

## Book Reviews

Fred P. Gale and Michael M'Gonigle, eds. 2000. *Nature, Production and Power: Towards an Ecological Political Economy*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing.

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How does one construct a theoretical framework that is both sufficiently general in scope to encompass a wide variety of empirical instances—and to justify the new label “ecological political economy” (EPE)—and yet particularist enough to apply to specific communities? And how does one handle the challenge of analyzing social and ecological change at multiple geographical scales? These are the important issues addressed in *Nature, Production and Power: Towards an Ecological Political Economy*.

To cut to the chase, the editors do not fully achieve their purpose of conceptualizing “a new ecological political economy (EPE)” nor do they claim to. In fact, reading the collection feels a bit like eavesdropping on a myriad of pre-dinner conversations without ever sitting down together at the same table. The Acknowledgments reveal that this volume is the result of “vigorous debates” during a spring 1998 online Virtual Workshop and a May 1999 workshop held in Victoria, Canada. It would have been fitting if more of the debate had been revealed. The editors might have provided reference to where the archives of the online workshop might be accessed on the worldwide web. Or, they could have presented the book more as dialogue and debate. Or, they could have had comments after the chapters by other authors. Or, finally, more conventionally, the book could have offered an introduction and conclusion to address what prompted the debates, the main lines of cleavage and agreement among the authors. As it is, we are presented with only a very brief preface commending the “diversity” of the volume’s entries.

The book is organized into four parts on Ecological Political Economy and [a particular component]—Community, Critical Theory, the State and the “System.” The three chapters in the second part and the book’s opening chapter by editor Michael M'Gonigle are the most abstract in their theoretical reflections. M'Gonigle offers a “dialectic of centre and territory” for understanding the physical and spatial relations of both the natural and social worlds. He sees a “crisis of the West” because of the (increasing) domination of “center” with its hierarchical concentration of power over territorial forms of social organization. Unfortunately, he is not clear about what force(s) drive the centralizing tendency if class and capital accumulation are rejected in his post-modern, anti-universalist approach. He convincingly shows how centralizing tendencies can be found in

a city or a village but is weaker in conveying how territorial tendencies of dispersed power can be anything but “local.” While not rejecting the possibility of “developing sustainability” at any scale—even through markets, he clearly prefers, both analytically and ethically, small geographical scales. In the end, he suggests an “ecological ‘network constitutionalism’” that could foster a transition “at all levels.”

Ted Benton and Mary Mellor, by contrast, offer us branches from the intellectual tree of Marxian political economy: ecological historical materialism and materialist ecofeminism. Benton argues, contra John Bellamy Foster’s recent work on Marx’s ecology, that Marx (and less so Engels) was guilty of the Promethean belief in progressive mastery of nature through technological innovation as the key to human emancipation. He proposes a revised, more contingent historical materialism that he believes offers a more adequate socio-ecological theory than the reflexive modernization approach of Beck or Giddens. Benton suggests his historical materialism can be applied to understanding capitalism in its concrete local situations, including the environmental debacles of the former socialist republics. The ecofeminist critique that he recognizes as important for dismantling ideas of economic determinism is largely dropped until the next chapter.

In that chapter, Mary Mellor appropriately re-titles the book “Nature, (Re)production, and Power.” (Why didn’t the editors take her cue? Perhaps this would have been harder to market to the still largely male audience of political economy?) Mellor argues that the starting point for an EPE “informed by feminist thinking” would be to break down the distinction between production and reproduction; challenge the equation of “economic” with paid work; separate provisioning from unnecessary and destructive forms of economic activity; and envisage an economic framework that enables human communities to reorient and provision themselves without exploitation of women, men, other species or ecosystems. If there is any hope for an alternative for Benton it is in the emergence of broadly based movements that do not rely on “influencing the rich and powerful to change their ways”

After M’Gonigle’s opening, the other two chapters of Part One on “EPE and Community” are an odd pair. Arun Agrawal offers an incisive critique of universalist claims about “community.” These claims include both the old critiques of “backward” and “traditional” natives who need to be excluded from conservation areas and recent euphoria about community-based resource management. As he notes, even international agencies like the World Bank have “found” community. Based on several recent studies, he argues that communities are composed of multiple interests and actors and that the local cannot be isolated from larger social forces. Institutions, he emphasizes, should be developed at the local level with the authority to make rules, implement them and resolve disputes.

