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**"Security and Environmental Change" (2009) Simon Dalby**

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"communication geography"' (p. 12) – the "media" component having already slipped away. In isolation, of course, this bias is unproblematic; but in a book that purports to introduce readers to the geographies of communication *and* media (and hence communication, information *and* entertainment), it is not. Inevitably, these generic blindspots manifest as stark individual absences: the lack of meaningful discussion (in an introductory book on media geographies) of the Hollywood studios that in so many respects continue to dominate not only North American but also global media markets, is striking. So too is the invisibility of path-breaking work on media geographies by geographers such as Susan Christopherson, Michael Storper and Allen Scott.

These concerns notwithstanding, the book should prove a valuable resource for teachers and students alike. It is far and away the best available guide to significant writings by both geographers and non-geographers on the place of communications in human geography.

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**Security and Environmental Change**. *Dalby, Simon*. Polity Press, Cambridge 2009. 197 + viii pp. 978-0-7456-4292-5 (pbk).

With *Security and Environmental Change*, Simon Dalby takes a new step in his long and pioneering engagement with (environmental) geopolitics and notions of "environmental security". Although heralded in his *Environmental Security* (2002), this book seeks to break fundamentally with notions of security as a somehow separate domain of intellectual and practical engagements. Indeed, Dalby recognizes that the book could perhaps have been better titled 'Environment and Security Change' (p. 170). This subsumption of security under a far wider rubric of profound social-ecological changes, challenges and contestations may trouble some theoretical purists, but it expands the book's potential readership and impact – in and beyond academic confines.

Borrowing Paul Crutzen's (2002) concept, the book is based on the key contention that we have entered the geological era of the "Anthropocene", where humanity not least because of "carboniferous capitalism" and a global urbanized economy are actively remaking the Earth's ecosystems. Challenging assumptions of an external environment that influences human activities, the still live and kicking spectre of environmental determinism and its Malthusian sibling, this prompts Dalby to argue that humanity and nature should be thought of as mutually constituted rather than as separate spheres. Dramatic events like Hurricane Katrina are in this vein "unnatural hazards" that have turned disastrous, and contemporary concerns with globalization and environmental change are more generally to be seen as two sides of the same coin. Existing and emerging "environmental" threats are self-imposed, at least by 'those of us who live in the prosperous, auto-mobile- and airplane-addicted consumer societies of the planet' (p. 2). If one can speak of external causes, it is how these societies produce threats to 'the poor people living in vulnerable peripheries in the world system' (p. 2). In this world of intense interconnectivity, Dalby argues, we should be cautious of conventional state-centric notions of security, which all too often produce highly problematic notions of threats to the existing social order of territorial states, for example "environmental refugees". Dalby seems more attracted to notions of human security, where threats to people rather than states become the focus. More specifically, Dalby emphatically recommends a critical agenda emphasizing 'the importance of focusing on who and what is portrayed as a threat, and how security is invoked to deal with what is portrayed as a threat to which political order' (p. 130). This critical agenda leads Dalby to propose that we in fact should be searching for an 'Anthropocene ethics' rather than for 'Anthropocene security' (p. 164), although he readily admits that the terms of such an ethics is still uncertain.

Dalby unrolls the many threads of these (in my rendering admittedly truncated) arguments in six (not easily summarized) chapters. Chapter 1 usefully discusses past and present thinking about environmental fears, linking Malthus to the neo-Malthusians of the 1970s and more recent discussions of sustainability, environmental change and security, while Chapter 2 critically investigates

notions of environmental security, arguing that simple conceptions of security for territorial states must give way to a human-security agenda. Chapter 3 takes up elements of the environmental history literature from which can be drawn examples of how political and economic forces are key to understanding the human complicity in seemingly natural hazards. This is further pursued in Chapter 4, which investigates the emergence of the Anthropocene, while Chapter 5 discusses the global urban economic conditions ("glurbanization") of environmental harm, arguing for a greater focus on the everyday life of particularly the poor and marginal (be they in Mumbai or in New Orleans). Finally, a multi-faceted Chapter 6 draws together elements of the previous chapters with emphasis on establishing the critical agenda of investigating who and what is securitized as threats to which order. Here, a critical geopolitical "where" emerges into full view, focusing particularly on schisms between the metropolitan North and the global South.

The individual elements of Dalby's investigation may not be groundbreaking in their own right, but taps into longer-standing and recent debates in and across a variety of fields. Advanced notions of a fusion between the human and the natural have a relatively long history in geography, for instance, be it in terms of Marxian "second nature" (Smith 2008) or Latourian "hybrid geographies" (Whatmore 2002). In fact, a criticism of the book could be that reviews of a great diversity of debates take up too many pages. But this is done with critical engagement, and along the way, Dalby presents several intriguing insights and propositions. Moreover, although I find connections within and between some chapters somewhat disjointed, the style is clear and the text rich on academic calories. This makes for a wide audience. Still, I would have welcomed if some key contentions had been further pursued. This may be more than can be asked of a relatively short book that covers an impressive range of scholarly ground. Yet, although I am very positively inclined towards the general gist of Dalby's propositions and arguments, I am often left wondering how well they actually hold or what could be made of them. For example, I am intrigued but also somewhat sceptical about Dalby's repeated references to insights of earth-system science, which he seems to view as compatible with critical social thought, 'the so-called postmodern turn in social thinking' (p. 160). This may well be the case. But as it stands, I am not convinced that these in many ways radically different fields are in fact compatible. More specifically, I can only welcome Dalby's criticism of environmental determinism and Malthusianism. This is imperative as such views all too often and problematically slip into environmental debates, also in academic quarters that should know better. Approaching the "social" and the "natural" as profoundly interlinked is certainly a major advance. But it frequently appears as if Dalby in effect reverses the causal arrow, interchanging environmental determinism with a sort of social determinism. A more overt dialectical approach (which I suspect is what Dalby in fact is aiming for) would in my view be more fruitful. This, I believe, could help to push the agenda beyond a search for ethical foundations to also aim more head-on for what could be termed an "Anthropocene *politics*". To my mind, David Harvey's notion of coevolution carries much promise in this respect (for example, Harvey 2009). Such musings should illustrate that Dalby has written an important and thought-provoking book, which opens a host of important quandaries and questions for investigation and debate.

## References

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