

11-1-2015

## Callison, Candis. *How Climate Change Comes to Matter: The Communal Life of Facts*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014.

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### Recommended Citation

Roscoe, Paul Ph.D. (2015) "Callison, Candis. *How Climate Change Comes to Matter: The Communal Life of Facts*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014.," *Journal of International and Global Studies*: Vol. 7 : No. 1 , Article 16.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.lindenwood.edu/jigs/vol7/iss1/16>

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**Callison, Candis. *How Climate Change Comes to Matter: The Communal Life of Facts*.  
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Recent research on the human dimensions of climate change has focused on why so many constituencies refuse to accept – or are alarmingly indifferent to – the science of climate change and how awareness of climate change might be heightened. Candis Callison’s book seeks to investigate a related but different set of questions, namely how, why, and when climate change “come[s] to matter.” She seeks to determine the circumstances under which different communities, operating in a complex world of abundant information sources, come to recognize a reality in which climate change is a matter to reckon with.

Deploying a methodology that Marcus and Fischer launched in *Anthropology and Cultural Critique* (1986), Callison examines these issues in five widely disparate “discursive communities”: Arctic indigenous representatives associated with the Inuit Circumpolar Council; journalists who report on climate change; Creation Care, a US evangelical Christian group concerned about climate change; science and science policy experts; and Ceres, a corporate social responsibility action group. The Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) represents Inuit peoples from across the Arctic countries. Originally formed in response to the industrialization and militarization of the Arctic, the Council has subsequently come to focus on climate change, and its engagement forms the book’s first chapter. The Arctic is where climate change has already become a lived and felt reality, so much so that some villages are inundated with media crews eager to dramatize it. For the Inuit, however, climate change has come to matter in culturally distinctive ways. The Inuit talk about it not in terms of climate science but in symptomatic and experiential terms – about changes in ice conditions, storm frequencies and intensities, and difficulties in hunting and whaling. They often refer to the climate change as a “friend acting strangely” or as a “bad baby.” In addition, they construe climate change in terms of its connectedness to other challenges their communities face. Where scientists see climate change and cooperation with Arctic peoples in terms of what facts can be established so that successful policies can be implemented, the Inuit see climate change as part-and-parcel with their suicide rates, the vestiges of colonialism, and the enduring educational, governance, and other structures that that history installed. What they want from their cooperation with scientists is for scientists to partner with and help them to deal with *Inuit* concerns, not just scientific ones, with how to adapt to the environmental, economic, and social changes looming before them. In 2005, this connected view of things came to the fore in the ICC’s efforts to recast Arctic climate change as a human rights rather than an environmental issue. In a petition to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, the ICC made the innovative argument that by its inaction on climate change, the US was violating the 1948 Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man, specifically “the Inuit right to life and physical security, personal property, health, practice of culture, use of land traditionally used and occupied, and the means of subsistence” (p.65).

Chapter two considers how climate-change facts come to matter among journalists charged with reporting on the topic, a constituency that finds itself trying to negotiate a path among the claims made both by climate scientists and by those of skeptics who seek to sow doubt about those facts, and their own obligations as the watchdogs of democracy to report issues in a fair and balanced manner. At its best, the competing claims of scientists and skeptics have led the Fourth Estate to report the science but give equal weight to the associated uncertainties. More dismally, it has produced a grotesque dichotomy that gives equal coverage to

scientists who have spent their lives trying to understand climate, and skeptics with no relevant credentials who have nonetheless become instant experts on the subject.

Chapter three examines how the facts of climate change gain a communal life among the adherents of Creation Care, a group of Christian Evangelicals concerned with bridging the divide between climate science and evangelism. Readers with interests in implementing climate policy may find this the most rewarding of the book's chapters. Creation Care sees the evangelical rejection of climate change as originating in a century of skepticism towards science, a suspicion rooted in different epistemologies. Where science finds truth in a dialectical interaction with Nature, evangelicals find truth in the morality of biblical authority. Creation Care proposes that climate change can come to matter for evangelicals if respected evangelical leaders – in particular, those such as John Houghton, who are also leading climate scientists – endorse the science. To evangelicals, the messengers matter as much as the message, and if respected leaders “bless the facts,” the congregations of those leaders will come to recognize a duty to cherish the Creator through his Creation.

