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**BOOK REVIEW**

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**Samuel W. Rose***State University of New York at Buffalo****The River Is in Us: Fighting Toxics in a Mohawk Community***

Elizabeth Hoover (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017)

This ethnographic monograph examines the past and present environmental and public health crisis at Akwesasne, a Mohawk reservation-based community located on the border between the United States (New York) and Canada (Ontario and Quebec). The St. Lawrence River, alluded to in the title, cuts through the reservation. The title of the book carries multiple meanings. The river is in them in a metaphorical manner describing their social identification with the river as part of their community and a significant portion of their livelihood. The river is also in them referencing the pollution of the river, a consequence of nearby industrial operations by General Motors, Reynolds, and others. The region became industrialized with the construction of the St. Lawrence Seaway in the 1950s. Thus, their bodies have become polluted due to this life and livelihood connection to the polluted river. This exists both in a public health sense as well as a broader social sense regarding the “toxic” social ruptures and social and political issues that have resulted from these altered lives and livelihoods. Both their individual bodies as well as the social and political “bodies” of the community are affected. Hoover states that the “goal in this book has been to describe the issues that [Akwesasne residents] are up against and the challenges they see going forward, but I have also sought to highlight the resistance and resilience that Mohawks have demonstrated in adapting, maintaining, and refining who they are as a community” (p. 275). Hoover succeeds in this dual goal: describing the issues affecting Akwesasne Mohawks, and the strategies and approaches that they have taken, as individuals and as a community, to adapt to their changing circumstances and to confront and challenge, and try to overcome these deleterious results.

While the ethnography works on several levels as an ethnographic case study, its main strength lies in the continual connections made between ecology and economy. The two terms share the same root, and as such they are best studied together, or at least with an awareness of the other. While this is not a work of economic anthropology, Hoover gives us a work of environmental anthropology that is conscious of how these ecological changes impact the

everyday lives and livelihoods of the people. Similarly, Hoover consistently presents Mohawk ideas about health and ecology and their actions to address the crisis as deeply intertwined with their desires to improve their own lives and build a viable life and livelihood for themselves and for subsequent generations of Mohawks. This also poignantly involves dimensions where Mohawk people are not these perfect or idealized crusaders. Rather, Hoover explores some of the tensions and the contradictions involved in attempts to make a life under these circumstances while consistently presenting Mohawks (sympathetically) as real and flawed human beings. Too often discussions of the beliefs of native/indigenous peoples in the field remain divorced from the actual lives and livelihoods of the people who espouse them. A lesser work might have dwelled at this superficial level. However, Hoover consistently makes these ethnographic connections and shows throughout that material changes have material consequences that impact people's material lives. Hoover's emphasis on the connection between ecology and both individual and public health with that of rural livelihoods on practical rather than idealized terms makes this a valuable ethnographic contribution.

Three primary limitations of this work are also common in contemporary anthropology and ethnography on North American indigenous peoples. First, there is limited examination of political economy (especially historically), the economic/labor history of Akwesasne, and the significant sociopolitical ruptures and realignments on the reservation that followed the industrial pollution. Following the introduction, the first chapter is entitled "Driving Tour through the Political and Environmental History of Akwesasne" and it is what this title implies: a geographic overview of some important places and events in Mohawk history as they relate to the contents and themes of the book. However, it is not a rigorous or systematic analysis of past and present Mohawk political economy, the economic/labor history of Akwesasne, nor the sociopolitical ruptures and realignments within Akwesasne since the 1950's Seaway construction. While some of these dimensions are mentioned in passing, they are not presented in the type of rigorous or systematized manner that would be useful for examining and understanding how individual Mohawks and how Mohawks from different economic positions/classes adapted to and contributed to these changes. Second, this work contains many of the common (and useful) terms and framings of the subfield of North American indigenous studies, including colonialism, environmental racism, and survivance. However, it does not explain, deconstruct, or historicize some of their more problematic uses. For example, the term "traditional" is frequently used. While the term is understandable in some situations as a shorthand for representing how something was before versus how it is now, use of the term in a decontextualized or dehistoricized manner often obscures more than it illuminates about social reality. When interlocutors use the word regarding changes to Mohawk traditional society or traditional economy, are they describing an actual social reality or an idealized one? If it is an actual social reality, what is the temporal depth being described? If it is an idealized one, then what are the sociopolitical forces contributing to these ideas about

the past and this construction of authentic indigenous representation? A third limitation of this work is that there is limited engagement with scholarly or academic literature beyond native/indigenous studies. There is some engagement with the areas of public/environmental health, medical anthropology, and nutrition. However, this work remains largely insular in its focus on examining native/Mohawk people, rather than using the case study as a bridge to make a larger contribution to social science, a global anthropological connection, or a larger statement about humanity.

Despite these limitations, the strengths certainly outweigh the weaknesses. This is a valuable ethnographic contribution both to environmental anthropology and for general anthropology due to the ecology-economy connections made.