

# BOOK REVIEWS / COMPTES RENDUS / REZENSIONEN

## THE AFTERLIVES OF EXTRACTION Alternatives and Sustainable Futures

*Filipe Calvão, Matthew Archer, Asanda Benya, eds. 2024. Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV.*

In the conundrum of contemporary political approaches to anthropogenic climate change, some avenues of answers are taking shape, presenting themselves as the legitimate ones to cope with and answer this problem. Yet these remain mainly technocratic and restrain the democratic spaces for the unfolding of new types of politics. The resources extractions and the ambiguous imbrication of extractivism to the energy transition as part of the answers – the paradox of green extractivism – provide a puzzling situation to unpack. In the realm of debates and discussions, these are political spaces necessary to deconstruct the future's fixing (Goodale 2023) that energy transition's mining intensifies (Kronenburg García and Wiegink 2024) fueling technical solutions. To explore this, one has to understand the power and predominance of extractivism as a logic that informs practices, imaginaries, and representations.

*The Afterlives of Extraction: Alternatives and Sustainable Futures*, edited by Filipe Calvão, Matthew Archer, and Asanda Benya, provides a captivating analysis of these problems. It places its contribution at the center of debates around the intertwined relationship between resource extraction and capitalism development, nested within the intricate discussions of economic growth and socio-environmental sustainability relationship. For development models and common sense in many locations, this connection is crucial, as the volume explores.

In the introduction, the editors show two main narratives. First, the developmentalist approach argues for the legitimacy of extraction, framed as suited and inevitable practice to achieve socio-economic development and thus reducing poverty. The volume shows that the mining industry places itself as promoter of this logic, by incorporating the narrative in new ways of carrying out the mining practice. Devotees of this viewpoint contend that resource extraction can be done responsibly, both socially and environmentally. Especially in this recent context of anthropogenic climate change, where new debates add to the already-present ones on how to behave in the green transition. Consequently, this intensifies mining legitimacy instead of diminishing, framed as decisive to achieve the goals of decarbonization while maintaining economic growth. This is the case of the mining of critical minerals used exponentially for technological devices of “clean” energy storage, a social process that the chapters of James Blair et al, Michelle Pressend, and Devyn Remme illustrate for the cases of Chile, South Africa, and Norway.

On the other hand, the critic of extractivism has no doubt: what produces and exacerbates environmental degradation, social inequality, and human rights violations is the extraction of resources. The volume's introduction shows that the reason why this happens is straightforward, since extractivism upholds a system of accumulation prioritizing profit over the welfare of people and the planet. As such, critics of extractivism state that any efforts to

enhance the sustainability of mining operations are useless and represent superficial green-washing that doesn't prevent harms, inevitable to resource extraction.

These debates are further analyzed and illustrated by the collection of contributions of this volume, distributed into three sections: Debates and Practices of Post-extractivism; Resilience, Contestation and Resistance; Green Extractivism and its Discontent. This book is a second part of a duo of publications by the same editors. *The lives of Extraction: Identities, Communities, and the Politics of Place* explored the operations of extractive industries in their expansions, their lived experiences by communities, indigenous peoples and workers. The second volume takes a step further from the basis established by the first volume, in dissecting extractivism, analyzing resistance to it, and exploring alternatives.

The volume argues that the key issue driving these discussions today is the growing acknowledgment of the unsustainability of an economic development model reliant on fossil fuels and resource extraction. Yet how to explain that extractivism keeps having a central role intertwining with the green transition as an answer to anthropogenic climate change? The goal of this academic contribution becomes that of dissecting extractivism from its fixed definitions and genealogy to see in practice how this takes shape.

Erik Post's and Alexander Dunlap's contributions tackle the first point. They show the importance of extractivism as an analytic, providing a qualitative overview of theories central to the concept. The first author shows that extractivism becomes pivotal to capitalism but without being coterminous. Instead, extractivisms, in the plural form, are modes of extraction that sustain the imperial mode of living, one that smooths the path for extraction of minerals and energy sources. Similarly, Dunlap lays open the dominant techno-industrial development, providing insights on how it becomes a framework of imaginaries and practices. For the editors, this chapter shows the "chameleonic ability of green growth to camouflage itself within apparently different discourses" (p. 15). Dunlap highlights the connection between extractivism and infrastructure within a development model that frames this combination as the solution to climate change, revealing how it shapes, and it's shaped by political perspectives and ideologies.

Dorothea Hamilton and Sina Trölenberg further the conceptual analysis of extractivism by questioning its applicability to cases in the Global North, against the grain of the current academic literature, that focuses too much on the Global South and on mining given its genealogy in Latin American critical thought. Instead, they argue that extractivism can be applied to large scale landscape destruction, for activities happening in the Global North too. Focusing on anti-extractivist practices in Germany surrounding the deforestation for extensive infrastructure projects like the highway passing through Dannenrod, they illustrate the clash between imaginaries. This insight is central to the approach this volume follows, in questioning the space of conceptualization and debates. The chapter shows the encounter of imaginaries of nature and ideas of good life at odds, and they raise the question of the researcher's own engagement with these positionings. By focusing on this German controversy, they illustrate how a national debate sparkles and how extractivism becomes central for this political confrontation.

Yet spaces of dialogue are scarcely present in contemporary unfolding of the energy transition. Blair and colleagues' chapter analyzes the important case of lithium extraction, cen-

tral for the supposedly clean energy storage preached by several actors like the automobile industry or some environmental movements especially in the Global North. Nonetheless, these scholars show the paradox of green extractivism, when the extractive industry operates as necessary practice for the sustainable future of no carbon-emissions yet generating alterlives of ecological exhaustion. Policy oriented, their chapter explores possibilities for local and indigenous participation, questioning the Chilean constitutional reform that didn't take place after national vote.

The volume strength is to focus on the space of ideas and political imaginaries that inform practice that social sciences and civil society are observing. Instead of a collection of case studies that would remain at the level of the factual happenings, scholars reunited here open the discussion for exploring the persistence of extractivism beyond its practice, to tackle how this intertwines with political projects of development. The editors argue for the necessary advancement of alternatives: decoloniality, degrowth, and resistance.

The book is a very qualitative contribution, and aimed at an audience of scholars, policy-makers, and development professionals, as the volume is part of the series International Development Policy by the Geneva Graduate Institute. This also means that reading becomes difficult if one doesn't have a background in current debates on extractivism. The risk is that the democratic space for citizens to actively have a say in the unfolding of the energy transition closes in what I argue to be a field of expertise. Unwillingly, academia too becomes an expert language that risk not resonating with the aspirations, feelings, and lived experience of a majority of citizens, like the recent Argentine case shows. The election of the anarco-capitalist Javier Milei has intensified the willingness of a majority of citizens to go against sustainable development, discourses of energy and green transition, and critical works of social scientists, as these don't make sense for their sense of good life. How to escape the field of expertise becomes a crucial question for scholars analyzing extractivism and energy in its political forms in their dialogue with the audience of citizens.

Crucially call for decoloniality and indigenous integration in discussions as active actors, the volume questions major political narratives and developmentalist approaches, even going to interrogate the persistence of development and exploring different paths based on other ideological foundations. The difference contributors make between extraction and extractivism gives us leads to understanding how extractivism is a powerful source of fuel that ignites contemporary politics. Together with the first volume, these works make a major contribution to the field.

## References

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