-structured negotiation exercise with one aim: to piece together a positive global regime to mitigate and adapt to the shifting spectre of climate change. It was a small event but had a significant takeaway. In piecing together international strategies, all participants were forced to wrestle with the complexity of national interests (be they altruistic or self-interested) on the international plain. The result, in short, was chaos. Greenpeace walked out of negotiations. Brazil seized the microphone from the chairs of the session. Not content with Brazil stealing the limelight, Sweden and Russia followed their lead. Significantly, this anarchic nature existed even without the complexities of the climate change regime – there was no right to amendments, no need for consensus and limited pressure from outside of the room. It is a miracle that any form of agreement was found – but it was, and it was overwhelmingly positive.

On the 12th December 2015, delegates of almost 200 countries filed into Le Bourget, Paris for the plenary discussion of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change's (UNFCCC) 21st Conference of Parties (COP-21). After two weeks of frantic – and often nocturnal – negotiations, a draft agreement was reached. Hailed as a historic juncture in the battle against climatic change, this moment possessed a great promise. An aim of keeping temperatures below 1.5 degrees Celsius, the creation of a loss and damages mechanism – although excluding claims of compensation – and the provision of national climate plans all provide an important route forward. Compared to how this conference could have – and previously has – panned out, this was progress. Yet, the critical voices have continued. Vulnerable states and communities appear short-changed, the 1.5-degree target appears unmeetable and the more-progressive mechanisms of mitigation are noticeably absent. Although there was relief in Le Bourget, only time will tell if this is the agreement the world needs.

This book was put together in the weeks and months preceding the Paris conference – and, at the time of writing, the ink of the agreement is not yet dry. As a result, this collection cannot provide any concrete analysis of the route forward that it represents. Instead, it seeks to provide a complementary understanding of how and why the international community must seek to reappraise its understanding of climate change and tactics of mitigation and adaptation. Paris is not the answer – it must only be the start.

This first case above may appear anecdotal – and it most likely is. Thousands of events like it have been run before, across the globe, and they all point to the same conclusion: that not only are climate change and the environment acquiring an increasing importance in the realm of International Relations, but *vice versa*. Climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies and mechanisms are developed at the international scale – resulting in their saturation with the nuts and bolts of international politics and governance. This is problematic: the effects of climate change will not be first experienced at the Westphalian scale of analysis but will instead affect the lives of those at the local level. Thus, it would seem a scalar paradox is created – the phenomena felt at one level and the decision made – or not

made – at another.

Yet, it is due to the universal nature of climate change – and responsibilities for it – that the international level provides the most effective route towards mitigation and adaptation (Luterbacher and Sprinz, 2001). Furthermore, the local effects of climate change can transcend the locale and be felt at the international level. The war in Syria – and the refugee crisis associated with it – can be linked to a prolonged period of drought in the country that drove the rural poor into the cities only to find their future limited by authoritarian rule and inaction. Popular protests against hydraulic fracturing ('fracking') and for the divestment from fossil fuel industries have grown into a global coalition of civil society, political parties and individuals. Lastly, the compromised future of many small island developing states (SIDS), due to sea level rise, and the undecided fate of their populations have led to a distinct understanding of the international injustice present within the multilateral negotiations on climate change.

It is this last case that provides us with an important reading of climate change: that it represents an existential crisis. Not for the planet, but for us. Yet, due to the dangerous environmental situations in which many in the world will find themselves, more needs to be done to understand the relations between climate change and international governance. It is this need that this collection takes as its starting point. In doing so, it follows in a rich line of literature. From Paul R. Ehrlich (1971) and Garret Hardin (1968) to Anthony Giddens (2009) and Naomi Klein (2015), the scope of climate change and its governance has captured the minds of many.

