

## Book Review

**Nithya Natarajan and Laurie Parsons (eds) (2021) *Climate Change in the Global Workplace – Labour, Adaptation and Resistance*.**

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*Reviewed by*

*Thomas Klikauer, Western Sydney University, Australia*

The two editors – Nithya Natarajan and Laurie Parsons – and fifteen contributors of the book *Climate Change in the Global Workplace* have divided their work into three parts: Labour, Adaptation and Resistance. After the editor's introduction on the core idea of the book, which is reflected in the title, Part I starts with "Thermal Inequality in a Changing Climate: Heat, Mobility and Precarity in the Cambodian Brick Sector". This is followed by "Climate Change Adaptation through Agroecology in Senegal: Enhanced Farm Workers' Autonomy or New Forms of Vertical Labour Control?" Part I closes with "Routes to Food Security: Strategies of Survival of Marginalised Communities in North Western Bangladesh".

Part II, on adaptations to climate change, begins with "Old Ways and New Routes: Climate Threats and Adaptive Possibilities in the Indian Himalayas" and continues with a chapter titled "From Climate Adaptation to Social Reproductive Resistance: Examining the Gendered Climate–Labour Migration Nexus in Southeast Asian Mobilisations for Environmental Justice". Part II ends with a chapter on "Hands That Adapt: Seasonal Labour Migration, Climate Change and the Making of Adaptable Subjects in Turkey".

The final part (III) on resistance offers illuminations on "Workers and Environmentalists of the World Unite? Exploring Red–Green Politics in Union Support for Heathrow Expansion" and "A Changing Climate: Indigenous Participation in Extractive Industry". It finishes with "Climate Change is Class War: Global Labour's Challenge to the Capitalocene". Thereafter, a conclusion highlights the editors' thinking in "Reworking of Climate Adaptation as Labour Resistance".

In his foreword, Andrew Herod argues that "Capitalocene" is a better term than "the recently popularised Anthropocene" (p. xiii) – just as Moore (2016, 2017) suggests. A country that claims to be socialist but pushes some of the worst excesses of capitalism is China. Interestingly, "whilst the US used 4.5bn tons of cement during the entire 20<sup>th</sup> century, China used 6.5bn tons between just 2011 and 2013!" (p. xv). Replacement of the United States (US) as "the" world power seems to be merely a question of time.

Beyond that, Natarajan and Parsons are – unfortunately – correct when arguing that "environmental studies have largely ignored labour issues, while labour studies have paid little attention to climate issues" (p. 2). Yet, the book uses the term "climate change" (p. 3) even though some have argued that climate change was invented as a right-wing public relations term because it sounds less scary than global warming. Given the scale of what we are facing, global warming is by far the more appropriate term (Wallace-Wells, 2019).

One of the countries most affected global warming is Bangladesh, which also suffers from

“growing insecurity of work [and] the impact of climate change”, very similar to “brick workers in the Cambodian construction industry” (p. 5). It appears to be true that they – and in fact all of us – are living in “the geological epoch not of humanity but of capital” (p. 7). Worse, there are “advocates [who] reframe resistance to climate change away from high-profile demonstrations and into the fields and factories of the global South, where trans-local labour relations render climate struggles and labour struggles continuous and mutually reinforcing” (p. 10).

In “Thermal Inequality in a Changing Climate”, Laurie Parsons correctly argues that “global warming” should be replaced by the “even stronger global heating” (p. 15). Global warming together with “thermal inequality” (p. 16; Fleming, 2018) are hitting the global poor harder – once again. Thermal inequality will lead to increased migration (p. 16) and heat exhaustion (p. 17), with agriculture and construction hardest hit (p. 19).

One way of trying to mitigate the impact of global warming is, according to Patrick Bottazzi, the introduction of “small pilot projects as well as independent unionised organic farmers” (p. 44). Virtually the same applies to Bangladesh, which ranks seventh on the “global climate risk index” (p. 49). In many countries, global warming regularly forces farmers into financial debt, where “micro-finance loans provide an alternative to private money lenders [as] they [farmers] still suffer from high interest rates, varying from 18% to 25% per annum” (p. 61).

Beyond that, the “deregulation of the agriculture sector left farmers more vulnerable” (p. 63). India tells a similar story where “in recent decades, the exposure of ... households to environmental risk – storms, flash floods, landslips, and drought – has intensified as a result of climate change” (p. 73). Worse, it “increases risks for people [whose] livelihoods ... are already precarious and peripheral” (p. 90).

Of course, capitalism’s eternal quest for “cheap food, cheap labour, and high profits” (p. 110) isn’t helping (Benson and Kirsch, 2010). Instead, it creates “labour-intensive agriculture landscapes” (p. 110) assisting profits but not people (Chomsky, 1999). This is made even worse as “powerful groups create, manage, and deal with vulnerability to climate change” (p. 122), as showcased every year at the Davos congregation of the global anti-union, feel-good, money elite (Klikauer and Link, 2021).

Set against this is “labour environmentalism [based on] strategies of unions, union membership, and workers – to combat environmental degradation, predominantly climate change” (p. 132). Much of this, in turn, would mean a “green turn among labour unions” (p. 149). This might go as far, Sabina Lawreniuk argues, as to think about the fact that “climate change is class war” and that there needs to be “global labour’s challenge to the Capitalocene” (p. 172). She also emphasises that we are not inhabitants of “the age of man ... but the age of capital” (p. 176) – as if such an “age of man” isn’t troubling enough (Klikauer and Young, 2021). In any case, it is helpful to think of “the degradation of nature as a specific expression of capitalism’s organisation of work” (p. 176).

In the conclusion to their most exquisite book, Laurie Parsons and Nithya Natarajan argue that “economic precarity and environmental risk are shaping one another, squeezing the livelihoods of the worst-off workers and setting in place durable new terms of engagement with the workplace” (p. 189). Finally, they note that “a commitment to constructing an approach to adaptation ... is contested and power-laden [with] social marginalisation, exploitation, and broader justice” (p. 195).

All in all, Nithya Natarajan and Laurie Parsons’ powerful collection on the issue of global warming and labour depicts the plight of workers in the Global South, exposed to what might be called the three evils of global warming: 1) the loss of livelihoods because of droughts, floods, landslides, etc.; 2) physical and mental suffering because of heat – heat strokes, dehydration, liver failure, etc.; and 3) forced migration because of global warming. While much of this has been

caused by industrialised nations, the Global South is paying a bitter price.

One is inclined to say that Nithya Natarajan and Laurie Parsons' workers of the "global workplace" – the title of the book – will continue to suffer from the ever-increasing impact of the Capitalocene. By linking capitalism and labour to environmental issues, their insightful book provides a detailed description as well as an illuminating analysis of what is going to come.

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## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

THOMAS KLIKAUER was born between Castle Frankenstein (Darmstadt), Johannes Gutenberg's birthplace (Mainz), and where Carl Benz invented the motorcar (Mannheim). After completing an apprenticeship in Germany's car industry as a union member ([IGM](#)), he completed an MA at Bremen University and Boston University, as well as a PhD at Warwick University. He teaches MBA students and supervises PhD candidates at the Sydney Graduate School of Management at Western Sydney University, Australia. Among his 800+ publications are books on *Managerialism* (2013) and a textbook on *Managing People in Organisations* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Routledge, 2022). His forthcoming book is on the language of managerialism (2023).

[Webpage: <https://klikauer.wordpress.com>; Email: [t.klikauer@westernsydney.edu.au](mailto:t.klikauer@westernsydney.edu.au)].