

# Book Reviews

Carmin, JoAnne, and Julian Agyeman, eds. 2011. *Environmental Inequalities beyond Borders: Local Perspectives on Global Injustices*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Reviewed by Tatyana B. Ruseva  
Appalachian State University

In *Environmental Inequalities Beyond Borders: Local Perspectives on Global Injustices*, JoAnn Carmin and Julian Agyeman bring together diverse examples of social and environmental inequities to illustrate how distances between producers and consumers, and linkages among institutions at different scales, deepen global injustices. The cases seek to demonstrate “how spatial and multilevel institutional dynamics interact to shape the ways global inequalities play out in local contexts” (p. 8). The ten chapters, written by scholars in geography, sociology, and urban and environmental planning, document environmental and social injustices arising from mining and oil exploration, local development, agriculture, and other activities around the globe.

It is fair to place this edited volume within the emerging cross-disciplinary literature on environmental justice, which seeks to provide explanations for and potential solutions to the unequal distribution of environmental harms and goods within and between countries. While the book offers no novel theoretical or empirical interpretation of environmental justice, it reiterates through diverse illustrations that environmental inequities are not bound to a specific locale, and do not occur in a vacuum. Instead, social processes are linked to spatial patterns, and “geographic determinants and differentials shape diverse forms of inequities” (p. 21). The presence of injustices is further entwined with the forces of the global political economy—the dominant production and consumption patterns, and our institutions of governance. The central point of the book is that the process of globalization serves both as a driver of, and a possible remedy to, ecological and social injustices. Political, economic, and social institutions, as noted in the first and last chapters of the book, “have the potential to be part of the solution, particularly when engaged and prodded by nonstate actors” (p. 271).

In their introductory chapter, Carmin and Agyeman approach global inequalities from two theoretical perspectives within environmental sociology—ecological modernization and the treadmill of production. The rest of the cases, however, are less in line with these views and more focused on the role of institutions in promoting social and environmental justice. Organized in three thematic sections, the ten chapters “integrate spatial and institutional perspectives

*Global Environmental Politics* 12:1, February 2012  
© 2012 by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology

to examine how social and environmental inequalities propagated by remote demand and consumption are constructed, understood, experienced, and addressed" (p. 8).

The variety of conceptual lenses is not surprising given the diversity of cases presented. These range from climate injustices in Durban, South Africa; oil exploration in the Niger River Delta, and China's oil operations in Latin America, Africa and Asia; foreign investment and mining in Fiji; gold mining in Bulgaria; sustainable agriculture and food sovereignty in Latin America; funding for environmental NGOs in Ecuador; benefit-sharing agreements to protect biological diversity in South Africa; as well as the potential of international organizations and transnational movements to advance environmental justice. Each chapter details the history of the case, discusses the role of different actors and institutions (local, national, transnational), and offers recommendations for promoting social equality and environmental justice.

Some chapters are more successful than others, particularly with regard to the literature and evidence marshaled in support of the analysis. Certain cases, such as local development in Durban (chapter 2), China's oil operations in the global South (chapter 8), and distribution of environmental funds in Ecuador (chapter 5) are theoretically weak and overwhelmingly descriptive, with inadequate citations to buttress the arguments made. Others are conceptually and factually clear with proper references and evidence-based arguments, for instance: the Niger River Delta case (chapter 3), the case of the Hoodia benefit-sharing agreement (chapter 6); and, the environmental justice movement networks chapter (chapter 11).

It frequently remains unclear whether the narrative is based on original data, fieldwork, or secondary sources. Another drawback to the book is its lack of definitional clarity. Carmin and Agyeman talk about the "scalar dynamics of inequities" (p. 3), and the "spatial dynamics associated with environmental injustice" (p. 6), but fail to decipher the meaning of either. A definition of spatial justice appears in the second chapter by Isabelle Anguelovski and Debra Roberts, but remains limited to the discussion of climate justice. Finally, when discussing the spatial aspects of a case it is always helpful to provide, if possible, a visual representation to the readers. Regrettably, the book offers only one figure.

Several commonalities emerge from the analyses and insights presented in *Environmental Inequalities beyond Borders*. Accountability, transparency and learning are not only a necessary foundation for recognizing the diversity of values and groups, but also for allowing different interests to be voiced. Similarly, institutions, accepted by all, are a requisite pillar for the rule of law, democratic governance, and participatory decision-making. Carmin and Agyeman conclude that spatial injustice "appears to rest on the commitment of networked civil society actors to monitor the activities of intergovernmental organizations, national governments, and corporations and to ensure that the claims and concerns of local actors are recognized within countries as well as amplified beyond

borders" (p. 273). Indeed, one of the valuable qualities of the book is its emphasis on private and public actors, and institutions from the local to the global level. Overall, the book offers an accessible collection of detailed case studies for students and teachers interested in environmental justice and politics. It is well-suited for a case-oriented seminar in environmental justice, where each chapter can be used alone or in combination with others.

Dankelman, Irene, ed. 2010. *Gender and Climate Change: An Introduction*. London: Earthscan.

*Reviewed by Claire Dupont*  
*Vrije Universiteit Brussels*

Statements such as the one by South Africa's Minister of International Relations and Cooperation Maite Nkoana-Mashabane, that "climate change can't be solved without empowering women,"<sup>1</sup> appear ever more frequently in the media and in climate change discourse. But what precisely does it mean to take a gendered perspective on climate change? This volume edited by Irene Dankelman, a long-time scholar of the intricacies of environmental and gender issues, aims to provide an analysis of this interface. The volume outlines gender aspects in mitigating and adapting to climate change, and examines these issues in both rural and urban societies, in practice and in policy. The volume's strong emphasis on reporting local-level action makes it interesting not only for students and scholars of climate change and gender issues, but also for policymakers at all levels wishing to improve the synergies between these two issues. Gender equality is still lagging behind in many of the most vulnerable regions of the world, resulting in a lack of equal participation in decision-making, and thus a lack of "gender mainstreaming," in local, national and international climate policies.

This volume attempts to tie together two complex issues. It is a formidable task to outline why a gender-specific approach to climate change policies is required, and how such an approach can be achieved. Climate change is complex because of its global nature, its varied impacts, causes, and solutions (that require broad and fundamental changes to many aspects of human society), and the challenge of achieving political consensus on action. Achieving gender equality also requires action across all sectors of society. The authors show that the interlinkages between these two issues are intricate. Women are among the poorest of the poor, and are traditionally in charge of their family's water and food supply, healthcare, and education of children. In times of climate crisis, women are often hit the hardest—in drought they walk farther to find water; in

1. "Empowering Women Key to Climate Change," *Times Live*, 9 August 2011. Available online at <http://www.timeslive.co.za/scitech/2011/08/09/empowering-women-key-to-climate-change>, accessed 14 October 2011.