Scholars based in security studies have often conceptualised environmental problems as an international security threat – with an increasing emphasis on climate change (see Westing, 1986; Homer-Dixon, 1994; Barnett, 2000). Others have looked to discuss global commons problems (such as ozone depletion and global warming) as issues to be solved in multilateral agreements (see Haas et al., 1993; Yamin and Depledge, 2004). Many perspectives have been provided within this literature, either supporting or rejecting the need for international action. Social Darwinists have theorised a strong connection between nature and the collective humankind (Hofstadter, 1944) that would provide biological justifications of laissez-faire economics in a climate change regime (Leonard, 2009: 38, 40). Within this reading, free markets can perform a crucial role when dealing with natural resource scarcity and degradation, via the provision of incentives. The belief that the market will fix all problems continues. Such activity can be seen in the REDD and REDD+ schemes against deforestation, carbon trading and the privatisation of water supply across the globe. However, it should be noted that such schemes have been widely criticised as a new arena of commodification of resources (Castree, 2003; Swyngdeouw, 2012; Fairhead et al., 2012; Branco and Henriques, 2010). As a result, if we are to reform environmental policies, we should consider both social changes and environmental changes (Rudel, 2013: 5), as well as the manner in which the two interact. It is important to note that climate change forces us all to confront a significant ontological question: what is the essence of our relationship with the natural world?

In short, welcome to the Anthropocene. All organisms transform their habitat to some degree. Woodpeckers make holes in trees, creating sites for nests; rodents burrow; and beavers build dams. However, human society has taken it to a new level. Over half of the planet's large river systems have been fragmented by our dam construction – with over 45,000 large dams disrupting two-thirds of natural freshwater flows across the world. We have drained entire marshes and aquifers. We have altered the carbon cycle, the nitrogen cycle and the acidity of the oceans. We have created urban areas whose dominance and environmental consequences extend well beyond their peripheries. Close to 70 per cent of the world's forests are at a distance of less than half a mile from the forest's edge and the civilisation that exists outside of it. The concept of wilderness is now an historical artefact. The extinction of many species has come as a result of our own actions. Virgin nature has ended; we have harnessed it and constructed our physical environment in such a way that it has become unrecognisable. Gaia is dead and the earth has become a mere footnote in a history of production and consumption.

Climate change is a global commons problem. Its causes – man-made greenhouse gas emissions – and impacts are distributed and felt (albeit not equally) across the international system, transcending traditional boundaries and jurisdictions of the states of the international political system. As a result, causality is particularly difficult to assert in objective terms. Concepts of 'historical responsibility' and 'right to development' are regularly used in the debates surrounding climate change – but their sedimentation is limited. These assertions can be particularly problematic due

to the assigning of these concepts to specific states, neglecting the host of non-state actors that operate both within and across state boundaries – all of which share a degree of this responsibility. With these actors important to the story of climate change, it becomes important to understand that states are not monolithic entities but are instead complex groups comprised of small, integrated systems and units that range beyond the realm of international politics. It is this complexity that must be understood when exploring the relationship between climate change and International Relations.

This book aims to provide the reader with an introductory guide to this complexity and the context in which the environment is found and understood in the realm of International Relations. It is important to note that, due to these complexities, it is problematic to base this exploration within a strict framework of International Relations theory. This collection is not for that purpose – it is instead to empirically ground such understanding in the experience of climate change at the international level – be it in the form of conflict, negotiations or the mechanisms created by the global community.

Within this purpose, we have looked to explore what we regard as some of the main topics. We are fully aware that many issues concerning the relationship among the environment, climate change and IR have been left out. Yet, this obeys more to book length concerns, than forgotten issues. Three sections present contributions from authors of diverse academic backgrounds and geographical settings. This is a conscious decision taken at the start of this process. The editors of this book are based in Mexico City (Mexico) and Bristol (UK), respectively, and they have welcomed contributions from five continents. These chapters also represent a range of voices in the academy – from PhD candidates to professors. These two characteristics are important – environmental and climate change issues are global and intergenerational issues and should be treated as such. Lastly, this book embraces the complexity of climate change by weaving interdisciplinary thought throughout – sociology, law and psychology are all represented, allowing a wide exploration of exactly what climate change means in the international sphere.

Book Structure

The book is structured in three distinct sections. The first section, *International Relations Tendencies on Environment and Climate Change*, provides a series of contributions that seek to contextualise this collection, exploring how climate change interacts with the international level. Consisting of five contributions, the section explains the contemporary tendencies that inform international understandings of environmental issues and climate change.

The first chapter, by Mizan R. Khan, introduces the governance of climate change to the theories of International Relations – exploring the role that realism, liberalism and constructivism (among others) play in our understanding of the international regime of climate change adaptation. As Khan asserts, 'climate change is the poster child of global diplomacy today'. Yet, this often ignores the intrinsic complexity of this phenomenon as a policy problem. Khan understands this 'perfect moral storm' (Gardiner, 2006: 33) via a theoretical framework that draws from neoliberalism, regime theory and institutional functionalism, before putting forward a fresh perspective. In doing so, the contribution seeks to explore climate change as creating a new moral norm of global public good and global public bad – opening up analysis of the complexity of climate change adaptation in both theory and practice.

