# Alexander Clapp’s Waste Wars reveals the global crisis of rubbish and its human cost



Alexander Clapp’s book, Waste Wars: Dirty Deals, International Rivalries and the Scandalous Afterlife of Rubbish, published by John Murray, London, and priced at Rs.799, presents a sobering exploration of the global waste crisis. The analysis provided by Clapp spans continents, industries, and decades, shedding light on the complex and often troubling realities of waste generation and management worldwide. The review by P. Vijaya Kumar, published in Frontline Magazine on April 28, 2025, offers a detailed overview of Clapp’s findings and arguments.

Clapp approaches the subject with rigorous journalism, tracing how the problem of waste has evolved into a multinational challenge entwined with economic and political interests. His narrative exposes how the environmental laws initially enacted in the United States and other parts of the Global North were not extended to many countries in the Global South. This gap allowed the accumulation of hazardous waste, often exported under the guise of aid or development assistance, to countries such as India, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Haiti, and others.

One of the most alarming revelations includes the establishment of what Clapp terms “waste villages” in East Java, Indonesia. Here, recycling of imported waste paper mixed with plastics led to environmental degradation. The plastic residues, unreturnable to the sender countries, were repurposed by locals as a cheap fuel source despite the toxic emissions, contaminating food production and local ecosystems. The resultant environmental ruin, including barren soil, dying wildlife, and polluted waterways, contrasts sharply with the villagers’ dependence on this practice as an economic necessity.

Clapp also discusses Turkey’s role prior to 2018 in receiving scrap metal and plastics for its booming construction industry before shifts in global waste policies redirected disposal efforts elsewhere. His account extends to Ghana’s Agbogbloshie slum, a notorious electronic waste dumping ground where young workers extract valuable metals through hazardous methods, and some engage in cybercrime exploiting data from discarded devices. These accounts illuminate the human toll and economic activities tied to waste management in poorer nations.

The geopolitical dimension of waste trade is highlighted, with examples such as the United States’ policy influencing waste disposal agreements in Latin America and the Soviet Union’s exportation of waste to client states like Benin. The review further details how waste has been entangled with military and economic aid, supporting authoritarian regimes willing to accept hazardous imports. The role of global financial institutions like USAID and the World Bank in structuring waste export schemes is also noted.

Beyond detailing the crisis, Clapp identifies the continuities of a form of “Trumpism” predating Donald Trump—an ideology marked by the prioritisation of Western interests and disregard for the welfare of less powerful nations. This worldview has facilitated practices whereby hazardous waste is outsourced to the most vulnerable populations. He emphasises that these actions are propelled by selfishness and a lack of accountability on the part of richer countries.

However, Clapp’s work is not without optimism. He points to technological and policy solutions that could address the waste problem sustainably, advocating for waste neutralisation processes close to production sites rather than dumping overseas. Some progress is noted in Kerala, India, where decentralised, community-driven waste management systems aim toward zero waste objectives.

Clapp’s investigation into global waste underscores the interconnectedness of environmental health, economic policy, and social justice. The review in Frontline highlights the comprehensive nature of his work, the extensive field observations, and its contribution to a deeper understanding of the global waste crisis. While acknowledging the considerable challenges, Clapp invites reflection on the potential for reversing damaging waste practices through concerted policy and civic engagement.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/alexander-clapp/waste-wars/> - This site provides an overview of Alexander Clapp's investigative work on waste, although it does not specifically mention the content of his book. It hints at the controversial nature of Clapp's research.
* <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/214175143-waste-wars> - Goodreads provides a summary of Clapp’s book, focusing on the global waste crisis and the economic factors driving its management, including the impact on various countries.
* <https://books.substack.com/p/review-michael-robbins-on-trash> - This article discusses Clapp’s book in the context of investigative journalism, highlighting the international trafficking of garbage and hazardous waste. It touches upon the shift in waste management paradigms and the ethical challenges involved.
* <https://www.netgalley.com/book/443485/reviews> - NetGalley reviews reveal Clapp’s exploration of global waste disposal practices, including the socioeconomic and environmental effects in different regions. The book highlights alarming practices like shipbreaking and e-waste management.
* <https://www.noahwire.com (Note: Specific article URL not provided)> - This platform hosted the original article discussing Clapp’s findings on the global waste crisis, though the exact URL is unavailable.
* <https://bookanon.com/2024/12/02/bookreview-waste-wars-by-alexander-clapp/> - BookAnon provides a review of Clapp’s book, acknowledging its comprehensive coverage of the global waste problem and its socio-economic impacts.
* <https://news.google.com/rss/articles/CBMirwFBVV95cUxPN1J0MjlIWnMwRVNYTnNUUnZfZmIwWWl6TTNmSVBRWThtNndyRXZvQ09tWTM4b3IxM1NGN0huNGRLUlBYb0ptaWp1SzFBczhTQTFIWVFXVUNUYmdnVTlYQlVneVV1a3I1eUx5VlJZSjhmZkRPaU9MaU9XQ1A1Z3hFZHFsVG83NndBbjRmS0Z5YXFfQmJjZHV3aThIcjMyTHJOckN1VkE5WFp4SE9uaTVF0gG2AUFVX3lxTFB6OW5NV2VaZ3RUSEpGNm1odmFudC1mV2dVbkFmNkRpR2Zyak9CWVZSdl9FOEFreVBRWjlnTEY5TU9TaFQwZ3pBZVVIQnBQRlhQSFZObGZpcU9LYklNdS1YTnlZeC1MS3Y0ckVtY19MNDZSYXJRdHQzVXR4UDFKVlNaMmdFc3pyODZUOWJuUW0yZm1yNHpjVWF0QVh1akp5ZXZmVGJCQnc0TzZvUGZYWjVLYVdGalZB?oc=5&hl=en-US&gl=US&ceid=US:en> - Please view link - unable to able to access data