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Review: Resisting Global Toxics: Transnational Movements for Environmental Justice

By David Naguib Pellow

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Pellow, David Naguib. *Resisting Global Toxics: Transnational Movements for Environmental Justice*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2007. ix, 346 pp. ISBN: 978-0-262-16244-9. US\$62, cloth. ISBN: 978-0-262-66201-7. US\$25, paper. Printed on recycled paper.

Resisting Global Toxics explores “the export of hazardous waste (through trading and dumping) to poor communities and communities of color around the world and charts the mobilization of transnational environmental justice movement networks to document and resist these practices” (p. 2). The text covers the transnational waste trade from its beginnings in the 1980s to the present, and builds on the knowledge base in the literature of environmental justice studies, environmental sociology, social movements, race theory, and transnational waste trade. It advances the global toxics debate in the areas of environmental justice, human rights, and sustainability.

Transnational movements for environmental justice are a rising force of opposition to transnational wastes. Examples of these transnational networks include Global Response, Rainforest Action Network, Pesticide Action Network, and Greenpeace. These movements often help define environmental justice. For example, indigenous peoples may not define their struggle in terms of environmental justice, but rather as struggles of self-determination and territorial rights. Social movement power connects environmental justice with human rights, something that “elevates and deepens the discourse, the struggle, and the framework within which activists’ claims can be made and resolved” (p. 238).

The book contributes two aspects to the broader picture of transnational waste trade. First, it incorporates the literature of race theory so as to better understand global toxic disposal as a practice of institutional racism. The author correctly asserts the “...global inequalities are rarely framed as racial inequalities” (p. 68), though toxic chemicals and racism are linked. The world of toxic waste is divided into the global North and the global South. The latter includes poor communities and nations within the global North. Annually, 90 percent, or three million tons, of the total transnational waste trade, cross international borders to the global South.

The second aspect is in highlighting the debate around the power of transnational corporations. Transnational corporations, an unparalleled institutional force in the world today, have routinely exercised hegemony over domestic and transnational political processes in toxic waste trade. Strong corporations, weak states, a lack of social capital, and the presence of poverty drive regional environmental inequalities.

Transnational movement networks are calling for more producer responsibility that hold producers and brand owners financially responsible for the life cycle impacts of their products. The emphasis is on take back and end-of-life management of products. Ecological modernizing would link economic development to rising environmental

standards, and costs associated with environmental justice would be borne by everyone. Economic development would no longer counter environmental sustainability and justice.

Pellow is Professor of Ethnic Studies and Director of California Cultures in Comparative Perspective at the University of California, San Diego. He takes the discussion of global toxics to the next level by bringing together disparate pieces of a multi-dimensional topic. The book, part of The MIT Press's Urban and Industrial Environments series, contains an appendix ("Principles of Environmental Justice"), a list of abbreviations and acronyms, extensive references, and an index. Recommended for practitioners, activists, students, teachers, and interested lay readers.

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