Ursula Oswald Spring provides an account of the complex interrelations and feedbacks between the human system and the environmental. By using an approach that compiles human, gender and environmental security (HUGE security), her contribution explores the viability of multilateral negotiations between governments, business communities and organised societies in relation to long-term sustainability goals. For this, Oswald Spring explains and differentiates concepts like global environmental change and climate change, the 'Anthropocene' and the importance of ecosystem services. Moreover, explanations about the Pressure-State-Response model are provided.

In 'Environment and International Politics: Linking Humanity and Nature', Simon Dalby details the importance that the environment has acquired in International Relations scholarship, the debates around it, and the nascent links it has with security, peace, and war. Dalby also explains the different understandings the term 'environment' produces, both politically and in materiality, to actors in both the North and the South. The role of science in major international

events both during and after the Cold War demonstrates the important role that the environment has when prompting international action of any kind. In addition, Dalby provides further insights into the importance of international agreements, environmental security, political economy and climate change, as well as where the future lies in the 'Anthropocene'.

Nina Hall looks at current trends to argue that climate change has become institutionalised in global affairs as a top priority issue, identifying four dimensions that confirm this: scientific consensus, political action, the location financial resources and the institutionalisation of climate change multilateral organisations. Hall examines G7 and G8 communiqués as well as international organisations' engagement with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). This approach allows the concluding observation that, although climate change was previously minimised by international actors, this trend is reversing.

In the final contribution to this section, Kirsti M. Jylhä explores the psychology of humans' reluctance to acknowledge climate change as a man-made problem. Jylhä suggests a move from questioning whether climate change is caused by humans to asking what hinders people from acknowledging it as an important route for research. In doing so, she affirms that denial develops for many different reasons, within a range of psychological mechanisms. In addition, Jylhä relates the concept of Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) to processes of climate change denial, stating that the perception that humans have of themselves as a superior group tends to compound the perceived right to dominate the rest of the nature.

The second section of the book, titled *Assessments: Which Way to Follow?*, presents the reader with four different contributions that explore the manner in which we – as an international community – understand environmental problems, climate change implications and the policy mechanisms that are in existence.

In 'Transversal Environmental Policies', Gustavo Sosa-Nunez presents an insight into the role environmental policies may play within a wider policy framework. This transversal nature is noticeable, but their omission or partial involvement is also obvious. In this context, Sosa-Nunez comments on policy approaches to environmental management; listing administrative rationalism, democratic pragmatism and economic rationalism as options through which inclusion of the environment in broader policies can take place. Furthermore, Sosa-Nunez addresses the role that environmental policies have in broader policy frameworks. This is illustrated through different areas such as industry, security, science, climate change and urban planning. Sosa-Nunez then goes on to identify the adequate conceptualisation of environmental policies – questioning whether transboundary cooperation or international governance could better explain the transversal approach that environmental policies have.

In his contribution, Ed Atkins explores the widely cited spectre of environmental conflict. Within this reading of degradation and change, many have asserted that a chain of causality will develop, with environmental pressures leading to increased competition that results in conflicts over scarce resources. This contribution looks to debunk this assertion, arguing for the drawing of an important distinction between strictly environmental factors and resources of an economic nature. It is the latter that provides an important understanding of the Anthropocene – with society's interaction with these resources (such as oil and gas) bestowing value upon them, driving potential competition. Instead, this contribution argues for a focus on strictly environmental routes to conflict. This opens up analysis to the role of the environment in a wider causal web of conflict – as demonstrated in the case of conflicts over environmental refugees.

In her contribution, Emilie Dupuits affirms that the increased participation of non-state actors in international governance is occurring due to the high fragmentation in which global environmental governance is found. This, Dupuits claims, is an opportunity for civil society and non-governmental organisations. However, she also recognises that this possibility leads to competition for visibility and power, which can hamper the strength of participation. By revising literature on multi-scalar governance, Dupuits asserts the importance of state and non-state actors in the transition from a hierarchical international system towards a horizontal network.

