

Mountain Movers: Mining, Sustainability and the Agents of Change

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Mountain Movers: Mining, Sustainability and the Agents of Change

By Daniel M. Franks. London, United Kingdom: Routledge, 2015. xv + 178 pp. Hardback: US\$ 165.00, ISBN 978-0-415-71170-8. Paperback: US\$ 56.95, ISBN 978-0-415-71171-5. E-book: US\$ 51.26, ISBN 978-1-31-588440-0.

I start this review by emphasizing what this book is *not*. It is not about mountains in the sense of topographically high and remote places where one would hike or climb. It is about the mining industry that “moves mountains” to extract valuable commodities and primarily about the people involved in and affected by this industry. It is not a light read; it is not a book that you can skim through, browse the photographs (there are very few), or open at a random page to be enlightened. It is a serious, complex, deep book—global in scope and spanning a lifetime of experience at the cutting edge of conflict, corruption, and policy development in the extractive industry. That said, the narrative is engrossing and enlivened by the author’s first-hand accounts of visits to remote regions—some, but not all, in mountain areas—and his conversations with key actors and “movers” in the mining and petroleum industries.

As Daniel Franks says in the Preface, our society (“civilization” if you wish) is incredibly reliant on the products of the mining and hydrocarbon extraction industries, yet we very readily blame industry for the environmental and social consequences of our own consumption. Franks confronted this paradox early in his life and saw no contradiction in supporting Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth while he studied geology at university. Mining undoubtedly has a bad reputation as an asset-stripping,

greedy, and corrupt industry that has blighted countries that had the misfortune to be endowed with mineral resources. Franks’ book is an account of the reform process that spread globally through the extractive industry starting in the 1990s as, under pressure from society and government, it began to embrace the concepts of sustainability and equitable development. Following the Preface and list of abbreviations, Franks provides an introduction to the Global Mining Initiative and the Mining, Minerals and Sustainable Development Project, in a chapter with the tongue-in-cheek title “Breaking new ground.” Following this are chapters addressing human rights, damage to the environment, resource development, conflict, and financial transparency. The final chapter on “mountain movers” looks at the regulatory processes that have shaped reform and the interactions between the various agents of change.

A vital feature of the book is that we get to know the people who have initiated the reforms and overseen their implementation. Only someone immersed in the reformation process would have the insight, and transcripts of candid conversations, to write such an account. Franks’ book is a tribute to “the dedication of a remarkably diverse range of mountain movers” (p 147) and to the initiative and drive of those prepared to break the established mold. The most engrossing sections are narratives in which the author has been directly involved, such as the Esmeralda ship replica built by the consortium working the Collahuasi porphyry copper deposit in northern Chile. On the subject of “blood diamonds,” we are startled by supermodel Naomi Campbell’s unexpected gift from Charles Taylor, then President of Liberia, of a pouch of rough diamonds—a gift that she wisely declined!

Daniel Franks is very much an expert witness to the transformation

of the mining industry since the 1990s. For example, he and Rachel Davis (then a legal advisor to the UN Secretary-General’s Special Representative on Business and Human Rights) interviewed 45 professionals in the industry to understand the costs of conflict with local communities and the ways that this problem was being approached. We learn of the surprising cost of conflict to the mining industry, with one estimate indicating that two thirds of the market value of companies is a function of stakeholder engagement, and only one third relates to the value of the gold (or other commodity) in the ground.

While, overall, the book is well written and accurate, I have a few niggles about acronyms and abbreviations—of which there are many: the list occupies 3 pages. “Washington Consensus” is referred to on page 71 but not explained and not included in the index. The abbreviation FSG appears on page 80 but not in the list of abbreviations. As well as the abbreviations, it might have helped to list the personnel mentioned in the book, along with their affiliations and roles, as I found it difficult to keep track of who was who. The environmental impact of artisanal mining is covered briefly (pp 55–56)—too briefly in my opinion—and more could have been said about reform in the non-corporate mining sector. However, I congratulate the author on his detailed “paper trail” of footnotes to each chapter. This is a valuable asset for anyone wishing to explore further any aspect covered in the book.

Although “many in the industry have been slow to recognize that the extraction of resources is as much a ‘social project’ as a technical one” (pp 103–104), remarkable progress has been accomplished since the Global Mining Initiative was formulated 20 years ago. In conclusion, Franks reflects positively on these achievements while urging that there is still much to do.

We look forward to a second edition that extends the narrative beyond the 2014 cutoff for publication of the first edition. A new edition could consider how the dramatic political developments of recent years and the shift away from the carbon economy have influenced the extractive industries in their pursuit of social and environmental accountability and a good governance “ecosystem.”

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