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## ExtrACTION: Impacts, Engagements, and Alternative Futures

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BOOK REVIEWS

## ExtrACTION: Impacts, Engagements, and Alternative Futures

KIRK JALBERT, ANNA WILLOW, DAVID CASAGRANDE & STEPHANIE PALADINO (EDITORS)

ROUTLEDGE, NEW YORK, 2017

238 Pp. \$150.00 HARDCOVER; \$39.95 PAPERBACK; \$39.95 EBOOK

REVIEWED BY RICHARD BARGIELSKI

Anthropologists have long been concerned with human interactions with the natural world. Today, human-nature interaction is defined by new processes, technologies, and relations that leave their mark on both the landscape and on human bodies. This timely volume, written and edited by scholars in environmental anthropology, answers the implicit call for an ethnographic, critical account of contemporary resource extraction. The case studies compiled in this volume represent a variety of extractive methods, activist responses, and geographic locations, making it perhaps the most comprehensive account of global extraction ever compiled.

In the foreword to this volume, June Nash begins with a bold proclamation: “Extractive industries represent the quintessential basis of globalization process” (xix). She is correct: without the fossil fuels, elements, metals, and various other materials we extract from the Earth, most of what we think of as the modern, globalized world would not exist. Without coal, our ideas cannot travel through the internet. Without oil, our bodies cannot travel to distant places. However,

as much as the possibilities for new cultural modes are opened by extraction, so too are some opportunities limited. The critical theoretical approach adopted by the authors of this volume asserts that the benefits and costs are unevenly distributed across society. The authors expose the experiences of uneven distribution through ethnography.

Key theoretical concepts to the volume are those of extraction—the process of removing raw materials from the Earth—and “extractivism”—the ideology that underlies extraction. As the editors state in the introduction:

If extraction implies the removal of resources from their points of origin, extractivism is the ideological mindset that underlies it. If extraction is about benefiting from resource removal, extractivism is about rapidly removing everything possible to maximize profit (6).

Extractivism, then, describes a particularly modern form of an ecological practice humans have been doing for millennia. Today, it is rooted in an ideology of neoliberal capitalism, and therefore represents the social process by which ideology influences materiality.

The volume is divided into four sections, each addressing a different temporal moment of the extractive process. Part I, “Histories & Trajectories,” recounts the historical development of key extractive sites. Diane Austin and Thomas McGuire trace the structure and transitions of the oil field labor force, drawing attention to the economic and health conditions that compose workers’ everyday lives. Daniel Renfrew and Carlos Santos present a landscape-scale analysis of uranium mining in Uruguay, showing how state and private interests become entangled across space and time. Referencing Aesop’s fable of the “golden goose,” Rob Cooley and David Casagrande show how industry spreads propagandistic discourses of prosperity and energy independence through the rural communities that support hydraulic fracturing wells; they

call these discourses of “energopower,” after Foucauldian biopower. Overall, the section provides a comprehensive overview of the discursive and structural factors that shape individuals’ experiences with extraction.

Moving on from the macroscopic approach adopted by the first three cases, Part II, “Risks & Rights,” investigates how discourses of extraction are made and remade through institutional activities. Amelia Fiske’s chapter analyzes the discursive functions environmental impact assessments (EIA’s) serve in constructing people’s ideas about extraction. The chapter highlights the contradictions between the supposed boundedness and locality of negative impacts (e.g., point-source contamination, noise pollution) and the supposed unboundedness of the positive ones (e.g., jobs, wealth) of Ecuadorian oil production. In the next chapter, through an examination of EIA’s counterpart, the health impact assessment (HIA), Moriah McSharry McGrath examines how documents formulate the discourse around coal mining and export. Andie Palmer’s following case study of aboriginal Australian land rights around a gold mine shows how enduring legal codes shape options for response among marginalized groups. Finally, concluding this section, Julie K. Maldonado turns her attention to how government-corporate partnerships generated vulnerability for the sake of energy extraction in coastal Louisiana, United States. Together, these chapters show how policy, science, and corporate rhetoric together frame our understanding of extractive industry.

