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The inevitability of a role for geo-engineering in the post-Paris climate change landscape

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After Paris, it is clear that despite the political progress, there remains a gulf between policy and policy goals as current mitigation pledges are calculated to fail to restrain warming to 2°C above pre-industrial temperatures. The next 70-100 years will be a transition period during which the world aims to decarbonize (the 'Transition') and without radical policy changes, there is an increasing sense of inevitability to the deployment of large scale geo-engineering. Solar Radiation Management (SRM) is the cheapest and most likely geo-engineering technique to be deployed during the Transition. However, SRM engenders many risks and uncertainties including the possibility of *sui generis* climatic effects, psychological and technical lock-in and spatially and temporally heterogeneous distribution of benefits (such as uneven regional climate impacts) and harms (economic costs of the deployment, unintended side-effects and so on). Shue warned that climate change may involve "compound injustice" in reference to past inequalities in international relations when some vulnerable nations had a weakened ability to achieve fair treatment in climate negotiations "in an international system characterized by historical injustices." SRM could exacerbate such injustices, deepen the existing differential moral burden and thus prompt a renewed and necessary interest in the significance of intra-generational and intergenerational equity in the climate change regime. In any event, SRM presents an interesting challenge for international law-making.

Biography

Clare James is a current Doctoral student at UCL and her research is centered on the relationship between the international regime for climate change, geo-engineering and intergenerational equity. She has an LLM in International Environmental Law. She is a qualified solicitor and has worked in finance in Paris and London with an international law firm and in-house in a dual role as General Counsel and Main Board Director.

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