

Rezension: Carbon Colonialism: How Rich Countries Export Climate Breakdown

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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Rezension / review

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Sharma, A. (2023). Rezension: Carbon Colonialism: How Rich Countries Export Climate Breakdown. [Review of the book *Carbon Colonialism: How Rich Countries Export Climate Breakdown*, by L. Parsons]. *Studies of Transition States and Societies*, 15(1), 67-68. <https://doi.org/10.58036/stss.v15i1.1174>

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Book Review:

Carbon Colonialism: How Rich Countries Export Climate Breakdown

Ankita Sharma*

Carbon Colonialism: How Rich Countries Export Climate Breakdown by Laurie Parsons, 2023, Manchester University Press.

In *Carbon Colonialism: How Rich Countries Export Climate Breakdown*, Laurie Parsons discusses the global carbon problem resulting from excessive production and consumption. Climate change and natural disasters are no longer natural; they are a consequence of excessive industrialization. The author argues that industrialization has negatively impacted underdeveloped countries more so than developed ones. Besides the problem of resource extraction and worker exploitation, he talks about the costs of labour, raw materials, and manufacturing that rich countries impose on low-margin countries. Poor countries are also dealing with the effects of climate change, while rich countries can easily find a way to overcome these effects.

The author argues that issues such as carbon emissions and global production along with poverty are added to every day around the world, but they still remain unnoticed at the global level (pp. 7–8). With a detailed analysis of the aforementioned issues the author has organised the book into two sections: - “Greenwashing the Global Factory” and the “Manufacturing Disaster in the Global Factory.”

In the first chapter, *Founding the Global Factory*, the author states that environmental devastation has increased to catastrophic levels during the past three decades. Since 1970, the world’s material extraction has tripled. Mountains are being crushed, precious stones and fossil fuels are being mined, and an estimated 19 million hectares of global forest are being lost each year (p. 26). Furthermore, he states that there is a correlation between resource extraction and worker exploitation, as extraction necessitates a certain workforce in the first place.

The author compares today’s extraction, exploitation, and expansion of the global market with the colonial structure and the imperial mindset, and does not hesitate to call this structure Carbon Colonialism (p. 7). Similar to how wealthy nations have exploited poor nations during the colonial era to meet their own demands, hence contemporary wealthy nations today continue accessing resources and building factories in low-margin nations, turning them into centres of the production of carbon for their own gain. The author claims that in order to fulfil the interests of rich nations, the world is on the edge of redrawing global risks (p. 47).

In the second chapter, *Consumer Power in the Global Factory*, the author claims that the consumer has power over products, as there are countless cases of products being altered, replaced or discontinued, and of new products emerging in the market to satisfy consumer demand (p. 58). For example, the food industry with its demands for things like organic and vegan foods as well as non-meat and low-meat diets has taken a firmer hold. The modern food industry focuses on high-tech ultra-processed foods (p. 59), leaving aside traditional and ethical ways of food production that have a strong cultural ethos of sustainability. The author claims that industries today are deceiving consumers in terms of ethics and sustainability. The term *Eco pornography* is often used by environmentalists to characterise situations where products are advertised as sustainable, but in reality, they are not (p. 60). However, the author uses the word *greenwashing* when describing this sustainability myth (p. 173).

In the chapter, *Carbon Colonialism*, the author analyses the fact that despite various global summits

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like the World Conference, UNFCCC, Kyoto Protocol, and the most recent Paris Agreement in 2016, the world has failed to reduce carbon emissions. Moreover, wealthy nations have been successful in creating the illusion that they are cutting their carbon emissions, but in reality, these countries are outsourcing their emissions to lower-margin nations. The wealthy nations have removed the burden of carbon emissions from their environmental books through such imported emissions – emissions that occur in a country other than where the manufactured goods are used. The author calls such practice Carbon Colonialism (p. 82), a term that also highlights the historical power relations that underlie carbon accounting.

In the fifth chapter, *Climate Precarity*, the author draws a relationship between environmental vulnerability and economic inequality. For example, in the hottest months like May, when the temperature rises to more than 40°C and the humidity in most of the south-eastern nations increases terrifically. Heat during this time is a protagonist in society's stresses and dramas (p. 101). Without central heating, people living in freezing climates also have a tough time surviving the winter. In London, for instance, if someone on a low budget wants to keep the temperature normal in their homes, they will need to cut back on even the basic necessities because maintaining a normal room temperature is so expensive (p. 104). The rich, on the other hand, are able to establish their own microclimates to bring with them around the globe in the form of clothing, heating and cooling systems, or social customs (p. 105).

Furthermore, the author describes the condition of Tonle Sap Lake in Cambodia, whose ecosystem is affected both by climate change and continuous extraction from the lake. The locals claim that the amount of fish has decreased by 10–20%, and the estimated temperature increase is 1°C. A large number of urban fishermen and industrial fishing boats continue to empty the lake of all its fish, leaving little for the nearby villagers. The author emphasizes that only the poor are affected by climate change and will continue to be, while the wealthy have the right to ruin the ecosystem even more.

The chapter entitled *Money Talks*, asserts that urbanisation comes at the expense of environmental degradation, as the raw material used to generate urban riches is dug, mined, cut, and removed from somewhere – somewhere that used to belong to someone and that used to have meaning for someone else (p. 127). However, the high-level discussions about saving the planet on a global scale are not at all worthwhile. The Conference of Parties (COP) gathering of world leaders only exists in theory and not in practice. For example, the Brazilian government promised to stop illegal deforestation by 2028 at COP 26, yet deforestation in the Amazon has become considerably worse in recent years, and according to environmental campaigners, the government is in bed with climate criminals (p. 174). The author totally agrees with Greta Thunberg's claim during the Conference of Parties (COP 26) in Glasgow while addressing the people on the streets that 'it is no longer a climate conference but rather a Global North Greenwash Festival' (p. 174).

In the final chapter, the author discusses six myths that support carbon colonialism. The first myth is that climate change causes climate disasters; the second is sustainable consumption; the third is that environmentalists are fighting for net zero; the fourth is that there are climate migrants; the fifth is the idea that sustainability starts at home; and last but not least is that climate science is an apolitical consensus. We are waking up with such misconceptions that are impacting our daily lives. This can only be tackled when we begin to examine and scrutinize environmental catastrophes and say no to carbon colonialism.

Carbon Colonialism: How Rich Countries Export Climate Breakdown, is a revelatory book for all of us. A large portion of the human population is preoccupied with satisfying their excessive demands. Our ever-increasing desires are putting an additional burden on the planet. The planet has enough resources for our needs but not enough for our desires. This book explains how wealth is ruling and harming the environment. We are all accountable for our unsustainable overuse of natural resources and climate change. Therefore, this book must be read by every individual, not just those with a specific interest.

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