

Gabrielle Hecht, *Residual Governance: How South Africa Foretells Planetary Futures*. Durham NC: Duke University Press (hb US\$104.95 – 978 1 4780 2028 8; pb US \$27.95 – 978 1 4780 2494 1). 2023, ix + 269 pp.

Gabrielle Hecht has authored a book that exudes an exceptionally assured tone, replete with bold assertions. One of these assertions is that ‘even after apartheid ended officially, it remained embedded in infrastructures and environments, acquiring new life, causing new harms, and sparking new modes of resistance and refusal’ (p. 5). But even readers with a cursory understanding of Southern African politics and history are probably acquainted with this account of apartheid’s recalcitrance and the resistance it engenders, especially among the still impoverished poor and black communities. This is because the story has been told dozens of times in a variety of formats, including in scholarly works, films, theatrical productions, art exhibitions and the praxis of grass-roots ‘social justice’ movements, some of which are celebrated internationally, such as the Abahlali baseMjondolo shack dwellers’ movement and Treatment Actions Campaign, among others. Long ago, sociologist Patrick Bond warned us that the shift from official apartheid to the then new South Africa was an ‘elite transition’, whose governance and policy practices occasionally incorporated ‘the worst aspects of neoapartheid practice with neoliberal principles’.¹

Hecht anticipated this inevitable and obvious objection to her work, so she carved her own niche out of the story of apartheid’s persistence and stubbornness, albeit in an unofficial form, by focusing on residual governance in Gauteng Province, the beating heart of South Africa’s mining industry for the last century and a half. Residual governance for Hecht is a three-pronged concept that explains: ‘The governance of waste and discards’, ‘Minimalist governance that uses simplification, ignorance, and delay as core tactics’ and ‘Governance that treats people and places as waste and wastelands’ (p. 6). One of the book’s main arguments, set out in the Introduction, is that residual governance is a technopolitical instrument of political power that serves racial capitalism and presents itself in a variety of political, legal, financial, spatial planning and public service infrastructures. It is precisely here that a broader argument concerning the Anthropocene’s colonialism and racism emerges. The Anthropocene is not apolitical, and any credible explanation of it ‘must account for systemic racism and ecocide in tandem’ (p. 11). This is why studying the mining industry in South Africa, its anthropogenic destruction, and the human and material residues left in its trail provides a lens for understanding the crisis of the Anthropocene, and indeed that of capitalism itself.

Chapters 1 to 5 and the Conclusion lay bare the historical and present challenges but also point to recuperation. This culminates in Hecht’s projections about planetary futures, and the social struggles surrounding residual governance, which will undoubtedly continue for some time. Hecht exposes apartheid and the racial and capitalist machinations of both the state and the mining industry, which come in the form of social and spatial engineering and, more insidiously, manufactured ignorance to suppress knowledge about the extent of residual damage (in material and human terms). She also lauds the many efforts of individual activists (such as the ubiquitous Mariette Liefferink and Jeffrey Ramoruti) and affected communities in Gauteng.

¹ P. Bond (2000) *Elite Transition: from apartheid to neoliberalism in South Africa*. London: Pluto Press, p. 133.

Chapters 1 and 2 provide a historical analysis of the mining residue problem, with a focus on authorities' painstaking efforts to reduce it to a parochial technical issue; there are echoes of Timothy Mitchell's argument here about experts' rule and the monolithic social and political frameworks they use, such as that of development, the economy and capitalism, to override local histories, knowledge, practices, political specificities and institutions.² However, the book is much more about bringing into dialogue and visibility the perspectives of those who have been rendered redundant (and their ways of knowing) by the infrastructures of racial capitalism over time – the poor black communities, farmers, activists, artists and scholars whose stories of struggle and resistance dominate Chapters 3 and 5.

I respond with personal sympathy to the aforementioned parts of the book, but capitalism, whichever adjective one chooses (racial or otherwise), is invariably predatory, scavenger-like, adaptable and everything in between, and it succeeds as assemblages intertwined in social and economic practices and processes at multiple scales. Herein lies the answer to why mining residue remains a persistent concern. Hecht knows the answer, but it is implied rather than stated outright throughout the book, as exemplified by the land developers, dump reclaimers and *zama-zamas* (the latter at the bottom of the value chain) who rummage through Gauteng's mine residuals. Anna Tsing would describe it as 'salvage accumulation', which flourishes in ruins when capitalist value and assets emerge from non-capitalist value forms.³ The global capitalist political economy, of which places such as South Africa provide clear examples, is constantly changing, and capitalism keeps pace – more and more poor people rely on 'toxic dregs' to, ironically, earn a living, and yesterday's waste (as in the uranium and tailings examples in the book) is tomorrow's bonanza. Even more, new political, ecological and economic agendas (e.g. energy transition) bring new actors, such as electrical automobile entrepreneurs (Chinese actors exhibit a growing influence in this sector), who are guided by political expediencies and bring with them different technologies, political infrastructures, ideologies and rationalizations. What does this entail for the social struggles of the 'abandoned'? That is, if capitalism ever 'abandons', for it appears to me that it finds new, however marginal, uses for yesterday's trash and surplus to fuel its ever adaptable, exploitative self. What new forms of mobilization can we expect from our living alongside a fragmented and ever changing capitalism?

All credit to Hecht for organizing so many aspects into a coherent and captivating analysis of a pressing issue in political ecology and public governance. But also for painting a generous picture of the continuing struggle for social justice in the rubble of capitalism.

Melusi Nkomo
Princeton University, Princeton, NJ, USA
Email: mn8973@princeton.edu
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² T. Mitchell (2002) *Rule of Experts: Egypt, techno-politics, modernity*. Berkeley CA: University of California Press.

³ A. L. Tsing (2017) *The Mushroom at the End of the World: on the possibility of life in capitalist ruins*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, p. 299.