

Gammeltoft's ethnography is not only an anthropology of belonging but also an anthropology of suffering and, as such, sits at the crossroads between disability studies, attachment, parenting, and reproduction. The author draws on Emmanuel Levinas (1998 [1982]) to analyse communities of belonging and attachment and positions suffering as the nexus of subjectivity. Rhetoric of suffering constitutes the main factor in pregnancy termination. In what the author calls the "disability-suffering" equation (p. 181), any type of fetal anomaly becomes a window through which the haunting images of Vietnam's severely disabled rush in and promise a life of suffering – individual suffering (of the future child) and collective suffering (of his or her family). The suffering of undergoing an abortion is then compared to the lifelong suffering of the future child. In a context where one's life's completeness relies on reciprocating care, disabled children are perceived as incomplete beings – and so are their parents. Couples longing to become complete beings – that is, fathers and mothers of "complete" children – thus make abortion decisions in the midst of the family's fear of the suffering the future disabled child will endure in their life. The birth of severely disabled or "incomplete" children places parents in the impossible situation of raising them to return the reciprocity of care, compromising their place in the family and the nation-state (p. 234).

Long after the closing of the book, Vietnamese women's narratives continue to haunt the reader. They echo women's difficult reproductive decisions in distant countries. This is one of the strengths of this captivating ethnography: it is deeply rooted in Vietnam's socio-historical context but yet draws on multiple similar stories in Asia as well as Europe and the United States and allows for cross-cultural comparison. The many case studies in *Haunting Images* make it a relevant reading for undergraduate and graduate students in cultural and medical anthropology, women and gender studies, and Asian studies, as well as to social workers and medical students who wish to gain a cross-cultural perspective on reproduction, parenting, and disability.

References

- Andaya, Elise
2014 *Conceiving Cuba: Reproduction, Women, and the State in the Post-Soviet Era*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Levinas, Emmanuel
1998 [1982] *Useless Suffering*. In *Entre Nous: On Thinking-of-the-Other*. Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav, trans. Pp. 133–153. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Rapp, Rayna
2000 *Testing Women, Testing the Fetus: The Social Impact of Amniocentesis in America*. New York: Routledge.

Kirsch, Stuart, *Mining Capitalism: The Relationship between Corporations and Their Critics*, Oakland: University of California Press, 2014, 314 pages.

*Reviewer: Catherine Morin Boulais
Laval University*

According to many international observers, the social and environmental impacts of the Ok Tedi mine, in Papua New Guinea, constitute one of the last decades' worst mining disasters. Since the mid-1980s, this large-scale copper and gold mine has discharged more than 2 billion metric tons of tailings, waste rock, and overburden into the Ok Tedi and Fly Rivers, causing colossal environmental degradation downstream. Consequently, the 30,000 villagers living south of the mining site, who are highly dependent on access to natural resources, have been unable to pursue their traditional subsistence practices. At the turn of the 1990s, they initiated a long-running campaign against the operator of the mine (BHP Billiton for the most part), which was reduced in 2004 following an out-of-court settlement of their second lawsuit. Stuart Kirsch, professor of anthropology at the University of Michigan and a leading figure in the anthropology of mining, has done over two decades of extensive research and advocacy with the Yonggom people, the Indigenous communities affected by the Ok Tedi mine. In *Mining Capitalism*, he takes the Ok Tedi mine case as an ethnographic context to examine the protesters' strategies of resistance against corporations and the corporations' strategies to reassert their legitimacy. To broaden the scope of his analysis, Kirsch addresses other mining conflicts and compares the way mining, tobacco, and pharmaceutical industries manage their relationship to the public.

The book reveals that the Ok Tedi mine case was one of the first conflicts between a mining company and communities to gain international prominence and participated in setting other important milestones. A prime example is how the Ok Tedi campaigners sought to hold BHP Billiton accountable for its international operations in its country of incorporation (Australia). This novel strategy led to a successful landmark settlement in 1996, in which the company committed to stop discharging tailings in the Ok Tedi and Fly Rivers. It also set a precedent for transnational legal proceedings as it showed that subsistence rights claims were analogous to more familiar claims based on the economic damage of property. Weighing the pros and cons of international tort claims, Kirsch concludes that whether or not they result in successful judgments to the plaintiffs, they have proven a valuable resource for communities as they put corporations on the defensive and tarnish their public profile.

Kirsch introduces several concepts of his own to make sense of the relationship between corporations and their critics, the flagship being the "politics of space" and the "politics of time." Typical of 1990s environmental activism, the politics of space

refers to creating opposition through the use of geographically distributed resources. The Ok Tedi mine case reflects this strategy in the transnational alliances developed by a group of political activists, supported by European non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and international church groups to exert pressure on BHP and the state. The author notes that associating with international organisations provided valuable resources to local leaders and advanced their claims by raising the profile of their campaign. It also mobilised new political discourses in support for actions. Kirsch shows that, although the term *Indigenous* had not entered the vocabulary of most Yonggom speakers in the mid-1980s, the Yonggom integrated the discourse of Indigenous rights in their campaign following their encounters with people facing similar threats.

