

The Study of Climate Justice in *The Mars House*

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Abstract

The Mars House is the latest climate fiction written by British writer Natasha Pulley. Beginning with the earth experiencing extreme climate change, this book constructs a Mars society (Tharsis) after human fleeing the earth. Focusing on a series of important issues with “Naturalization” as the core, the writer launched a political romantic dialogue between the protagonist January sterling and Aubrey gale, a local politician on Mars. From the perspective of climate justice, this article analyzes the resource allocation in the novel under the framework of climate crisis. It argues that the Martian society is more inclined to the Martian residents in the allocation of climate resources, while the earth refugees, as a vulnerable and marginalized group, are severely deprived of their basic rights, which is contrary to Rawls’ principle of justice and is a manifestation of climate injustice. By discussing the marginalization of earth refugees in Martian society and the tilt of climate resources to local Martian residents, it shows the absence of climate justice in the novel.

Keywords

The Mars House, Natasha Pulley, Climate Justice, John Rawls, Principle of Justice.

1. Introduction

The Mars House is Natasha Pulley’s first foray into climate fiction. When a catastrophic flood swamps Earth, London collapses into ruin, and January—once a dancer in the Royal Ballet—is forced to leave the only home he has ever known. He boards a supply ship bound for Tharsis, the Chinese-run colony on Mars, and steps off as a refugee. Overnight he is branded an outsider, trapped on the wrong side of a new class divide. Like every other Earth-born arrival, he must learn how to live under thin air and light gravity while enduring open suspicion and daily discrimination. The impact of the climate crisis on mankind is self-evident, and the vulnerable groups are the first to suffer the most serious impact because they are at a disadvantage in resource allocation and decision-making. In this context, the concept of climate justice came into being. Climate justice aims to solve the global inequality caused by climate change, emphasizing that under the premise of limited climate resources, all parties in society should maintain fairness and justice in the share of climate rights and obligations. As a core issue related to human survival, resource allocation and equitable development, climate justice runs through the whole novel, providing readers with a text to examine the dilemma and contradiction of climate justice from the perspective of science fiction.

2. Climate Justice

2.1. The Concept of Climate Justice

The term “climate justice” did not originate with a single scholar or organization; rather, it coalesced gradually at the intersection of environmental activism, human-rights struggles, and global climate politics. Its first documented appearance is found in a 1999 investigative report, *Greenhouse Gangsters vs. Climate Justice*, produced by the independent watchdog group CorpWatch [1]. The concept gained formal international currency at the Paris meeting in 2002

and has since been widely adopted. Although scholars diverge in emphasis, they converge on a core proposition: under conditions of limited climatic resources, every social actor must equitably share both the burdens and the benefits of climate action [2].

Two distinct but mutually constitutive dimensions of the term should be distinguished. First, as an environmental-justice movement, climate justice operates as a broad-based social mobilization that links global warming to intersecting axes of human rights, gender, class, race, income, energy, and food security. Owing to its capacious scope, the movement has achieved mainstream discursive legitimacy and is now widely regarded as a political imperative, thereby propelling the normative evolution of climate-justice thought. Second, as an ethical principle, climate justice denotes the equitable allocation, within and between societies, of responsibilities, rights, and resources engendered by anthropogenic climate change—most notably the distribution of scarce climatic goods.

Climate change inevitably brings or leads to various forms of climate injustice [3]. One salient manifestation is the forced displacement and cultural dispossession experienced by populations whose homelands become uninhabitable, engendering crises of cultural and personal identity [4]. In this sense, climate change constitutes a form of cultural injustice—an experience vividly dramatized in *The Mars House* by the Earth refugees coerced into migration to Mars.

Whenever the question of justice is posed, John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* remains an unavoidable reference. Regarded as one of the most influential works of twentieth-century Western political philosophy, Rawls's treatise supplies an ethical foundation for contemporary climate-justice discourse [5]. Rawls articulates two core principles: the principle of equal liberty, which guarantees the most extensive system of basic liberties compatible with like liberty for all; and the principle of difference, which permits socioeconomic inequalities only when they advantage the least-privileged members of society [6].

Climate justice, concerned as it is with the disproportionate impact of climate change on vulnerable populations and with the equitable distribution of climatic resources, is thus consonant with John Rawls's principles at the level of moral commitment.

2.2. Emergence of Class Stratification

As stipulated in *The Mars House*, Martian gravity is approximately one-third of Earth's [7]. Therefore, anyone raised on Earth arrives with denser bones and stronger muscles, giving them an obvious edge in strength. Tharsis officials see this difference as a danger to locals, so every newcomer from Earth must wear a "resistance cage." The cage mimics heavier gravity and saps their extra power, keeping Martians safe from accidental—or deliberate—injury. That technology soon becomes the keystone of a new pecking order. Anyone who grew up on Earth is stamped "Earthstronger," and the label sticks. Wearing the cage, they're also told where they can and can't go, and every street seems to carry a glare that says, "You don't belong". Jobs follow the same line: if you're an "Earthstronger", you lift, haul, or sweep—no questions asked about résumés. January once danced for the Royal Ballet but now he clocks in at a loading dock like everyone else who shipped in from home. Meanwhile, anyone born on Mars—or officially "naturalized"—slides easily into offices, labs, and corner desks.

