

**GARBAGE WARS: THE STRUGGLE FOR ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE IN CHICAGO** by David Naguib Pellow. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2002.

This is a very ambitious book. It purports to examine the typical maintenance, the conscious neglect, the failures and the harm caused to the residents of the city of Chicago, Illinois in the U.S.A. that have resulted from the inadequacies of solid waste disposal programs. The book also deals with the inability of American society at-large to formulate just solutions for environmental hazards that are a direct, though not unavoidable, outcome of modern urban life. The author, Dr. David Pellow, has attempted to describe and link a number of phenomena. He tells the story of the awakening and development of environmental awareness in the United States, against a backdrop of the impact that macro-economic events, such as World War II, a shortage of raw materials and balance of payment difficulties, had on national environmental management issues. Furthermore, he uses the unique character of Chicago, with its high concentration of Afro-Americans, to argue that environmental neglect can be directly attributed to deliberate discrimination against certain, designated population groups. The author has high aspirations. He undertakes an analysis of the issues from a number of different angles, and does not merely provide a detailed historical review of Chicago's solid waste management program. Rather, there is an attempt, somewhat far-reaching, to take facts concerning the city of Chicago's solid waste disposal industry and draw conclusions applying to societal-environmental issues in the whole of America.

The book sets out to accomplish three main goals. First of all, it aims to survey the milestones in the history of garbage maintenance in the United States. Next, it attempts to impart an understanding of how the 'garbage business' developed in the city of Chicago and, finally, it examines the link between environmental pollution and discrimination. The entire discussion is based on the following premises: 1. American society is prejudiced; 2. Race-based discrimination is a reality in American society and can be seen in environmental issues; 3. Discrimination is deliberate and serves the financial and social interests of certain groups; 4. It is possible to attain environmental equity, i.e., a just approach that does not come at the expense of designated groups; 5. Sooner or later, the American society, in its entirety, will be forced to pay the price of rectifying environmental discrimination damages that it has incurred for 200 years; and 6. There is a clear differential among groups bearing the adverse affects of pollution, and this indicates that societal-environmental bias is intentional.

Pellow is correct in stating that ample empirical evidence exists to support his claim of a correlation between levels of exposure to pollution and the income bracket and skin color of the population group. In other words, there is a relationship between poverty and pollution. This is an old story in the United States. The data, which are unequivocal and stretch over an extended period of time, show an uneven distribution of exposure to health hazards. We know for certain that for over 100 years, poor blacks have suffered because of environmental neglect, intentional or not, in

far greater proportion than wealthy whites. This has been evident in America since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and is throughout the nation. It is particularly true in Chicago. Nevertheless, in my opinion, these facts alone cannot support the claim of environmental racism in the United States. The 'leap' from empirical evidence to conclusion is too big. More substantive research is necessary.

The book is not looking for evidence that environmental racial discrimination exists. It views it as axiomatic to the discussion and then goes on to pursue an entirely different track. We see an attempt to understand what facilitated the development of the phenomenon and how it was sustained over almost 200 years. Using Chicago to illustrate his case, Pellow examines a number of the factors at work that eventually culminated in this discrimination. The author painstakingly, and in great detail, depicts the historical chain of events that was set in motion. He points to the clout the financial magnates have in the city of Chicago and how they are able to affect municipal policy. He also demonstrates how decision makers are influenced by social status when it comes to determining public policy in these areas.

The story of garbage maintenance in Chicago begins in 1880. At that time, it included the construction of landfills, efforts to reduce solid waste dumping and recycling. In the 1920s, the city began building incinerators. We learn that there were years where landfills were the primary method of waste disposal; others where the focus was on recycling; still others where the method of choice was either burning or reducing solid waste production. In all of those years, no new ideas were introduced, and in fact, municipal officials continued to reintroduce the same old methods. The decision-makers have shown themselves to be unimaginative and uncreative. He goes on to explain that repetition of ideas, avoidance of long-term planning and adopting ad hoc solutions are endemic to the nature of policy-making in the field of solid waste management.

Having established that Chicago's record on waste management is not exemplary and having mentioned that some sectors of the population suffered more than others, Pellow endeavors to make us understand what motivates municipal leaders to make the decisions they do. He offers two types of explanations: a political rationale and an economic rationale. The political rationale takes into consideration basic human nature: the weakness, the malice and the greed. The economic rationale recognizes the drive to achieve maximum personal financial gain at the public expense. These two explanations enable us to summarize the book's findings in merely a few sentences: 1. Racial discrimination in the United States also includes environmental neglect of the black and economically more vulnerable sectors of society; and 2. The wherewithal to sustain such a discriminatory policy is part and parcel of the vested financial interests and influence wielded by rich and powerful segments of the American public.

