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Book Review

***Dirty Gold: How Activism Transformed the Jewelry Industry*. Michael John Bloomfield.** 2017. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. 272 pages, ISBN 978-0-2625-3600-4. Paper ($17.95)

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To challenge environmental degradation, human rights abuses, and labor exploitation on a global scale, activists have increasingly targeted corporations and markets, not just governments and international organizations. One can certainly see this in the jewelry industry, where concerns over 'conflict diamonds' were soon followed by a campaign against 'dirty gold'—that is, gold mined in ways that poison water, degrade land, displace or trample upon communities, or expose workers to severe hazards.

As Michael John Bloomfield recounts, the 'No Dirty Gold' campaign, started by Earthworks and Oxfam in 2004, rippled quickly across the jewelry industry. Specialty jewelers such as Tiffany and Cartier signed on to the campaign's 'Golden Rules' and joined with other companies to create the Responsible Jewellery Council (RJC). Separately, new 'ethical jewelry' startups emerged to appeal to conscientious consumers, fueling a growing market for Fairtrade gold. Even general retailers such as Walmart and JCPenney signed on to the Golden Rules and worked to better trace their supply chains, though they have tended to avoid the RJC. Why did so many companies take up the mantle of 'no dirty gold,' Bloomfield asks, and why did they promote different types of solutions?

In answering these questions, Bloomfield constructs a powerful account of the intersection of social movements and corporations, which emphasizes both moments of reputational crisis for

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industries and champions of reform within companies. Scholars have been a bit at odds as to how to make sense of companies' responses to social movements. I see three basic positions: On one hand, there are those who see companies defensively responding to media exposés and 'naming and shaming' campaigns, essentially looking for ways to repair their corporate reputations and brand images amid an onslaught of unwelcome pressure. On the other hand, there are those who see companies as shaping their environments more than responding to them, by quickly coopting critics and narrowing the debate to a range of corporate-friendly solutions. Finally, there are those who see well-meaning and committed individuals within companies making real improvements, even within severe corporate constraints.

Bloomfield essentially weaves together all three of these positions. He argues that moments of crisis, generated by campaigning NGOs and prior controversies, provide an opportunity for well-placed individuals to become entrepreneurs for reform, whether within their companies or by starting new social enterprises. If they manage to gain traction, they throw the power of the company around in various ways, pursuing solutions that are broadly compatible with their markets and production practices and thereby shaping the larger paths of reform. Whether this generates real improvement is not entirely clear; nor is it clear how much space internal reformers really have to operate. However, Bloomfield is effective in striking a tone that is cautious but far from cynical about the prospects for reform from within.

At the core of the book are case studies of three companies, Tiffany, Walmart, and Brilliant Earth, plus a bit of attention to their peers. Tiffany, the specialty retailer, quickly responded to contact from the No Dirty Gold campaign, largely because of the environmentalism of its CEO. In addition to signing the Golden Rules and helping to create the RJC, as some other specialty retailers did, the company worked to consolidate its supply chains for gold, much as it had previously done in response to concerns about 'conflict diamonds.' With its focus on jewelry and its brand image, the company faced the glare of the spotlight but also had an interest in stabilizing its supply chain and minimizing risks of disruption.

Walmart somewhat surprisingly became one of the most active general retailers in the sustainable jewelry arena. After being listed as an industry laggard, the company contacted the No Dirty Gold campaign, worked with Conservation International and the Environmental Defense Fund (which got an office inside the company), and eventually introduced a "Love, Earth" line of jewelry. Bloomfield traces Walmart's actions largely to a senior vice president of merchandising, who was hungry for a sustainability 'win,' as emphasized by the corporation's culture at the time. For Walmart, sustainability was becoming a way to defend or rebuild the company's reputation after years of bad publicity on labor issues, both domestic and global.

Brilliant Earth is an ethical jewelry social enterprise, started by young Stanford Graduate School of Business graduates to provide alternatives to 'conflict diamonds.' As gold mining came onto the agenda, the company was building its supply chain around recycled gold, though it later became a supporter of Fairtrade-/Fairmined-certified gold from a cooperative in Peru. Unlike the other types of companies, specialized ethical jewelers have turned to third-party certification and have criticized the RJC and the Kimberley Process for certifying conflict-free diamonds. (The

Initiative for Responsible Mining Assurance, once intended to be the multi-stakeholder certification initiative for jewelry, has apparently been stalled for years.)

Bloomfield has produced interesting and highly informative case studies of three leading companies, effectively illustrating the interplay of reputational risk, corporate culture, and institution building. These should definitely be read by anyone who wonders about the processes by which activist campaigns get incorporated into firm strategies. Further attention to comparative cases, though, could have helped to identify the limits and contours of this process. Unlike Tiffany, Rolex has refused almost all engagement with the dirty gold issue. Bloomfield suggests that this reflects different corporate cultures, but it is worth asking whether gendered consumer markets might also matter. Walmart's story is interesting, but JCPenney's similar engagements are left unaddressed, while Macy's refusal to engage is addressed only in passing.

The book is clearly written, engaging, and accessible to a wide audience. The theoretical argument is belabored at times, and it foregrounds the multiple dimensions of corporate political power in a way that seems tangential to the key argument. Nevertheless, the core of the theoretical model should prove useful for other scholars and students of movement-company dynamics.

The main limitation of the book, of course, is that it focuses only on retailers and standards, with occasional attention to the reconfiguration of supply chains, but it has little to say about the consequences of these standards on the ground. That is not a huge concern, since the book's goal is to make sense of the different ways in which companies in affluent markets (especially the U.S.) have responded to activist campaigns. Nevertheless, it means that readers will need to look elsewhere to find out whether and how mining operations have really been 'transformed' by activist campaigns.