Part III, “Struggles & Opportunities,” covers how people contend with the extractive industry in their home environments. In this section, the authors examine how lived experiences of extraction give rise to cultural activism intended to reinforce participants’ feelings of security. Genevieve Brisson and Emmanuelle Bouchard-Bastien provide an insightful account of the risk society that has developed in Lac-Mégantic, Quebec following a highly publicized accident of a train carrying crude oil. Tamar Cohen’s analysis of a bauxite mine’s

rehabilitation in Australia shows how aboriginal people leverage ecological restoration to advance their futures. And a case study written by a team including Caitlin McCoy, Veronica Coptis, and Patrick Greuter show us, too, that these kinds of activism can take place in the United States—specifically southern Pennsylvania, where environmental justice activists are seeking to put a stop to community issues caused by coal and natural gas extraction. By drawing attention to lived experience, the authors in this section show how extraction as a disempowering economic force simultaneously creates opportunities for hopeful change through environmental justice movements.

The final section, Part IV: Alternative Futures, continues with the theme of productive tension introduced in Part III. This section speaks to a growing concern within anthropology with the kinds of futures that can be imagined in the blasted landscapes of capitalism. Authors in this section document the actions communities harmed by extraction are taking to shift both discourses and materialities. Amanda E. Wooden’s analysis of images and perspectives surrounding Kyrgyzstani gold mining shows how activists in that country are attempting to transform a process that is exploitative of both humans and natural settings. Rachel Hannah Nadelman examines the Amazonian “extractive imperative,” a policy regime whereby extractive industry has been seen as instrumental to Latin American economic development, showing how El Salvador is attempting to escape the confines of this political economic framework of metals mining (especially gold) in favor of more sustainable energy and development regimes. Tristan Partridge’s chapter turns a critical eye toward the concept of dependency by examining how anti-hydrocarbon activists are promoting a new economic order based on clean, renewable energy using water as opposed to hydrocarbons. And lastly, Dana E. Powell concludes the section with an examination of Navajo Nation’s engagement with extractive policy and practice around coal.

Together, the themes of the four sections—historical context, discourse, lived experience, and environmental futures—clearly link extractivist ideologies, practices, and outcomes. By following an ethnographic trajectory from social structure down to individuals, the authors are able to expose the dialectics that, in turn, rise up from individuals and groups and strive to remake destructive ideologies. The book's strength is its ability to make sense of environmental injustice by linking various layers of social life.

This volume further speaks to the Anthropocene, a recently proposed geological epoch marked by human activity as a/the dominant natural force in Earthly transfiguration. The Anthropocene as a temporal construct is concerned not only with where we have been, but where we are going. Futures are becoming as much an object of cultural inquiry as the past or present has historically been in anthropology. By exposing the shifting and contested nature of energy regimes, *ExtrACTION's* exploration of extractive logic and practice is an intellectual pursuit by, of, and for the Anthropocene.

While the volume highlights the relationships between different levels of analysis, more explicit connections could have been made among the different chapters and especially sections. Although there is significant theoretical overlap in the chapters' shared positionalities on risk, environmental futures, the role of discourse, and more, the relevance of each chapter to those outside of the designated section is unexplored. As a consequence, the theoretical links between discourse, activism, futures, and lived experiences are left for readers to draw out mostly on their own.

The volume is a valuable contribution to the environmental anthropology literature on resource extraction, environmental justice, and environmental activism. While producing an edited volume is a challenging task, the outcome is the reward of producing a scholarly work that can serve as a standalone comparative exercise among several case

studies. What began as a meeting of the minds at the 2012 Society for Applied Anthropology meeting is now a collection of extraction narratives that shines a critical light on how ideology, experience, and possibility reverberate on one another. The volume is an important and timely read for all environmental anthropologists interested in issues of environmental justice and/or resource extraction. It would also be appropriate and informative for environmental science and policy practitioners outside of anthropology who desire to learn more about the consequences of extraction. The chapters in *ExtrACTION* are written at a level such that they would be appropriate readings for an undergraduate-level course in environmental anthropology, sustainability, energy policy, or another related field.

In concluding, Jeanne Simonelli, who founded the American Anthropological Association's ExtrACTION interest group, pens an open letter to extractivists in which she calls to arms those who dare to envision a different world. Simonelli invites us to be "architects of socially just solutions for lasting change" (228). Here, Simonelli synthesizes the aforementioned theoretical trajectories under an umbrella of application in a call to arms for action-oriented anthropologists. If information is, as Simonelli says, weaponizable, then this book should be considered an arsenal. *ExtrACTION* is thus not only an intellectual contribution; it is also intended to inspire anthropologists to action.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I was given fair compensation to assemble the index for *ExtrACTION* as part of a professional development grant awarded to Anna J. Willow by The Ohio State University—Marion. I did not have any editorial, authorial, or consultative role in the production of this volume.