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Since the writings of dependency theorists in the mid-twentieth century and the publication of *Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent* by Eduardo Galeano in 1971, scholars in Latin American studies have been preoccupied with the region’s vexed relationship to global capitalism. In the past decade or so, this question has been revealed in debates about mega-mining projects, neo-extractivist regimes, and the consequences of these articulations for environmental justice, inequality, democratic governance, and sovereignty. Daviken Studnicki-Gizbert’s book, *The Three Deaths of Cerro de San Pedro*, honors this long-lasting and pressing debate with a riveting story of a mining town in central Mexico that underwent three cycles of bonanza, decline, and rebirth. In twenty rich and succinctly written chapters, the author takes us through the long history of Cerro de San Pedro with stories of colonial plunder, industrial revival, and serial environmental destruction. As environmental historians, scholars of capitalism, and fellow Latin Americans will note, this book speaks directly of our open veins.

In a well-structured and concise introduction, Studnicki-Gizbert gives us three organizing concepts to read the long history of this mining town. The first one, “cycles of extraction,” points to the periodic nature of extractive works. Mining industries, in the long run, have an ability to transmute busts into booms, the author argues, thereby producing cycles of revival and death. The idea of “transmutation” is apt to describe Studnicki-Gizbert’s argument on this point. The metal mining companies in central Mexico, as they did in the Americas writ large, managed to convert abandoned sites into more gold and more silver by altering the technological and energetic formula they used for its extraction. After colonial-style mining went into decline for several decades, an American company managed to make the Cerro de San Pedro productive again by introducing more capital-intensive machinery and new energy sources (fossil fuels and hydroelectric power) toward the end of the nineteenth century. More capital and
more energy equaled faster processing speeds and more metal output (also a shorter extractive cycle). A similar process of revival took place when a Canadian mega-mining company took over the now twice-defunct Cerro de San Pedro in the 1990s. Through the introduction of open-pit mining and open-air cyanide ore leaching, this enterprise extracted more ore in thirty years than in the previous five hundred. By altering the metabolic formula for extracting and processing ore, then, capitalism managed to turn ruined landscapes into tons of gold and silver, as if by alchemical transmutation.

The second organizing concept is “social metabolism,” which encourages us to pay attention to the origin, flow, and destination of matter and energy throughout this process of extraction. Colonial mining, for instance, required timber and charcoal from nearby forests, draft animals nourished by local pastures, food for human labor, and water from rivers to wash ore and run silver-processing mills. Each process of revival sped up this social metabolism and so did the tolls exerted on the bodies and landscapes on which it depended. Deforestation, polluted rivers, depleted aquifers, and damaged bodies were the natural consequences of a hungry extractivist metabolism.

But the power of these companies did not go unchallenged. Studnicki-Gizbert examines several cycles of contestation organized by mine workers and town residents throughout several centuries. During the colonial era, miners rebelled against mine owners to defend a system of profit sharing called “partido”; in the mid-twentieth century, strikers demanded safer working conditions and wage increases from American corporations; and, when rising to protect the town against demolition and relocation in the mid-2000s, residents of Cerro de San Pedro connected to a wide network of activists throughout Mexico. This history of resistance, the author argues, was not simply a “series of spasmodic reactions to harm” but rather a “positive defense of human-nature relations that are more amenable to the reproduction of health and life and more equitable in the distribution of benefits and sacrifices” (p. 13). This is what the author calls a “moral ecology”—an implicit and dynamic agreement setting the terms of exploitation, the breaking of which motivates protest or rebellion.

There are many aspects that make this book outstanding beyond these important conceptual contributions. The author excels at examining how the Spanish Crown assembled different techniques of economic and environmental governance to constitute an extractivist regime. Especially compelling is the argument that colonial officials codified rights to extract nature and labor as a reaction to a series of crises (epidemics, deforestation, rebellions) that threatened the empire’s economic and spiritual goals. Equally gripping is Studnicki-Gizbert’s narrative of early Indigenous resistance against Spanish incursions and his examination of different forms of resiliency, entrepreneurship, and rebellion enacted by miners in Cerro de San Pedro. In some moments of the town’s history, organized miners effectively controlled metal production and “held the mountain in full” (p. 99).

Another salient aspect of this book is its arguments about capitalism and the environment. In particular, Studnicki-Gizbert emphasizes that the cycles of extraction in Cerro de San Pedro have less to do with the exhaustion of mineral deposits than with the nature of capital investment at any given moment, which enables different kinds of metabolic functions. In general, more capital-intensive technologies have increased the scale and the speed of extraction, at the cost of more energy consumption and higher environmental tolls. This formulation implies that abundance and scarcity are, in a way, manufactured. It also suggests that understanding transitions from one mode of extraction to the next demands attention to the evolution of different energy systems. For this reason, scholars and students interested in the history of
capitalism, energy, and the environment will find the author's fine description of energy sources, flows, and transitions masterfully instructive.

Any book covering such an ambitious timeline inevitably leaves some stones unturned. The book, for example, is not a comprehensive study of the ecological conflicts produced by the metabolic functions of the mining industry. Chapters discussing the nature of minework definitely provide vivid descriptions of underground environments and striking narratives about horrific working conditions, which one may consider an environmental struggle happening at the heart of the mining industry. Yet conflicts over deforestation, water sources, and smelter pollution, which exemplify the wider reach of this social metabolism, remain largely unexplored. Moreover, scholars looking for unusual stories that break away from the binary model centered on exploitative companies and a resisting/accommodating workforce may have to keep looking. The Mexican state also does not figure prominently as an actor in these pages, other than a tacit enabler of extraction.

These limitations, however, by no means affect the goal of this book, which is to highlight the subsequent waves of extractivism that have exploited workers, damaged their bodies, and rendered Cerro de San Pedro a ruined landscape. Anyone interested in a sweeping (and thrilling) history of extractive capitalism in Latin America should pick up this book without hesitation.

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