In 'Global Climate Change Finance', Simone Lucatello engages in the debate about who is going to pay for mitigation and adaptation costs within national and international responses to climate change. In doing so, he explores the

effectiveness of environmental aid and economic initiatives. Lucatello suggests that multilateral aid is preferable to bilateral aid for a number of reasons. First, it provides greater financial control to recipient, generally developing, countries. Second, a multilateral scheme is more desirable because it is less open to political issues and can be better delivered, therefore providing better outcomes. However, issues remain over the origin of economic resources. Who should pay, how should the money be delivered and what should its destinations be are questions that ought to accompany concerns surrounding climate change governance.

The third section of the book, *Two Steps Forward, One Step Back: Perspectives as We Continue with Our Lives,* provides an insight into the actions and processes we should expect of international environmental governance in the future. This section seeks to take into account the problems we, as an international community, face if we are to find and maintain resilience in the face of environmental problems and climatic change. It is important to note, as is outlined in this section, that much of this will depend on the commitment that different sectors of national and international society can provide to ensure this resilience for forthcoming generations.

In his chapter, Lau Blaxekjær explores the emergent role of the study of environmental diplomacy as an additional lens of understanding within International Relations literature. Using the examples of the role of the Cartagena Dialogue in UNFCCC negotiations and the influence of green growth networks, Blaxekjær posits that contemporary scholarship must seek to understand the 'orchestrating role that diplomacy plays in these new, overlapping environmental governance fields' present within the climate change regime. It is important to note, as this contribution does, that these coalitions often take the form of partnerships, utilising tactics of issue linkage. With the international governance of climate change standing at an important crossroads within the post-Paris regime, it is important to explore the increasing role of these partnerships in the development of the international relations of climate change.

As Duncan Depledge explores in his analysis of the geopolitics of the region, the observed and predicted climatic changes will be particularly experienced in the Arctic Circle – a region which overlaps the territorial boundaries of a number of states, including the USA and Canada, the Scandinavian states and Russia. Depledge charts how this has resulted in decisions over the Arctic occurring at all levels of governance – from the community to the global. A wide-ranging discussion follows regarding the best route forward and how it should be taken. A particular issue that has become significant within these processes has to do with wider understandings of political economy: will the Arctic provide a new resource frontier or a global commons?

In 'Renewable Energy: Global Challenges', Lada V. Kochtcheeva explores the inherent complexity of piecing together the implementation of renewable energy strategies. Although the use of renewable energy is increasing across the globe, the success of these measures – and their wider adoption – are often constrained by a series of regulatory, technological, social and economic barriers. As Kochtcheeva argues, this is often the result of the need to balance competing policy goals – such as sustainability and economic development. Large-scale subsidies for fossil fuels and nuclear power persist – often resulting in the undercutting of renewable energy technology. These market failures can often be coupled with unfavourable institutional environments that further limit successful adoption. This contribution argues that the solution could be found in a more systematic approach of research, one that aims to further our understanding of the unfavourable conditions that hinder the adoption of renewable energy.

The final two chapters can be understood as a twinned approach to a fast-growing actor in the international governance of climate change: the fossil fuel divestment campaign. While the individual demands of the movement may vary on the ground, the overarching aim is simple: that companies and institutions divest (or withdraw investment) from companies that profit from the fossil fuel industry (such as oil and gas companies). First, prominent activists in the USA Leehi Yona and Alex Lenferna look to the student-led divestment movement as a means to understand the future of popular understandings of climate change and its interaction with international society. The movement has its roots in a 2010 campaign at Swathmore College, Pennsylvania, and has transformed extensively since then. Yona and Lenferna argue that this is the result of a process of coalition-building, support/pressure from alumni groups and the transformative generational belief that you cannot solve the problem by supporting the actors that created it.

In the final chapter, Matthew Rimmer presents an important, primary source-laden analysis of how this divestment

movement has also sought to influence the management of sovereign wealth funds. Using the example of Norway, Rimmer explores the way that the popular divestment movement has globalised its efforts – striking at the heart of the international system. The bold decision by the Norwegian government to divest from the coal industry can be used as an example for many nations to follow. Rimmer argues that, although the introduction of divestment as a policy initiative at the international level remains uncertain, its future role will likely present important options in the international climate law regime.

To conclude, the editors present what they consider are the key findings of this edited collection. They offer a critical assessment on the context of the environment and climate change within IR studies, before concluding with suggestions for the development of future understanding of the mutually constitutive relationship between climate change and International Relations.

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