Ironically, much of the critique from Agrawal is exemplified in Northcott’s chapter “Sabbaths, Shamans and Superquarrying on a Scottish Island” which

offers “an ethical validation of the attachments to place which are most characteristic of the spatially stable lives of primal communities” and repeats the error Agrawal notes of seeing globalization simply as the “juggernaut to be opposed.” Northcott finds the local community in the isle of Harris, Scotland, building on their local knowledge and traditions to create religio-cultural resistance to a huge proposed quarry. The quarry was eventually defeated (for now) by the local resistance. Northcott is nuanced in his case study of how the history of the 18th-19th century Clearances is re-introduced into the discourse and especially how the religious emphasis on observing the Sabbath leads, through public hearings, to the creation of an indigenous identity for resistance. Northcott shows that religion is not a source of war and intolerance (something of a straw man argument) but a powerful resource for local rejection of the global discourse of utilitarian cost-benefit analysis.

Another chapter that deals with the local is Haripriya Rangan’s “Political Ecology and Regional Sustainability” which complements Agrawal in critiquing a “fetishized notion of ‘locality.’” Rangan, a geographer, hopes to create more theoretical coherence in political ecology by defining it as “an analytical approach that explains the biogeographical outcomes of social relations in the context of differing spatial and political configurations.” His framework focuses on four interlinked dimensions of social institutions and practices: households, the state, institutionalized modes of access and control over regional resources, and discursive strategies. In contrast to both local and global narratives with their self-contradictory emphasis on states that are both minimalist and highly interventionist and ultimately unsustainable, his political ecology views sustainability as a geographic question of “improved access to resources and social well-being” in reality rather than in the utopian abstract.

The last section of the book focuses on EPE and the System, or how to connect the local to the global. Gar Alperovitz et al. stress ecological norm building, national level democratization, and locally embedded economies. In her chapter, Ellie Perkins questions whether the local is as progressive as often assumed. In effect, she points out the “red” social equity problems with “green” environmental solutions: first, class inequality because expensive local production, based on extra-local exploitative production, hurts low income people most and second, North-South inequality because trade and other global interchange provide absolute increases in living standards, health care, international mobility and the like for many people.

Finally co-editor Fred Gale’s chapter on global civil society builds on Ken Conca’s earlier chapter, “Beyond the Statist Frame,” which argues that scholars and social movements need to create a new conceptual frame for global governance. Gale uses the case of the Forest Stewardship Council’s (FSC) role in promoting sustainable production and consumption of forest products to exemplify an emerging global civil society force. The FSC counters the hegemonic regime of accumulation with an institutional form that Gale argues is civil society controlled, inclusive, with equitable North-South participation, an ethos of

ecosystem-based management and devolution of responsibility down to regional and local levels. Two empirical questions are not really answered by Gale: does the FSC actually reduce consumption, unlike industry efforts at green standards to merely preserve market access? And how is forest management at the local level altered by the process of gaining FSC certification? The broader question of whether FSC type activities can be extended to other is, as Gale acknowledges, open to future research.

Who will want to read this book? First of all it is clear that this is not a book for most practitioners and policy-makers, although they might benefit from reading parts of it. There are few recipe book answers to the environmental and social problems of our time and few practical (managerial) suggestions—except Agrawal's suggestions on how not to work with and advocate "community." In fact, the volume openly rejects approaching environment as an "issue" to be studied with whatever tools one has. The state as locus of action is also largely rejected. Therefore, this book will be most interesting to those who wish to fathom the relationships between nature, (re)production and power and to act outside the usual channels for changing these relationships, perhaps in modest ways, in our lifetime.

Paul F. Diehl and Nils Petter Gleditsch, eds. 2001. *Environmental Conflict: An Anthology*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

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The emergence of environmental security studies has led to a great deal of controversy regarding the relevance, scope and methodology of the subfield. *Environmental Conflict* does not aim at settling these discussions but rather at providing an overview of the essential puzzles in the area. The book easily achieves its goal. It is recommended either for readers who want to broadly familiarize themselves with the environmental security literature, or as a text for upper-level undergraduate or graduate courses in environmental security.

The book is divided into three parts, with a total of thirteen chapters. In the first section, the relationship between environmental degradation and conflict is covered. This issue has been heavily debated and since the end of the cold war numerous studies have attempted to clarify if and how environmental factors can cause conflict. Most of the viewpoints that have emerged in the literature are covered in *Environmental Conflict*. For instance, Percival and Homer-Dixon use process-tracing to illustrate a causal relationship between environmental scarcity in some South African Homelands and political violence. The opposite view—that environmental factors rarely cause conflict—is articulated by Goldstone, who suggests an interesting distinction between violent and non-violent environmental/demographic security issues (p. 84). In essence the argument goes that more often than not cooperation, rather than conflict, results