

UNDER PRESSURE: DIAMOND MINING AND EVERYDAY LIFE IN NORTHERN CANADA. By LINDSAY A. BELL. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2023. ISBN 978148758216. xiv + 172 p., maps, b&w illus., index, bib. Softbound Cdn\$30.95 CAD. Also available as an ebook.

The Mackenzie Place tower graces the cover of Lindsay Bell's fine-grained and highly readable ethnography, *Under Pressure: Diamond Mining and Everyday Life in Northern Canada*. Bell writes that the Mackenzie Place tower, a seventeen-story apartment building in Hay River, Northwest Territories, "looks like it was left here by accident," a "visual anomaly" (p. 6) in an otherwise flat landscape. The building is known to locals as the High Rise, the term Bell uses in her book. From the vantage point of this high rise, Bell brings her reader into what she calls the "architecture of extraction" (p. 9). Her book focuses on the contemporary diamond mining industry in the Northwest Territories, but she is careful to resist narrowing her lens to diamonds, only, as a material and commodity. Instead, she locates the diamond industry in the broader histories of northern extraction in Canada and analyzes the industry through the everyday lives of the people she meets during her time living at and working from the High Rise.

As an anthropologist interested in the ways major social processes articulate in our everyday lives, Bell writes that her objective is to move away from analyses of extraction as simply good or bad, and, instead, to "get curious about our framing of the problems themselves" (p. 144). Bell asks, "how does mining, for many people, make sense? How did Arctic extraction become enmeshed with people's views of their future?" (p. 12). She answers these questions through a deeply-researched and considered ethnography, undertaken largely in the late 2000s. Her chapters move through the architectures of extraction thematically, rather than chronologically, shedding light on intersecting social structures, processes and practices that shape how northern extraction operates, and is understood and experienced. Throughout, Bell approaches her subject matter through the everyday lives of northern residents. For example, Bell traces the production of race, and the racialized contours of northern extraction through the story of Destiny, a young Dene woman living in the High Rise who enrolls in a mine training program.

Because of her background as a teacher, Bell ends up teaching the mine training program, offering her a unique window into the discourses, content and material consequences of mine training programs. Indeed, Bell's close analysis of the mine training program makes for one of the book's strongest chapters. Bell follows a cohort of mine training students through the program; by combining insights from the students with a critical reading of training curricula, Bell reveals an emphasis on individualized responsibility and readiness for extractive employment. While northern Indigenous workers are targeted for

extractive employment, Bell's analysis shows that, in training, they are simultaneously disciplined away from social and political beliefs and family and community ties that would complicate the quote-unquote positive attitude required of mine workers. Moving from training to job prospects, Bell follows the prospective mining employees in the context of a mining downturn. In so doing, she illuminates the ways in which "job training 'failure'" (p. 102) is actually part of the architecture of extraction, rather than an individual experience, and part of the broader agenda of making Canadian diamonds appear ethical through corporate and state training interventions. In reading Bell's novel analysis of the architecture of extraction, I wondered what insights might have been gleaned through a closer conversation with contemporary analyses of extraction and dispossession. For example, in *Red Skin, White Masks* (2014), Glen Coulthard emphasizes northern Indigenous Peoples' relationship to place, and how this has shaped Indigenous experiences of extraction, processes of racialization, and the development of the Canadian State. How might Bell's students' experiences of racialized expectations in job training and employment be articulated through their relationships to place, and the harms mines cause to Indigenous land?

Place, as a concept, does figure in Bell's analysis, primarily in relation to her chapter on mobility and migration. This chapter offers novel insight, drawing attention to the fact that large segments of the northern population and extractive workforce come from elsewhere, including the northern Indigenous population. In her discussion of migration, Bell positions her analysis in opposition to the longstanding tendencies in academia and social and political discourse alike to treat Indigenous Peoples anachronistically as subject to unchanging relationships to tradition and place (as critiqued by McClintock 1995 and Starblanket 2017).

In these chapters and throughout, Bell's book is undoubtedly successful in its aims. In bringing ethnographic narrative into conversation with the broader architectures of extraction, Bell reveals the nuanced ways in which the transnational processes of extraction articulate in the everyday. The strength and accessibility of this work is illustrated in Bell's narration of a visit she had with Ruth, an Indigenous woman who had moved to the Northwest Territories from the Maritimes in hopes of employment at the diamond mines. To this end, Bell was working with Ruth on her draft cover letter. Bell shares a discussion they had about whether Ruth should identify as Indigenous (she is, but not from the communities that have agreements with the mines) or as a Northerner (she has been living in the North but is not from there). After recounting their conversation, Bell writes,

While Ruth was persistent in her belief that mining would make her "set for life" the ways in which that related to her Indigeneity was unclear. On the one

hand, she was aware of stereotypes that being “too” Indigenous could single non-deference to her employer; on the other hand, she was aware of the political-legal landscape in which mines had been approved under the guise that they provide local, specifically Indigenous, employment.

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Ruth’s story troubles straightforward narratives of mining, social responsibility, and who counts as northern, and it reveals the shifting experience of Indigenous identity across place and political economic context.

This passage reflects the strength of Bell’s work, both analytically and pedagogically: complex social realities are made legible in her writing through grounded storytelling. This book is part of the University of Toronto Press’s *Teaching Culture* series, a collection of accessible and

provocative ethnographic case studies curated with the undergraduate students and their instructors in mind. This book will certainly be enjoyed in an upper-undergraduate setting, but so, too, will it be of interest to northern scholars, policy makers and residents, alike. As northern governments turn to critical minerals and historical megamines receive billions in public dollars for remediation, Bell’s analysis offers important insight into the everyday ways in which northerners manage and understand these social processes.

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