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Collective human rights as an (onto)logical solution to climate change: reconceptualizing, applying and proceduralizing an overlooked category of human rights

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This dissertation explores the potential role of collective human rights to the human rights approach to climate change. From an interdisciplinary perspective premised on the study of ontology, it positions collective rights as representing another way of being with the world. It argues through a ‘lifecycle’ analysis of collective rights – conceptualization, application and proceduralization – that regarding collective human rights as a vehicle for ontological flexibility within the rights discourse can provide normative clarity to a category of rights that has been plagued by ambiguity. This, in turn, can provide a myriad of climate advantages as the hurdles to climate change can similarly be linked to the singular ontological roots of the rights tradition.

Ultimately, this dissertation calls for a new lens to the human rights approach to climate change, highlighting the necessity of collective human rights to enhance its effectiveness. More broadly, it contains a moral call to allow the flourishing of ontological diversity within human rights law. It highlights the dichotomous thinking of the rights tradition, emphasizing the ‘local’ as an important third space to be considered and identifying an associated expansion of duty bearers – together more closely matching the complex temporal and spatial scope of climate change.

This is a volume in the series of the Meijers Research Institute and Graduate School of the Leiden Law School of Leiden University. This study is part of the Law School’s research programme ‘Exploring the Frontiers of International Law’.



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451

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