A major shortcoming is the time that it takes to address the problem after the fact. It takes too long to implement solutions to save the environment under attack. To counter these limitations, Kirsch indicates that critics of the mining industry increasingly use political strategies based on intervening earlier in the production cycle. He groups these strategies under the concept of a “politics of time.” One of the main strategies of the politics of time is accelerating the learning curve of communities facing the prospect of a mining project. To this end, international networks of NGOs have been created to share information, coordinate responses with the mining industry, and apply pressure on multilateral organisations and international financial institutions that underwrite the mining industry. Kirsch exposes how these networks participated in establishing new policies intended to safeguard Indigenous rights and the environment, such as the recognition of Indigenous peoples’ right to free, prior, and informed consent. According to the author, critical movements relying on the politics of time have more leverage because they can make it difficult for corporations to raise the capital or receive government approval for the project they seek to develop. They are also more effective in preventing harm from occurring.

But corporations also draw on the politics of time. Analysing the scientific practices of mining companies, Kirsch unravels how they try to gain government and public approval by delaying recognition or concealing evidence of their destructive environmental impacts, forestalling critique, and controlling information in ways that limit the effectiveness of their critics. Incidentally, the wide array of corporate efforts used to strike back at Indigenous resistance and NGO criticism goes far beyond the realm of the politics of time. Among recently developed corporate methods discussed are audit culture, which conveys the message that problems are being addressed while avoiding any real changes to operating procedures; co-opting critics’ discourse, for example, in promoting mining as a form of sustainable development; or increasing corporations’ symbolic capital by contributing to public health campaigns and developing stronger relationships to the academy. Kirsch asserts that corporations ingeniously respond to their critics through social technologies that successfully protect their economic interests, minimise their reputational risks, ward off the threat of external regulation, and, *in fine*, let them do their thing unhindered.

Thus, the book’s central argument is that the relationship between corporations – no matter the industry – and their critics is dialectical; because corporations are efficient at appropriating and adapting the strategies of their critics, activists

have to engage in continual strategic innovation. Kirsch contends that this dynamic is a permanent structural feature of neoliberalism, defining both the possibilities and the limitations of political engagement in an era of global capitalism. It illustrates how the fundamental contradictions underlying contemporary capitalist modes of production cannot be completely resolved, only renegotiated in new terms. Is resistance futile then? Kirsch very clearly emphasises that it is not. The author maintains that opposition movements represent one of the primary defences against the negative consequences of unrestrained capitalism. They play a pivotal role in making visible its dilemmas – for example, in challenging the deleterious consequences of corporate conduct for human health and the environment. They also have the ability to negotiate alternative outcomes, hence, offering a partial antidote to the politics of resignation (Benson and Kirsch 2010). Here lies one of *Mining Capitalism*’s greatest strengths. Despite the book’s potential to be discouraging and fatalistic, the struggles of the activists from the Ok Tedi and Fly Rivers nonetheless give cause for hope.

Overall, Kirsch discusses an extremely relevant and timely topic in the present context of controversies over natural resource projects arising all around the world. Rather than casting the Ok Tedi mine case as the exception, his compelling story brings to light the underlying commonalities with other conflicts, whether in mining or other industrial sectors. Those unfamiliar with Kirsch’s previous work might be startled by his strong political positioning against the Ok Tedi mine and corporations in general, which breaks with the anthropological tradition of suspending one’s political engagement when conducting ethnographic research. He does, however, duly justify his standpoint and participation in the campaign by contending that it represents the “logical extension of the commitment of reciprocity that underlies the practice of anthropology” (Kirsch 2002, 178). Whether or not one agrees with Kirsch, he has to be commended for pursuing an engaged anthropology. Furthermore, in addition to scientifically contributing to explaining the way global capitalism constitutes and maintains itself in the face of its devastating social and environmental impacts, *Mining Capitalism* aptly responds to the call for greater attention to corporations in mining studies. Individually comprehensive analytic chapters, ending with a conclusion that greatly summarises key ideas, makes for smooth and accessible reading, even for readers unfamiliar with mining issues or Melanesia – or anthropology, for that matter. This last point is not negligible; after all, it is in the interests of the common good that as many people as possible develop a keen eye to avoid being fooled by corporations’ molifying words.

References

- Benson, P., and S. Kirsch
2010 Capitalism and the Politics of Resignation. *Current Anthropology* 51(4):459–486. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1086/653091>.
- Kirsch, S.
2002 Anthropology and Advocacy: A Case Study of the Campaign against the Ok Tedi Mine. *Critique of Anthropology* 22(2):175–200. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/03075X02022002851>.