



Book Review:

***Climate Change – Who’s Carrying the Burden: The chilly climates of the global environmental dilemma*, Anders Sandberg and Tor Sandberg, Eds, 2010, Ottawa: The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives**

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They say that you shouldn’t judge a book by its cover. In the case of Anders and Tor Sandberg’s *Climate Change—Who’s Carrying the Burden* it may be necessary to bend this literary rule. The Sandbergs’ selected a photograph of Jens Galschiøt’s sculpture *Justitia, Western Goddess of Justice* as their cover illustration. Rarely can an image have so poignantly captured the ethos of a book. Galschiøt’s sculpture is comprised of a meandering line of emaciated figures, thigh-deep in water and looking expressionlessly into space. At the front of this grim human line, one of the cohort struggles under the weight of an obese figure whose rolls of fat protrude as he is carried above the water. The sculpture is accompanied by an inscription, which reads, ‘I am sitting on the back of a man—he is sinking under my burden—I will do everything to help him—except to step down from his back.’ There are surely fewer better artistic expressions of the contemporary relationship between the Global North and the Global Majority South. While clearly devised with issues of world trade, financial debt, international aid, and neo-colonialism in mind (and initially commissioned for the Social Forum held in London in 2004), this sculpture was displayed at the fifteenth United Nations Conference on climate Change (COP15), which was held in Copenhagen in December 2008.



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This is a book that is intrinsically connected to the politics and poetics of *Justitia, Western Goddess of Justice*. Politically, this volume was conceived and forged in the debates and protests that surrounding the COP15. Poetically, it is a volume that takes seriously the idea that climate change is not simply an issue of environmental science and forecast, but a question of international social justice and human dignity. The volume is comprised of 19 chapters (including an editors’ introduction), which are split into three sections. The first section introduces the topic of climate (in)justice as it is expressed and addressed in international deliberations. The second section moves from the global level in order to consider local expressions of climatic injustice. In the third, and final, section we are introduced to a series of alternative initiatives (including Transition Towns, Climate Camps and food share schemes) that are beginning to challenge the assumptions associated with mainstream, UN sanctioned approaches to climate justice. There is a freshness and urgency of political intent about this volume that is, in my experience at least, unusual in academic publications. This is perhaps a product of the fact that this book is quite different from your standard academic treatise. In combining the writings of environmental activists, journalists, a political ambassador, and the leader of the Green Party of Canada, the volume develops an air of pragmatic engagement, which is often sorely lacking in more abstract analyses. The relative shortness of the chapters also tends to militate against the pursuit of more abstruse scholarly avenues of enquiry. This combination of pragmatism and brevity means that the book has a highly accessible feel, which, in the context of its subject matter, is a significant strength.

The unifying theme of the volume is the idea of climatic (in)justice. Significantly, the volume’s focus on debt and injustice does not lead so much to a discussion of the ethics, but rather the geography of climate change. This geographical focus is signaled at the outset when, in their introductory chapter, the editors question the very notion of “global” warming. They are critical of this term because of the flattening affect it tends to have on climate change politics (this is a critique that can actually be applied to the homogenizing global discourses associated with environmentalism more generally). The point is that while climate change may have a global dynamic, its causes, effects and associated responsibilities are unevenly distributed across space. Of course, the uneven geographies of climate change are already recognized in formal United Nations declarations on the common but differentiated responsibility that the global community holds for climate change. What all of the contributors to this volume appear to agree on, however, is that official doctrines of common but different responsibility for climate change tend to be used all too easily to mask the processes in and through which those who are most responsible for climate change are able to continually insulate themselves from taking responsibility for its ensuing socio-ecological consequences.

The idea of *climate debt* is a concept that runs through and connects various chapters in this volume. As a fairly simple concept, climate debt provides an easily

understandable context within which to explore the relational geographies of responsibility associated with climate change. In her fascinating chapter 'Paying our Climate Debt,' Naomi Klein outlines the two dimensions of climate debt: 1) the principle that many, often poorer, countries are owed reparations from the historical perpetrators of climate change for the adverse impacts that it will have on them; and 2) that society should repay its debt to the global ecosystem, by allowing it to rebalance its skewed carbon budget (2010: 55). Where this volume is at its best, however, is when it starts to move beyond discussions of socio-ecological reparation, to expose the other injustices that are increasingly becoming associated with climate change. These injustices include the ways in which the climate change agenda is being used to simultaneously constrain the development trajectories and choices facing many nations, and to restrict the spaces for political contestation of, and civil engage in, the environmental polity.

There are many fascinating chapters in this volume, but space does not allow me to mention them all here. Particular highlights for me include the editors' ethnographic account of the events surrounding the COP15 meeting; Killoran-McKibbin's fascinating description of *the World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth*; and Saad's account of climate refugees and remittance networks. Furthermore, there is very little I can be critical of in this volume. In the spirit of positive critical engagement, however, there are two points I would like to reflect upon. First, while I welcome the type of geographically informed account of climate debt and injustice developed within this book, I found that at times the discussion of debt and involuntary exposure tended to produce a somewhat blunt geography of responsibility. While often geopolitically valuable, discussions of the Global North and South can often hide the complex institutional contexts within which climate injustice is produced and sustained. I was left wondering where the Multinational Corporation (with its sprawling shareholders in both the Global North and South) fitted into this picture, and how the ecological sins of a nation translated into the ethical concerns of a contemporary household (these issues are partly addressed in sections 2 and 3 and chapters like Osuoka's on carbon capitalism in the Niger Delta). Second, while I sympathized with the strong emphasis that this volume placed on the role that civil society has to play in redressing the entrenched injustices of climate change, I remained unclear as to the precise nature of this civic force. Was it an ecologically informed electorate who could hold its parliament to account? Was it perhaps, an international collective ensuring the flow of climate remittances? Or was it a radical anti-capitalist movement, supporting degrowth in the Global North? Effective action most probably requires a mix each of these civic forces, but a measured analysis of the opportunities and constraints that face them all is clearly needed.

My quibbles with the volume are, however, minor and I would recommend *Climate Change—Who is Carrying the Burden* to anyone who senses both the radical potential, and tragic injustice, of climate change.