The potential global catastrophe that climate change represents poses a dilemma for climate scientists themselves, one that also confronted atomic physicists three generations ago. At an early point, nuclear scientists realized that their findings would usher in a world in which humans have the power to eradicate themselves and a fair proportion of other species from the face of the earth. Similarly, many climate scientists see a potentially terrible future in their discoveries, and like nuclear physicists before them, they must wrestle with a conflict between the disinterest and objectivity that they perceive to be the imperatives of science and a concern to galvanize action for the public good. Chapter four explores the evolution of norms and practices in the scientific community that seek to regulate what it means “to speak for and about what climate change means – its form of life, and its associated facts, predictions, and risks” (198).

Finally, chapter five examines a corporate social responsibility organization known as Ceres, the Coalition for Environmentally Responsible Economies. Ceres was established in response to the Exxon Valdez disaster but has gone on to address climate change. The organization seeks to create coalitions among major corporations, institutional investors, and environmental groups through stakeholder engagements. For Ceres, climate change comes to matter due not just to the scientific facts – participating corporations and investors accept those as givens – but due to “structural considerations related to markets and corporate logics and grammars” (pp.205-206). To corporations, their investors, and other stakeholders, climate change becomes a risk and potential financial liability, “a metric by which competitive advantage might be established and evaluated” (p.206).

Callison's book is a useful contribution to the sociology of science and technology, and its concern with how climate facts come to matter in different communities is critical to the question of how best to communicate climate change science to general publics. One can wonder about her choice of case studies, however. To foreground the issue of how climate change does come to matter, it might have been useful to consider a couple of constituencies for whom climate change facts have *not* come to matter. The facts do matter to Creation Care, but what about other evangelical groups that reject its strategy of “blessing the facts,” or secular groups that for economic, political, or other reasons reject climate science? A second point to query concerns the type of journalists upon whom she focused. The science journalists examined in Chapter two were drawn from the “quality press.” These reporters, however, are not representative of the media as a whole. They are a distinct minority; they reach one of the smallest of publics (albeit an influential one); and they are among the most conscientious of

those who cover climate change. What we really need, however, is a climate change-equivalent to Ben Goldacre's *Bad Science*, which examined how the British tabloid press routinely – often dangerously – distorts medical science. In the UK and the US, most journalists are not as conscientious as those Callison interviewed. To please a corporate master, most are content to peddle whatever climate narrative attracts the largest audience, remaining largely indifferent to ethical conflicts concerning obligations to objectivity and fairness. An examination of how and why climate facts do not matter to this constituency would have illuminated an enormously powerful yet curiously unstudied vector in disseminating and distorting climate-change science.

One of several things that make this work valuable is its multi-sited ethnography, which raises one's hopes that some *general* lessons, however tentative, might be drawn about how climate change comes to matter in human communities. Lessons like these are critical to understanding how diverse constituencies might be galvanized to confront the climate change threat in globally equitable ways. On this score, Callison's broad conclusions are a little disappointing. She counsels us to attend to the meanings, ethics, and morality that circulate in a community and to what people already care about – instead of thinking in terms of how to increase scientific literacy, how to communicate more of the science more effectively, or how to build public trust in science and comfort with uncertainty. We should attend to “the process of socialization and meaning-making inherent in the public adoption of facts as matters of concern,” she asserts (p.20). This is a fair point, albeit no longer original. More useful would have been insights from these five cases about precisely which elements of socialization and meaning-making are the most critical to making climate change matter. The case studies reveal how climate change came to matter in five specific cases. A few suggestions about what these cases had in common could have been valuable in guiding efforts to engage and partner with yet other constituencies in confronting the climate-change challenge.

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