

prescient and focused points DeSombre makes, this book is an engaging and valuable contribution.

Matthew Paterson. 2000. *Understanding Global Environmental Politics: Domination, Accumulation, Resistance*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

*Reviewed by David Watkins*

In this important and exciting new book, Matthew Paterson makes a convincing case for significantly expanding the boundaries of research done in the field of global environmental politics (GEP). The principal argument is that scholars of GEP to date have largely focused on efforts to deal with environmental problems through international institutions, cooperation, and/or conflict, but have ignored the *causes* of global environmental problems. This book sets out to correct this deficiency in the literature by examining some sources of global environmental change and degradation.

Paterson makes both an empirical and theoretical case here, with each side of his argument getting three chapters. The theoretical chapters all make compelling cases for changing the way we approach the study of GEP. Chapter two, "Realism, Liberalism, and the Origins of Global Environmental Change," make the case that realist and liberal approaches to GEP focus and limit the topics that can be studied. Realist approaches to GEP limit the analysis to questions of environmental security; liberal approaches lead to a focus on international institutions and agreements on environmental issues. Environmental problems, in both cases, are implicitly assumed to be the result of a collective action problem; specifically, a version of the famous "tragedy of the commons" thesis. However, "most writers eschew the apocalyptic language of 'tragedy,' but still invoke the notion of the *commons* as a metaphor for many facets of global environmental change" (23). In other words, they focus on the problem of collective action, but not the creation of the problem itself.

In chapter three, "The 'normal and mundane practices of modernity': Global Power Structures and the Environment," Paterson identifies four aspects of what he terms the "deep structures" of international politics that are responsible for the production of environmental problems. He identifies four aspects of this system, all of which contribute to environmental harm: the states system, capitalism, knowledge and power, and patriarchy. He makes compelling cases for why each of these structural features of international politics are prone to contribute to environmental degradation. He is quite pessimistic about the capacity of any of these features of the modern world order to contribute to the solution of environmental problems.

In chapters four, five, and six, he applies his theoretical arguments to specific topics: the construction of sea defenses, cars and car culture, and fast food. The methodology behind these chapters is to look at the discourses surrounding these social practices for evidence of the four aspects of the deep structure of

international politics discussed in chapter three. These chapters are brief and suggestive. While there is much left out of these discussions, and much more that could be discussed, he succeeds in these chapters on at least two levels. First, he makes a strong case that these topics should be within the purview of the study of GEP. Second, that the discourses surrounding these practices suggest that the structural aspects of international politics discussed above are at work in some way in the production of these environmentally questionable practices seems incontrovertible. There is more that could have done here, though. For example, in chapter five, "Car Trouble," the "socio-spatial consequences of car-centred development" (specifically, suburbanization) are mentioned (106) but not discussed in any detail. The state-driven turn toward suburbanization in the decades following World War II would certainly aid his argument, but it is not pursued in this chapter. Despite omissions and missed opportunities in these short chapters, they are an exciting extension of GEP into new and important territory.

The final chapter returns to theoretical arguments. First, he takes on the arguments of the "global civil society" school of international relations. He sees their arguments as overly optimistic, since the actors and institutions of global civil society emerge from the institutions that create environmental problems in the first place, such as states and transnational corporations. He concludes the book with a discussion of opposition to dominant patterns of global environmental change, which he suggests must oppose the logic of development, which is "a central discourse through which patriarchal, technocratic, capitalist, statist societies reproduce themselves" (152). He concludes with a defense of small-scale, local communities as the primary organ for this resistance.

I am hesitant to engage in wholesale criticism of this book because I think it takes the study of GEP in new and important directions, and should be widely read. There is one point of criticism, however, that I must make. In chapter three, Paterson identifies himself as a structuralist, but in a weak, non-determinate form. Specifically, he suggests structure should be seen as "historically evolving, and as undergoing transformations" (41) but that "*tend* to reproduce their basic principles through the practices of actors operating within them" (42, italics in original). I agree with this approach to structures, and think this is entirely appropriate for this book, and the study of GEP in general. However, this weak structuralism is inconsistent with his relentless pessimism about the possibility of productive environmental change coming from the states system, or any other aspect of the structure of world politics identified earlier. While his pessimism could be seen as a useful antidote for excessive optimism about the prospect of international institutions, given his own theoretical commitments, it is too strong. He should be more open to the possibility of working within these structures as part of resistance strategies. Just because the states system, or the system of knowledge and power, or even capitalism do not contribute to environmentally productive change when all their actions are tallied up is no reason to ignore the possibility of using them for productive environmental

change on an *ad hoc* basis. This would seem entirely in line with his weak version of structuralism, but he dismisses it as a possibility.

This is a minor quibble, however. On the whole, this is a provocative, important new book that should be of interest to and deserves to be widely read amongst students of GEP, international relations theory, environmental politics, and cultural studies.