



Climate terror: a critical geopolitics of climate change

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BOOK REVIEW

Climate terror: a critical geopolitics of climate change, by Sanjay Chaturvedi and Timothy Doyle, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, XVI + 247 pp., US\$39.00 (paperback), ISBN 978-0-230-24962-2

As creative as it is critical, this innovative enquiry into the geopolitics of climate change is also at once discomfiting and disorienting. It focuses on how the power relations dividing the 'majority world' of the global south from the 'minority world' of privileged polluters transform how the threats of climate change are both represented and experienced. The two authors, Sanjay Chaturvedi and Timothy Doyle, argue on this basis that it is critical to question all-encompassing anthropocene appeals to a single global 'we' of responsibility and response. Without questioning scientific depictions of anthropogenic climatic disruption on a planetary scale, they nevertheless present a compelling series of contrapuntal contrasts between the ways in which the resulting risks are conceptualized by the powerful and confronted by the vulnerable. The result is a sobering review of what they call the 'climate terror industry', an industry that in their account constructs 'climate terror' at the intersection of a geopolitics of fear and a geoeconomics of hope to advance 'a largely conservative grand-strategy deployed by faltering sovereign states, at various stages of neo-liberal embrace, to discipline and regulate various faultlines in statecraft' (page xii).

Published before Donald Trump came to power in the US in January 2017, the book makes for even more disturbing reading now that there is an unabashed climate change denier in the White House. With his monstrous merging of Nazi and neoliberal tendencies, Trump creates or exposes faultlines in statecraft on a daily basis (Bessner & Sparke, 2017). Even as his administration has set about hiding evidence of climate change and undermining the 2015 Paris Agreement, it has been confronted by massive floods in Houston, Florida and Puerto Rico that are widely interpreted as a sign of climate terrors to come. Many people around the world fear that Trump's faultline fracturing of global politics will lead to Armageddon, whether fast through war, or more slowly but unstoppably through climate change catastrophe. In this new context, the book's cautions against the 'catastrophe fatigue' created by the climate terror industry seem all the more salient, especially as Trump's attacks on the climate policy legacies of the Obama administration and the green neoliberalism of its Clean Power Plan (CPP) have created urgent new kinds of catastrophism. But at the same time, the ultimate conclusion of Chaturvedi and Doyle in this book serves simultaneously as a useful jolt for all of us who feel newly endangered by the insecurities and instabilities of Trumpism. Already, they remind us, 'Armageddon came many years ago for the globally peripheral peoples of the global South, when their lands were first invaded and colonized by their European oppressors. The flood came long ago – it was their peoples' blood' (page 208).

Sensitive to the long histories and global geographies of subaltern suffering, Chaturvedi and Doyle repeatedly counterpoint privileged post-materialist responses to climate change with post-colonial perspectives from the global south. In place of soft sustainability-speak with its future-focused investment in intergenerational ethics, they thereby highlight how many peripheral communities in poorer parts of the world are preoccupied with survival now in the present (page 45). Instead of cosmopolitan carbon trading schemes, they present the majority world's concerns with climate change debts and the need for reparations from the influential and affluent (pages 55 and 60). Deliberately disorienting atmosphere-oriented

consciousness amongst privileged post-materialists, they foreground the earth-centered approach of subaltern survival efforts (page 197). Instead of luxury emissions, they ask us to consider the case for livelihood emissions (pages 40 and 188). Instead of one-off days of action and parliamentary politicking in places of plenty, they juxtapose the enduring urgency of everyday survival for the poor in the face of failing monsoons, droughts, floods and overheating (page 181). And instead of electoral campaigning by environmental experts imparting knowledge to an atomized populace, they suggest that in the global south where 'there is an innate respect for local systems of knowledge [e]ducation becomes a tool of empowerment for the people, rather than challenging the fundamentals of their knowledge' (page 182).

All of their contrapuntal contrasts are informed by the different perspectives Chaturvedi and Doyle bring as an Indian scholar and Australian scholar collaborating internationally across and around the Indian ocean. Rather than essentialize a single subaltern perspective, the authors' situated knowledges (which are also warmly humanized by the book's heartfelt acknowledgments) lead to especial sensitivity to the ways that the discourse of 'common but differentiated responsibility' obscures internal differentiations around the Indian ocean region, including between India and Bangladesh. The use by Indian negotiators of per capita caps on emissions is unpacked as a strategy that allows Indian elites to hide behind the vast numbers of the country's poor. In a different way, Chapter 5 offers an extended critique of the construction of the specter of climate change refugees, focusing in particular on how Bangladesh is framed as a fearful 'black hole' and how its politicians themselves represent the fears of both climate change and refugee flows in diverse policy statements and responses. In these, as in many other analyses in the book, the authors keep asking us to consider 'whose "fear"' (page 12) is at stake. They thereby juxtapose the very real embodied fears of the most vulnerable with the much more general geopolitics of fear imagined by privileged policy-makers who, it is argued, commonly seek in these ways to distract their audiences from the underlying causes and culpability for climate change.

As interdisciplinary as they are international in their approach, Chaturvedi and Doyle develop their international relations interventions in a way that draws as much on political geography as it does on political science and political theory. They closely engage the work of many geographers including John Agnew, Noel Castree, Simon Dalby, David Demeritt, Klaus Dodds, Emily Gilbert, Jennifer Hyndman, Rachel Pain, Susan Roberts, Anna Secor, Jo Sharp and, I must acknowledge here, myself. These generous and constructive engagements lead to particularly useful adaptations of critical geopolitical arguments by geographers. The book presents the geopolitics of fear and the geoeconomics of hope in this way as powerfully reterritorializing geostrategic discourses that recode the implications of climate change with imaginative geographies that make some supposed threats and opportunities visible at the same time as they obscure any analysis of the causes of climate change that might disrupt neo-liberal business as usual. It is in this way that Chaturvedi and Doyle show how those who are most vulnerable are recoded through a geopolitics of fear as the most dangerous. Reciprocally they demonstrate that it is through a geoeconomics of hope that climate change is variously securitized and financialized as an opportunity for military planning, market making or both. As a result, the book avoids the theoretical pitfalls of partitioning geopolitics and geoeconomics into distinct eras or spaces, and instead contributes important new evidence about their cogenerational dialectics as entangled geostrategic discourses (for a review of other recent efforts to examine these entanglements see Sparke, 2017).

There are some sections of the book that could have benefited from closer editing, including the index which fails to do justice to all the scholars with whom Chaturvedi and Doyle engage so carefully. It also needs noting that while the book makes an especially strong case for

addressing the embodied terrors endured by poor communities in the global south it does not document their actual experiences and recriminations in any depth. Instead, what it does do systematically, rigorously and with well-researched detail is reveal the urgent need to question a normalized and neoliberal climate change catastrophism that obscures the global unevenness of climate change responsibility, adaptability and vulnerability. Some may now see this as beside the point in the time of Trump, but that would be a mistake. Instead, the book's critical attention to the 'planetary apartheid system' (page 129) supported by climate terror talk seems more relevant now than ever. With his signature mix of green golf courses and border-wall boosterism, Trump simply makes the rapacious territorial fortification of wealthy enclaves and privileged interests transparent to all. He would appear thus to have put terror, territoriality, blood and soil back into climate terror with a revanchist vengeance. Following the arguments of *Climate Terror*, solidarity with all those who have seen this kind of violence and blood before should surely become an urgent global priority.

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