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# Climate Changed: Refugee Border Stories and the Business of Misery

Raúl Gualtruzzi<sup>a</sup>

## BOOK REVIEW

Daniel Briggs. *Climate Changed: Refugee Border Stories and the Business of Misery*. Routledge, 2020, 224 pp. ISBN: 9781003004929 (eBook).

HISTORY Published 2023-12-28

Daniel Briggs's book **Climate Changed** is a necessary and timely work that addresses the triggers of forced displacement and the close interrelationships between these very factors but also what he calls the "business of misery," which is born out of conflict and war, as well as the exploitation of millions of ruined lives of those in search of a safe place.

The author first addresses how climate change and, fundamentally, the causes that generate it—for example, the environmental deterioration and the depredation of natural resources, bad policies, economic inequality—are prominent causes of conflict in countries such as Afghanistan, Syria, Uganda, and even South Sudan, forcing population displacement. These factors constitute a lesser-known issue despite the fact that 85% of asylum seekers in Europe come from countries that are affected by climate change and are devastated by war.

In addition to the effects attributed to climate change, in terms of development, prosperity, and equality, especially for the poorest countries, Briggs addresses the dire consequences of neoliberal policies that

"render some of the world's regions and, in some cases, whole countries obsolete" (p. 35). Indeed, as the author points out, many problems of the twenty-first century are related to neoliberal policies and their structural consequences: climate change, resource wars, the increasing prevalence of the far right, widening national inequality, and a lack of basic employment and housing rights across countries.

The author leads us to understand how this global-scaled exodus, as he himself describes it, is nothing more than a natural response to the inequality and violence that weigh on millions of people. Chaos, in turn, functions as a formidable breeding ground for the "business of misery" that arises around war and arms trafficking, exposing people to hunger, violence, smuggling, and trafficking before they decide to leave their country of origin, during the perilous journeys in search of safety, and even while their future is being decided in host countries.

Likewise, the author crudely exposes the securitization approach of European countries, evidenced "almost exclusively [in] poli-

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cies designed to contain refugees and migrants prior to their arrival on European shores" (p. 117). This can also be seen in the economic revenue of those countries, which benefit from agreements such as the externalization of migration controls, as confirmed by the scandalous payment of 6,000 million euros to Turkey by the EU to reduce the number of refugees entering in its territory in this way, and the role played by the Libya and Morocco governments in the same sense.

Thus, it is the states that apply these restrictive policies that invest the most money in building walls and obstacles to send a clear message that refugees are not wanted or welcome, to the detriment of an international protection system that is already seriously wounded.

At this point, and through the testimonies of more than 100 refugees across 14 European Union countries, the author exposes the drama in first person: the impoverished living conditions that refugees are subjected to even once they have arrived in the host countries, where a bloody "formula to failure" (p. 115) is imposed. Hence, the host countries' systems themselves undermine any process of reconstruction of refugees' lives—if reconstruction is even possible in the face of such experiences.

Finally, the book's timing allows it to address the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic, another clear symptom of climate change. The author notes that "the advent of global warming is expected to significantly increase the evolution of new viruses and their transmission" (p. 173), once again widening the inequality gap and posing serious risks to the poorest and most vulnerable groups in our societies. This inevitably includes refugees, who live mostly in extreme poverty without access to safe spaces, internet, food, medical care, or remote work.

Briggs's book is fascinating precisely because of its politically and academically incorrect narrative, which pursues critical thinking and escapes from the constraints of conventional research, which tends to respond to the "neoliberalization" of university education systems, many times dependent on attracting funding and with close ties with governments and decision-makers in detriment of freedom of research. More importantly, his work is based on people's experiences, something that the author is proud of and will delight the reader.

In conclusion, **Climate Changed** displays how humanity is reaching a point of no return; climate change is already wreaking havoc. Coupled with unsustainable capitalist consumption systems, climate change only deepens the spiral of violence and inequality that pushes people on the move. In the midst of all this is the rise of the increasingly prolific and profitable "business of misery," a term that, in the author's words,

is not only representative therefore of geopolitical arms sales, illicit commodity markets and in the chaos, bribes and miscellaneous payments needed for movement but also the way new illicit and exploitative business opportunities evolve around the misery caused by the refugee crisis. (p. 99)

This is a powerful message that humanitarians often do not dare to give but is absolutely necessary if we are to stop being spectators of a reality that challenges and involves us all.

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Briggs, D. (2020). *Climate Changed: Refugee Border Stories and the Business of Misery* (224 pp.). Routledge.



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