Residential segregation further materializes class asymmetry. "Earthstrongers" are sequestered in designated districts—most conspicuously "American town," a repurposed nuclear-reactor complex whose cramped and rudimentary quarters signal infrastructural neglect. By contrast, figures such as Aubrey Gale inhabit palatial domiciles replete with advanced climate-control systems and bespoke technological amenities.

Political marginalization is the most acute. "Earthstrongers" possess no enfranchisement or deliberative voice within Tharsis governance. Therefore, their juridical identities—and hence their life prospects—are wholly determined by the Tharsis administration. The dominant

symbolic order constructs earth refugees as exogenous threats rather than co-citizens, legitimizing discriminatory practices that entrench native Martians as the advantaged class and “Earthstronger” as a subaltern population. This asymmetrical power structure systematically obstructs Earth refugees’ access to climate resources and to social welfare, exemplifying a regime of climate injustice.

2.3. Unequal Allocation of Climatic Resources

In *The Mars House*, there is a significant difference in access to climate resources between local residents of Mars and earth refugees. Mars is a planet with scarce water resources relative to earth. Water resources mainly come from the water treatment system of nuclear reactor cooling tower and solar power station. The Martian society described in the novel is often attacked by sandstorms. In the Martian environment, the dust storm itself is very destructive. Dust storms will reduce air quality, affect residents’ health, interfere with the operation of solar energy equipment, and increase the instability of energy supply. At the same time, dust storms will reduce atmospheric visibility and affect traffic and communication. It not only destroys many buildings on Mars, paralyzes the transportation and network systems, but also destroys the atmospheric structure, pollutes water resources, worsens the ecological environment and makes it difficult to maintain the ecological balance.

The impact of sandstorms on local residents is far-reaching and significant, but this impact is reflected in the obvious differences between the “Earthstrongers” and Martian residents. Tharsis is the only place on Mars with industrial scale water treatment capacity, while Earth residents can only do manual work on Mars and cannot enjoy the water resources of Martian residents. In addition, Mars’ energy supply mainly depends on solar power stations. When these power stations are affected by dust storms and the supply becomes unstable, the energy consumption of the “Earthstrongers” will be strictly limited first. As it shows in the book *“the water meter showed a traffic light that said how much water you could use in the day. green was twenty literes; amber was ten; red was five. January had never seen it green and suspected they only made the gages with the green light to give you false hope ”* [7], while Martian residents can enjoy a relatively stable power supply. In terms of living conditions, Martian residents can live in a high gravity environment more suitable for their own physical conditions, such as the apartment building after the transformation of the cooling tower of the nuclear reactor. However, the living conditions of earth refugees on Mars are relatively poor. For example, January lives in the cooling tower of the nuclear reactor and can not even guarantee the basic heating demand. On the other hand, the Martian society pays less attention to the safety of earth refugees. When a dust storm strikes, these “Earthstrongers” need to find shelter by themselves, while the Martian residents can enjoy a safer and more complete shelter environment, so people from the earth often become the most severely affected group by the climate disaster. Finally, Martian residents enjoy a relatively perfect medical security system. Even if the sandstorm causes health problems, they can get better treatment, while the earth people are faced with the lack of medical resources and untimely treatment.

These earth refugees are forced to migrate to the Martian colony because their homes on earth have been flooded, leading to the crisis of cultural identity and identity. Therefore, they belong to the category of vulnerable groups. Local residents, by virtue of their adaptability to the Martian environment and political advantages, have monopolized most of the climate regulation facilities and energy supply, while the earth refugees are regarded as outsiders and are limited to areas with extremely scarce resources and poor living conditions. This resource allocation mechanism obviously violates Rawls’ principle of equal liberty and deprives the earth refugees of the equal right to access basic climate resources. And after the disaster, the society does not give more preference or provide special protection to the vulnerable groups in

the allocation of climate resources to improve their ability to cope with climate change, which also violates the principle of difference and caused climate injustice.

2.4. Ethical Enlightenment under Climate Justice

2.4.1. Technology Should Not be the Dominant Means

As it depicted in the novel, naturalized surgery exchanges health for equal identity. In reality, gene editing and solar geoengineering may also become the privileges of a particular group of people. However, any means of adaptation must be subject to a double test - does it widen the capacity gap? Is the right to withdraw or reject reserved?

2.4.2. Climate Citizenship

Initially, as a climate refugee, January did not have the right to vote in Tharsis society, nor did he have a fixed water quota. In reality, climate refugees also face the situation of "homelessness". In addition to nationality, people need a "climate citizenship" based on the right to survival, that is, no matter where we are, everyone has the right to access the same level of climate resources as the local people, such as clean water, energy and disaster shelter.

3. Conclusion

By following the difficult struggles of Earth refugees on Mars, *The Mars House* lays bare the unfairness and ethical dilemma that come with a changing climate. With the sharp contrast between the local residents of Mars and the refugees on earth in terms of resource allocation and social status, it highlights the harsh reality of climate injustice. This imbalance runs against the justice principle that John Rawls argued for, and it pushes readers to consider hard questions about what climate justice really means. Apparently, the issue of climate justice, which is related to human survival, resource allocation and equitable development, cannot be ignored. What is worth pondering is how human society can realize sustainable development, joint prosperity under the challenge of climate crisis.

References

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