

BOOK REVIEWS

Climate Refugees



Collectif Argos, Jean Jouzel and Hubert Reeves
Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, ISBN: 9780230347724, pp. 336

Climate Refugees is a visually arresting survey of some of the world's populations currently most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Produced by a team of French journalists called the Collectif Argos, the intention of this book seems clear—to humanize the phenomenon of global warming and its effects in order to prompt decided international action on this issue. In particular, the concern of the Collectif Argos team is focused both on the overwhelming number of people who may soon be forced into mass migrations as the result of climate change as well as the very real problems posed by the ambiguous political status presently held by such 'climate refugees.' *Climate Refugees* therefore attempts to produce not just one 'face of climate change,' but rather works to personify the manifold impacts of climate change as it is variously experienced across our planet. Ultimately, this text is designed to be a wake-up call to those of us not yet living on the front lines of these events.

By ranging across the globe in search of their stories, the Collectif Argos has done a particularly effective job of highlighting how the concept of global warming itself can work to obscure the myriad ways that this issue manifests itself ecologically. The volume begins with an account from the Alaskan Arctic that represents one of the more commonly understood examples of these effects as evidenced by the rising temperatures and rotting permafrost that endanger an island community of Native Iñupiat. However, other featured stories also detail how the magnification of normal seasonal flooding is reaching disastrous proportions in Bangladesh and how rapid rates of desertification are now threatening many villages in the Chinese interior. Through exposure to these tales, the reader should ultimately come away with a better understanding of the large array of complex environmental problems that are associated with the more general notion of climate change.

Drawing upon their strengths as a team of journalists, the Collectif Argos has produced a series of short,

easy-to-read pieces that engage with a handful of citizens in each of the nine featured geographic locations. The purpose of these essays is to examine how the daily lives of these people are being profoundly impacted by climate change. Each of these personalized perspectives is coupled with a wealth of images that serve to better illustrate the reality of these lived experiences. As an example, both the extreme vulnerability as well as the rich cultural diversity of an island nation like Tuvalu, which sits just 2 meters above sea level, becomes palpable. This is accomplished by a series of photographs that juxtapose evidence of the flooding issues already present there with the vibrancy of a Polynesian way of life that these rising waters imperil. Taken together, these personal stories and evocative photographs compellingly portray the many different ways that individuals and their communities are struggling to survive and maintain their unique lifeways in the face of global climate change.

One of the primary issues associated with this text, however, arises from the very fact that the diversity of problems associated with global warming are considered here under this all-encompassing banner. The inherent danger in this act of assemblage is that it becomes easy to overlook the fact that not all those at the geographic epicenters of these occurrences are equally threatened and/or vulnerable. The story of Lake Chad's inexorable disappearance and the quiet desperation of its fisherman who once made a living on its rapidly receding waters is nearly heartbreaking. This is especially so when compared to the piece from the Halligen of coastal Germany that is also included in this work. In this instance, a rather charming scene of bucolic remoteness and occasional isolation ultimately imparts the sense that the area's stalwart inhabitants and their way of life are but mildly threatened. Clearly there is a great disparity between the levels of hardship that these communities are experiencing as a result of a changing climate, yet as 'vulnerable areas' they are given relatively equal consideration here.

It is recognized that it is largely beyond the intended scope of this work to provide a more in-depth examination of the political, economic and social conditions that work to place certain communities at greater risk while simultaneously constraining their abilities to effectively adapt to rapidly changing environmental circumstances. In their introductory chapter, the Collectif Argos writers do allude to the fact that it is often the world's poorest populations, whose lives are already marked by a fair amount of insecurity, that are generally the most affected by the impacts of climate change. They also make mention of issues of social justice in the context of the unequal burden that many less developed nations are forced to bear as they contend with the problems created by greenhouse-gas emissions that they themselves did very little to produce. However, with the stories that follow this introduction, it feels as if there is almost a missed opportunity to further explore the material ramifications of these essential arguments.

As a case in point, there are the two examples highlighted from the United States. These each feature communities whose vulnerability to the effects of climate change are quite likely linked to the historical marginalization they have experienced as a result of either their ethnic or racial status. Here we find an Alaskan Native village that will be forced to relocate in the very near future because of the severity of local coastal erosion. This is a move that many community members recognize as a direct threat to the cultural cohesion of their people. Yet, these villagers must try and induce the federal government to spend the extra money necessary to relocate them to the alternate area they deem most amenable to the retention of their current way

of life. The second case from the US explores the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. This recent disaster has certainly led many to call for a more thorough deliberation of how certain social justice issues like the state of contemporary race relations in this country can magnify the vulnerability of minority residents to these environmental catastrophes. However, the brevity of the pieces featured in this work clearly does not allow for a deeper consideration of these elements of each story. Thus it can only be hoped that the reader becomes at least subtly aware of these critical issues with which we must contend if we are ever to effectively engage with the full suite of problems associated with global warming.

As a whole, the climate change stories presented in *Climate Refugees* ideally serve to represent a global issue whose impacts should also be understood as uniquely local. Therefore, while we must tackle this issue at the international level as the Collectif Argos suggests, careful attention should also be paid to the particularities of each place. *Climate Refugees* is the type of emotionally charged exposé that seeks to motivate its readers to want to know and do more about the challenges raised by climate change and the refugees it will likely create in the not so distant future. *Climate Refugees* therefore represents the best efforts of the Collectif Argos to instill a sense of caring and concern for those already being impacted by the effects of climate change. In this way, it is hoped that we all will be compelled to seriously reckon with the issues raised by the notion of 'climate justice' before it is too late.

ALANA SHAW

*Conservation Refugees: The Hundred-Year Conflict
between Global Conservation and Native Peoples.*



Mark Dowie

MIT, ISBN: 9780262012614, pp. 376, 2009

The parks vs. people debate continues to garner attention in scholarly, policy, and activist circles. *Conservation Refugees* is Mark Dowie's welcome addition to this forum. From international conferences and the boardrooms of the largest conservation NGOs, to the patch of grazing land on the Serengeti, *Conservation Refugees* provides an accessible and informative overview of the displacement of indigenous peoples (both in terms of forced eviction and indirect forms) around the world for the

purposes of biodiversity conservation. Not only does Dowie outline the history of this debate from the establishment of Yosemite and Yellowstone up until today, but he also argues for a new conservation paradigm whereby indigenous peoples and powerful conservation interests work together to balance the protection of nature and culture. This paradigm is one where indigenous peoples participate fully in conservation and the management of protected areas not as stakeholders, "but as rights-holders and equal players."¹