

## Competing Visions of Climate Justice

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The humanitarian costs of climate change today are on such a scale and complexity that they demand a radically new social, political and legal understanding of the global geography of resource justice. The threats we now face call for an order of governance capable of imposing restrictions on resource depletions and GHG emissions which no agent should be able to violate. Certainly, the heightened international campaigning of climate justice coalitions, human rights organizations and various UN bodies (e.g., the UNHCR, the UNHDP, UN Human Rights Council) suggests some minimum degree of consensus emerging today as to the need for a more globally coordinated and human rights-sensitive response to natural resource depletion and climate-induced suffering. What these actors share in common are at least two interpretations of an ecologically threatened humanity. The first is practical in terms of the urgent need to find workable and sustainable solutions to real and immanent threats of disaster - the spread of disease, famine, drought, flooding, statelessness (UNHCR, February 2011) and natural resource conflict (UN General Assembly, 2009). The second is moral in that all of these actors presuppose that such a threatened humanity possesses a normative status that is highlighted in current situations deemed intolerable, unjust or inhumane (e.g., severe drought). That, however, is perhaps where this consensus ends. There are still disturbing gaps in both our willingness to apply such interpretations of humanity evenly to all peoples across the world and claim ownership of the global problems of resource deprivation, hunger and inequality. The compartmentalized reasoning of states, together with a predominantly 'national outlook' on resource entitlements and distribution, allows a non-responsibility for global climate destruction to continue at enormous costs to humanity as a whole. The major climate threats posed to humanity today are de-territorialized. Yet these threats provoke territorialized responses (in particular the re-assertion of the primacy of bounded communitarian moral-political reasoning).

A communitarian logic ultimately narrows the scope of relevance as to what constitutes legitimate grounds for the application of principles of justice. The principles of equality embedded in International human rights law, for instance, are applicable to all individuals in the world. Given the dominance of a communitarian reasoning, obligations embedded in International Law, such as the right to self-determination or the right to life, come to be interpreted as imposing 'imperfect moral duties' on states. Recognizing and acting upon the rights of others who are threatened with ecological destruction is seen more as an act of compassion or altruism, not an obligation, and one which is, therefore, acceptable only up to the point where the interests of community members are not threatened and their rights not infringed upon. Imperfect moral duties, like granting hospitality privileges to those peoples dispossessed by the chain effects of climate change, are thought to be circumstantial in that they are conditioned by events, as well as the preferences and priorities of the host community.

Those who choose to challenge this dominant reasoning do so on the grounds of a common ownership of the earth's resources and, also, on the basis of a more contemporary world condition – common ownership of environmental harms (in recognition of the fact that climate destruction is by now internationally sustained). This paper will assess how competing visions of climate justice today define issues of equity, responsibility and juxtapose what we share 'in common', our experiences of commonality with different constructions of 'the commons'. It will also consider how various climate justice coalitions challenge the contemporary validity of the values and principles of justice upon which dominant models of development or practices of rights enclosure (practices of exclusion based on territorial rights and private ownership) are founded.