

THE CAMBRIDGE HANDBOOK OF ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Despite the global endorsement of the Sustainable Development Goals, environmental justice struggles are growing all over the world. These struggles are not isolated injustices, but symptoms of interlocking forms of oppression that privilege a few while inflicting misery on the many and threatening ecological collapse. This handbook offers critical perspectives on the multidimensional, intersectional nature of environmental injustice and the cross-cutting forms of oppression that unite and divide these struggles, including gender, race, poverty, and indigeneity. The work sheds new light on the often-neglected social dimension of sustainability and its relationship to human rights and environmental justice. Using a variety of legal frameworks and case studies from around the world, this volume illustrates the importance of overcoming the fragmentation of these legal frameworks and social movements in order to develop holistic solutions that promote justice and protect the planet's ecosystems at a time of intensifying economic and ecological crisis.

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The Cambridge Handbook of Environmental Justice and Sustainable Development

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Foreword (on Living in an Interregnum)

This book deals with two main topics, one with an already long and controversial history (sustainable development) and another with a shorter but equally controversial history (environmental justice). It could therefore be one more book about conceptual history (the narratives, discourses, and practices unfolding from such mainstream concepts) and a rereading of the controversies that make up such history. The importance of this book lies in the fact that it is not such a book. It is rather a book which, however fully accounting for the contemporary histories of these topics and the controversies surrounding them, is dialectically (and tragically) aware that it is coming at the end of an epoch dominated by these topics, an epoch consisting of both the issues these topics credibly highlighted and the issues they cunningly obscured or made invisible. In this way, the discussion on sustainable development slides into the discussion on the highly problematic development of sustainability, as much as the discussion on environmental justice slides into the discussion on the highly dubious justice in/of conceiving of the environment as a separate entity, added to many other conditions that make life on earth possible in a dignifying way for both humans and nonhumans.

The deep flaws of the mainstream renditions of the controversial trajectory of these topics come out very clearly in this book. I identify three of them. First, as long as infinite economic growth remains as a dogma we will be cruising the *Titanic* and be part of its fateful destiny. If escaping is still possible, an intellectual and political move imposes itself: from alternative development to alternatives to development. Second, this move is extremely difficult because it demands confronting the three main modes of modern domination: capitalism (exploitation of labor power), colonialism (racism, slave labor, accumulation by dispossession), and patriarchy (sexism and all forms of gender discrimination). Third, global social justice is not possible without global cognitive justice. If I am allowed to quote myself, “the quest for the recognition and celebration of the epistemological diversity of the world underlying the epistemologies of the south requires that these new (actually, often ancestral and newly reinvented) repertoires of human dignity and social liberation be conceived of as being relevant far beyond the social groups that caused them to emerge from their struggles against oppression” (*The End of the Cognitive Empire* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), p. 11).

This book sometimes suggests, sometimes cries loudly that we live in an interregnum, a period similar to the one analyzed by Antonio Gramsci in the early 1930s and characterized by the fact that the old is not yet completely dead while the new is not yet fully born. The antinomies of the old go on causing much damage and suffering in the world to both humans and nonhumans, while the new is forcing its entry into history more and more convincingly. The morbidity of our

time lies in this historical and existential ambiguity. This book is by far the best I have read in years about the antinomies of our historical and existential condition. It is therefore a must-read for those who want to understand why so much rhetorical investment in the topics of sustainable development and environmental justice have accomplished so little. And equally for those for whom a new beginning is necessary, a new gestalt, with new concerns, radically different objectives, discourses, practices, and, above all, different ways of knowing and living.

Boaventura de Sousa Santos