

**Book Review: Phoebe Godfrey and Denise Torres (Editors), *Emergent Possibilities for Global Sustainability: Intersections of Race, Class, and Gender*. Routledge, 2018. ISBN: 978-0815364566 (paperback). 350 pages. \$49.95.**

Review by Alexa Pupillo<sup>1</sup>

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Among the growing tide of bleak reports and grim news articles recounting the devastating effects of global climate change, it is difficult not to feel a growing anxiety creeping into the privileged parts of the world; parts who, for the moment, have escaped the majority of these ill consequences despite being the most responsible for them. Naomi Klein describes our wide-spread denial in the face of our own destructive force as such: “we look for a split second and then we look away” (2015). Yet, safe places to turn towards are shrinking and an increasing number of us will be coming to terms with our own recklessness. In doing so we should not only be looking at how to solve (or at least soften) these consequences but also how to help mend the world and cultures we have harmed and rebuild a sustainable world together.

This is where editors Phoebe Godfrey and Denise Torres step in with the second installment of essays and art in their series on global sustainability. The first instalment of the series, *Systematic Crises of Global Climate Change* set out to establish global sustainability in an intersectional lens to demonstrate how “inequality and injustice are the problems” (Godfrey and Torres 2016, p. 3). This sequel is then to show how “equality and justice are the solutions” which can be achieved through the possibilities presented by an “intersectionality-informed just sustainabilities” lens (Godfrey and Torres 2016, p. 3). By championing this perspective, the editors set out to challenge paradigms of sustainability that ignore social justice and old ways of knowing. In part this challenge involves dismantling Western capitalism’s myth that we can continue to

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<sup>1</sup> Alexa Pupillo, Emory University, e-mail: [alexa.janette.pupillo@emory.edu](mailto:alexa.janette.pupillo@emory.edu).

consume the Earth's resources without limit and still be sustainable (Godfrey and Torres 2016, p. 7); a myth that allows those with privilege and power to avoid reassessing their values and practices and continue looking away. By acknowledging all the possibilities presented by those who kindly contributed to this work, perhaps we can see that while it will be difficult we can build a better, just, and sustainable world.

With such strong conviction in the power of intersectionality, the editors have chosen unconventional methods in both what works they have included and how they have organized them. Alongside pieces written by those in academia, there are also some from outside of it ranging from journalists to activists to farmers, as well as artwork dispersed among the pages. Though each comes from a unique perspective, all address some concept or tool missing in the dominant paradigm of sustainability. Furthermore, rather than placing the works into "ghettos" of oppression (Godfrey and Torres 2016, p. 5) severed from one another, they are organized into sections by an associated element; air, earth, fire, water, and aether. A carryover from the first installment, the editors elaborate that this novel form of segmentation also functions to guide the reader through the works by their common themes.

In their choice of essays, the editors have done a remarkable job of selecting pieces from not just a variety of perspectives but also a variety of utilities. Throughout the anthology there is a mix of both authors who confront how we think about sustainability theoretically and those who provide new methods for meeting its goals. As an undergraduate student young in my understanding of these global issues, being given not only challenges to the paradigm I have grown-up in but also guidance how to put these new ideas into action is dearly appreciated. I would also like to draw particular praise to the forward by activist and "unreasonable woman" Diane Wilson who comforts and inspires those who feel overwhelmed and powerless in face of these enormous and entrenched injustices. She reminds us that you "don't have to be an 'expert'" to fight for the rights of anyone, be that yourself, others, or the planet but to "just start where you are, as you are, right now" (Godfrey and Torres 2016, p. xxiii). Together, the authors and editors have made a strong and convincing statement on the necessity of intersectionality to our current and future understandings of sustainability.

However, for all of my admiration of the editors' work, I do feel that with some adjustments the collection could feel more cohesive and whole. The editors met the first goal of their "elemental segmentation" (Godfrey and Torres 2016, p. 5) but fell short of the second. At times adjacent essays can have abrupt shifts in both content and tone. These rough transitions

are jarring, and it takes some time after each to adjust back into the reading and truly appreciate it. This issue extends as well to the sections as wholes. On each page that begins the section the editors name the guiding themes but purposefully chose not to explain why they are together and how they are linked through the separate works (Godfrey and Torres 2016, p. 10). The noble intent was that each work should speak for itself. Yet in practice this makes the reading feel staccato instead of fluid. I fail to see how a short introduction done with care as they did in the first instalment would have impeded upon the strong voices of these authors. Rather, introductions could have been used to encourage a holistic view of the themes engaged and tie the elemental segments closer to one another. The overall effect hinders the collection from being more than the sum of its individual parts and I worry that it may cause readers to set it down prematurely.

Nevertheless, for anyone interested in seeking resources outside of the dominant paradigm of sustainability and who wishes to understand our planet and its peoples with greater depth, this is a collection that should not be passed over.

## **REFERENCES**

- Godfrey, Phoebe and Denise Torres, eds. 2016. *Emergent Possibilities for Global Sustainability: Intersections of Race, Class, and Gender*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Klein, Naomi. 2015. *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate*. New York: Simon & Schuster.