

DEVELOPMENT THEORY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

SALIH, M.A. MOHAMED

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The relationship between development and climate change has become one of the defining concerns of contemporary social science. While the literature on climate governance continues to expand rapidly, comparatively few studies revisit the classical traditions of development theory in order to assess their continuing analytical value for understanding the climate crisis. 2007 Co-laureate of the Nobel Peace Prize Mohamed Salih's *Development Theory and Climate Change* addresses precisely this gap. Bringing together decades of scholarship in development studies, political economy, environmental governance, and international development, Salih offers a theoretically ambitious reconsideration of how competing development paradigms explain both the origins of and responses to global climate change. In the Foreword, David Simon of the Royal Holloway, University of London, underscores that: "Salih has done us a great service by integrating climate change challenges fully into competing development theories and setting out his arguments and the implications so clearly. These deserve our full attention." (p. ix)

The volume is carefully organized around the evolution of development thinking. Following an introductory chapter outlining the relationship between development theory and climate change, Salih systematically revisits the main theoretical traditions that have shaped development studies, including modernization theory, ecological modernization, dependency theory, world-systems analysis, and critical alternatives to mainstream development approaches. The concluding chapter returns to the broader question of whether classical development theories remain analytically relevant in an era defined by the Anthropocene, the "Anthropocene Epoch [which] places new functions and responsibilities on climate change science and sustainable development's academic research findings and policy prescriptions" (p. 22) and accelerating environmental change. Here, it is crucial to acknowledge that this new epoch "requires exceptional measures and interventions to manage and sustain life on Earth" (p. 23). The organization of the volume reflects a logical progression from historical foundations to contemporary theoretical debates, making the book accessible to both students and specialists.

One of the book's strengths lies in its insistence that climate change should not be treated as a separate environmental problem detached from broader processes of economic transformation, political power, and global inequality. Instead, Salih convincingly argues that climate change exposes many of the assumptions underlying competing development paradigms and therefore provides an opportunity to reassess their explanatory capacity. Rather than dismissing classical development theories as outdated, the author demonstrates their continuing relevance when appropriately adapted to contemporary environmental realities. This historical perspective distinguishes the volume from many recent contributions that privilege policy-oriented discussions while neglecting the theoretical foundations upon which climate governance ultimately rests. Although Salih states that: "Development theories as all-encompassing praxis have declined, but conceptual frameworks derived from their historical heritage are live in development studies and climate change academic and policy debates, climate justice activism, and resistance to states and

global governance business-as-usual policy discourses and paradigms.” (p. 149) One of the noteworthy dimensions in Salih’s work is the book’s balanced engagement with competing schools of thought. The above-mentioned theories are not presented merely as successive intellectual fashions but as alternative explanatory frameworks that continue to illuminate different dimensions of global environmental change. Such an approach encourages readers to appreciate the strengths and limitations of each perspective while recognizing that no single theoretical tradition provides a complete explanation of the climate crisis. The comparative treatment of these traditions is likely to prove especially valuable in graduate teaching, where students often encounter fragmented accounts of development theory without sufficient attention to their continuing contemporary relevance.

The volume also makes an important contribution by foregrounding the structural inequalities embedded within the global climate regime. Although climate change is frequently discussed as a universal challenge, its causes, consequences, and adaptive capacities remain profoundly uneven across regions and societies. By situating environmental change within broader debates about development, global capitalism, and historical inequality, Salih reminds readers that climate justice cannot be separated from questions of political economy and international development. This perspective is particularly relevant for scholars working on Africa and the wider Global South, where climate vulnerability intersects with persistent developmental challenges. Salih profoundly points out that the global environmental crisis “has been linked to centuries of colonialism and imperialism and presents asymmetrical power relations between developed and underdeveloped countries” (p. 99), and offers details about the complex question of dependency. He also devotes sufficient attention to green capitalism, carbon trading, and climate colonialism (pp. 99-109).

The book is has an interdisciplinary character, which draws upon development studies, environmental politics, international political economy, and sustainability scholarship, and Salih successfully bridges disciplinary boundaries that too often remain isolated from one another. The integration of classical social theory with contemporary climate debates broadens the analytical horizon of both fields and encourages readers to think beyond narrowly technical or policy-driven understandings of climate governance. The book’s emphasis on conceptual synthesis rather

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than empirical case studies represents both a strength and a potential limitation. Readers seeking detailed national or regional analyses may find the discussion less empirically grounded than works focusing on specific climate policies or adaptation programmes. Yet this appears to be a deliberate choice. Salih's objective is not to provide another empirical account of climate governance but to construct a coherent theoretical framework capable of informing future empirical research. In this respect, the volume succeeds admirably by offering a conceptual map that scholars may subsequently apply to diverse geographical contexts.

The writing is clear, well structured, and pedagogically effective. The progression from classical theories towards contemporary environmental debates allows readers unfamiliar with development theory to follow complex conceptual discussions without sacrificing scholarly sophistication. Equally, experienced researchers will appreciate the author's nuanced treatment of longstanding theoretical controversies and his willingness to revisit established paradigms in light of emerging global realities. At the very end of his argumentation, Salih underscores his hope that "others will step in to complete this journey by devoting collections or authored books offering more comprehensive analyses of each development theory's contribution to climate change research and studies, activism, and policy debates." (p. 149)

In sum, *Development Theory and Climate Change* represents a timely and intellectually significant contribution to the literature on development studies and environmental politics. At a moment when climate change increasingly challenges established assumptions about economic growth, sustainability, and global governance, even in our era of uncertainties amidst the vision of a "climate catastrophe" (mentioned by Gerard Toal in his book *Oceans Rise Empires Fall*) Salih demonstrates that classical development theory remains an indispensable analytical resource rather than a historical relic. The book will be of considerable interest to scholars and students of development studies, political economy, environmental governance, African Studies, and International Relations. It deserves a wide readership among those seeking to understand how enduring theoretical debates continue to shape contemporary discussions of climate change and sustainable development.✴

