

Reviews

Toxic Criminology: Environment, Law and the State in Canada
(2002) edited by Susan C Boyd, Dorothy E Chunn & Robert Menzies,
Fernwood Publishing, Halifax

Toxic Criminology is the companion reader to the 2001 publication [*Ab*] *Using Power: The Canadian Experience* (compiled by the same editors) which originated from the 1998 Simon Fraser University Symposium of the same name. Similar to the publication that preceded it, *Toxic Criminology* is comprised of edited papers from the 1998 event. However these papers comprise only half the publication, also included are three commissioned essays (by Ted Schrecker, Elizabeth May and Randy Christensen), which bring a diversity of views.

Despite its predominately Canadian content, *Toxic Criminology* is a timely publication for Australia, which begins with an acknowledgement of the devastating environmental impact of the US-lead military action in Afghanistan — an event that, at the time of publication, was just beginning to be played out. Given the continued war effort in Iraq, the contents and context of this book are perhaps even more timely now than they were in 2002.

But this book is not only about the environmental impact of war — in fact this area warrants very little attention — it's really an exploration of environmental harm in Canada, set in the context of criminology's noted absence from discussions and theorising on the topic of environmental crime. Why, the editors ask, did it take until the late 1980s for criminologists to express genuine and sustained interest in environmental harm?

The real highlight of the book is its introduction, which not only introduces the reader to the book but also (and succinctly) to the rather insufficiently theorised discipline of environmental criminology. As the editors note, the real reason for criminology's late entry into the exploration of environmental crime is due to whom the perpetrators are — predominately wealthy, white males — the polar opposite of the 'traditional' criminal. This overview of the theoretical underpinnings of environmental crime is pertinent to bringing the diverse chapter subjects together, particularly given that in the main, individual authors do not address specific criminological theory. Rather, they focus on more pragmatic examples of environmental crime (past and present) in Canada.

Melody Hessing's (Ch1) 'Economic Globalization and Canadian Environmental Restructuring' chapter explores the often detrimental environmental consequences of economic globalization. While this correlation between increased globalization and increased environmental harm is often acknowledged, little is offered as a solution to the 'problem'. Moreover, globalization has meant that the state's role in resource protection has also been steadily diminishing.

Relatedly, Ted Schrecker (Ch2) links Canadian environmental deregulation and degradation to the strengthening of late-twentieth-century neo-liberal capitalism and asserts that the environment and socio-economic power are inextricably linked. That is, social

characteristics such as race, sex and social class play an integral role in exposure to environmental risk — we do after all, get the environment we can afford. It is Schrecker's contention that these ties between place, class and environment will, in the future, only become stronger and more significant (p50) so their recognition now is pertinent.

In Chapter 3 former provincial minister (of agriculture and food and health), Corky Evans asserts that in order to ensure its survival, the environmental movement needs to do away with notions of classlessness and make alliances with class-based politics. Stuart Rush (Ch4) then traces the historical struggles of Aboriginal nations to save their natural resources from depletion.

Toxic Criminology successfully brings together six authors from quite diverse backgrounds — academic through activist. Particularly refreshing is the manner in which Elizabeth May (Ch5) and Randy Christensen (Ch6) recount their own experiences with, and views on, two of Canada's most infamous examples of environmental harm: the Sydney Tar Ponds of Cape Breton and the Walkerton water contamination incident respectively. These chapters, while intensely personal, are both well written and well integrated into the more theoretically oriented chapters.

Overall, *Toxic Criminology* is an excellent and practical introduction to the broad area of environmental crime. The diversity of the authors and their topics is also a considerable asset. With regard to the editors' intention to 'throw up a challenge for Canadian criminologists to intensify their engagement over the coming years with the pervasive phenomenon of environmental crime' (p23), I'd be surprised if they hadn't done that already.

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