Of particular interest in this book is the way the author vividly portrays the complex unfolding of events in Chicago. The big advantage here is that by telling the story of the city from the vantage point of waste disposal policymaking, the author opens the door to a wider readership. The deliberations, considerations, influences and intrigue involved in the decision-making process of the municipal leaders will ap-

peal to readers from many walks of life. Unfortunately, the book's biggest drawback derives from the telling of the same story. Fascinating as it may be, the book falls short as an academic undertaking. There is no mention of the line of thought that preceded empirical research, statement of purpose, report of research findings, or data description. What we do have is a mixture of facts and conclusions, of observations and thoughts, of ideas and reality. This is an aggregate of fascinating subjects, varied conceptual approaches, dissimilar research disciplines all tossed together to prove one thing—environmental racial discrimination exists. But after all, this is precisely the starting point of the entire discussion. As if this weren't enough, the author is not satisfied with his theory regarding municipal management and how it affects the city of Chicago. Throughout the discussion, he tries to take what he believes are the truths that arise from his analysis of Chicago and sprinkle them all over the United States. On the one hand, he tells us that Chicago is an ideal case study for this subject due to its unique ethno-demographic and socio-economic makeup and because of its industrial character, at least for part of the period. On the other hand, Pellow claims that what happened in Chicago also occurred in other cities and states. In other words, with no data to back him up, he says that Chicago is both unique and characteristic of other places in America. An additional problem, and no less central, is that the author abstains from defining the concepts he employs. You will not find a single description for 'pollution' or 'environmental hazard'. He uses the terms 'environmental justice' and 'environmental racism' extensively without clarifying what the accepted standard is for justice or who is responsible for determining what is just and what is not. Other questions must be asked as well. How can you tell the difference between prejudice and a 'mere' case of injustice? What constitutes an environmental hazard, and how does it differ from an ordinary nuisance? How can you measure benefit and harm? Who has the authority to do so? Have harm and benefit always been evaluated according to the same criteria? Should they be? What about the discussion concerning solid waste disposal management and environmental hazards? Isn't it possible that for at least part of the period under discussion, the subject of garbage disposal was not necessarily related to the environment? Why is the discussion about garbage used as a model for learning about other environmental questions? How similar are the environmental issues and the problems involved in coping with them? The questions go on and on.

As an Israeli, I read the claims and findings in the book with great interest. I have to admit that I found some small measure of comfort in the fact that even in better developed, richer and more enlightened nations, affairs are managed as they are. Evidently Israel is not the only country where the political powers-that-be favor the interests that are closest to them and prefer visible gains to less apparent ones.

It occurred to me that Pellow's description of municipal decision-making in Chicago and his claims regarding environmental discrimination based on race and/or income bracket may have some parallels in Israel. A case in point could be the outrage of Negev residents not long ago who were informed that the government intended to move the garbage dump from Chiriya to Duda'im in the heart of the Negev. Politi-

cians were accused of partiality and biased decision-making. There were claims that moving the landfill to the Negev would turn the area into the 'garbage dump of the country'. This could, in turn, have had adverse affects on the population, which is already weak in socio-demographic terms, by making them more vulnerable to health hazards. Suspicions surfaced about how the rich and well-connected use influence to distance themselves from potential environmental hazards by getting them moved closer to the poor and downtrodden.

As a researcher, my opinion is guarded. This is a book that should be read carefully and critically. It would behoove the reader to be aware of its weaknesses and wary of accepting all of its conclusions.

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**WOMEN AND THE POLITICS OF MILITARY CONFRONTATION: PALESTINIAN AND ISRAELI GENDERED NARRATIVES OF DISLOCATION**, edited by Nahla Abdo and Ronit Lentin. New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2002.

The book encompasses the intellectual biographies of seventeen Palestinian and Israeli women in a quest for understanding and an attempt to reach over the national divide. It is an excellent example of the differential power of nationalism, and how this power shapes women's lives from the two sides of the divide, as well as the lives of the women who reside on the same side. Although the book does not deal directly with concepts of space and place, it is all about space and place—about oscillating between homeland and exile. The impact of the national divide is conveyed from the perspective of women who have been pushed by the power of nationalism into exile and a diasporic existence. This perspective permits the deconstruction of national exile not simply as one edge of the territorial binary of homeland-exile, but deconstructs exile itself as a far more complex meaning than simply being outside one's homeland; by that virtue it also reflects on the meaning of homeland.

Diasporic existence, as the testimonies and the internal organization of the book indicate, does not necessarily overlap 'non-homeland' residence; it dwells in the lives of those who fail to shape their own homeland in the spirit of their belief, in the lives of those whose national sentiments are oppressed by a variety of means, in the lives of those who voluntarily chose to live elsewhere and are unable to detach themselves from their birthplace, in the lives of those who were born and brought up in 'non-homeland' places, and of course in the lives of those who were actually expelled. The book portrays a fragmented space of Palestinian and Jewish exile(s) and illustrates how these fragments, no matter how far away from each other and from the shared territory of homeland, never cease to be part of the homeland.

While the book reads as an (anti)nationalist venture, it is also a brave feminist one. Apart from giving the voice to women of diasporic existence (as opposed to the masculine experience of exercising power over the homeland territory) it also leans on