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BOOK REVIEWS

Landscapes of power: politics of energy in the Navajo Nation, by Dana E. Powell, Durham, Duke University Press, 2018, 336 pp., US\$26.95 (paperback), ISBN 978-0-8223-6994-3

Remote, extractive landscapes are often marked by persistent pollution, particularly when the extracted resource in question comes from underground and serves as a source of energy. The toxic legacies of fracking, mountaintop removal and more conventional mining projects are well documented at this point. The disproportionately polluted extractive ‘hinterland’ looms especially large in recent accounts of the rural West of the United States, which tend to emphasize the ways in which these ‘peripheries’ have enabled consumption and prosperity elsewhere (e.g. Kuletz 1998; Needham 2014; Voyles 2015). Dana Powell’s *Landscapes of power* (2018) moves swiftly beyond a recognition of such patterns to offer a complex, multivalent account of how power circulates within and shapes these landscapes. Centering the experience of inhabiting such terrain, rather than simply removing materials from it, the book presents a powerful case for attending to the role of ‘hinterland’ communities in the production and consumption of energy.

Powell trains her analytical gaze on the numerous, often conflicting interpretations of past and future energy development projects in the region. The book is loosely organized around an account of the never-built Desert Rock Energy Project, a 1500-megawatt coal-fired power plant proposed for construction on Navajo (Diné) land in Northern New Mexico. Situating the failure to build Desert Rock within the territory’s protracted history as an extractive landscape, the book serves as a compelling argument for examining the multiple scales of relational political ecologies at play in the production of energy landscapes.

Energy development has marked Diné land and lifeways since colonization by the US commenced in earnest during the second half of the nineteenth century. Largely overseen by the US federal government and private companies, cycles of oil production, uranium mining and coal extraction have left Diné terrain with pollution and an enormous infrastructural skein of pipes and power lines. However, the profits and the energy from these projects have largely flowed away from the tribal territory, leaving the residents of the resource-rich land with little access to capital or – significantly, in this account – electricity.

Recounting the debates over Desert Rock, Powell depicts intra-tribal conflicts about the possibility of extending familiar arrangements of energy production into the twenty-first century. Some members, particularly those associated with Navajo Nation governing bodies, approached the project as a potential conduit for tribal independence and power, via the wealth and jobs they believed would accrue to Diné people through the plant’s operation. Meanwhile, others understood Desert Rock as a retrenchment of undesirable dependencies on polluting fuels, outside entities and dangerous practices within their lands. Depicting the debates, Powell outlines convincingly how – despite never being built – the idea of Desert Rock produced politics, catalyzing new alliances and forms of expression over the course of its consideration.

The book’s title is used throughout as an organizing heuristic. The ‘landscapes of power’ are analyzed in terms of four entangled modalities of power that shape both terrain and lifeways in the region: material-subterranean, cultural-political, knowledge-practices, and ethical-cosmological. Each of the first four chapters focuses on one of these axes, while the fifth – an analysis of Native political art about energy – draws the four together. This approach enables Powell to

foreground the divergent ways in which actors invoke and signify material politics while holding space for the ‘liveliness’ of the materials in question.

While conflict over a power plant – Desert Rock – structures the narrative, Powell’s broadly infrastructural approach foregrounds the multiple moments and nodes that comprise energy landscapes. In this rendering, Diné land emerges as not only the source of raw materials like coal, but also as a site where energy sources are processed, transmitted, distributed and consumed – and where material networks enable (or circumscribe) all of these processes. The striking political cartoon reproduced on page 219 crystallizes this. ‘No water for farms. No electricity for our homes. Some things never change’, laments a Diné man as he hacks at the soil with a pick. Meanwhile, power lines and a water pipeline stretch behind him, destined for elsewhere. The image, and the book as a whole, demand consideration of the infrastructure that enables connections or access to power – in the form of electrons, or otherwise. Attending to the sites and legacies of energy extraction while overlooking sites of consumption and distribution obscures a broader range of inequities at play in these arrangements.

Notably, as Powell details, some Diné do not desire access to the grids snaking through (and often powered by) their homeland. While they want electricity in their homes, they prefer relatively small-scale, distributed solar and wind power projects. But in contrast to mainstream environmentalist appeals to decarbonized energy production, some Diné proponents frame the appeals of these technologies in terms of self-sufficiency or independence. Freedom from bills and dependency emerges as more desirable, for some, than the freedom to consume energy without limits. Such framings articulate with concurrent tribal debates over the notion of political sovereignty, through which the wisdom of working with outside companies like Sithe Global Power (the Navajo Nation’s planned partner in the Desert Rock project) is questioned. In both contexts, the desirability of certain arrangements of interrelations emerges as a key site of politics.

This focus on the contradictions that mark ideals of both material independence and political sovereignty is timely. Building on older scholarship emphasizing the material links between cities and their ‘hinterlands’, such as William Cronon’s *Nature’s metropolis* (1991), a growing body of scholarship within urban studies is making ever-broader claims about the spatial reach of urbanization (e.g. Brenner 2013). Accounts like Powell’s, emphasizing steps taken within peripheral communities to sunder or prevent the formation of new material ties to the metropole, offer an important counterpoint to such totalizing narratives.

While attentive to this scale of interrelations, the book’s greatest strength lies in its foregrounding of how these networks are wrapped into more localized ethical cosmologies. Throughout, the competitions over the meanings of infrastructural networks – made manifest through projects like Desert Rock – are approached as debates over what it means to live ‘a good life’ within Diné territory. This turn toward the idea of inhabiting a landscape as an ongoing relational practice with ethical dimensions clarifies the stakes of these battles for Diné residents. The pollutedness of these landscapes – present and anticipated – is only one of many factors structuring residents’ experience of making a life within them. And while the text might have gone a bit further in its analysis of the significance of this complexity, evoking the multivalent, multi-scalar dimensions of infrastructural development in this region is valuable in itself.

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Cultivating community: interest, identity and ambiguity in an Indian social mobilization, by Michael Youngblood, South Asian Studies Association, 2016, xix + 304 pages

Cultivating Community focuses on a social movement involving one of the largest economically marginalized sections of the world, namely India's millions of small and medium farmers, and landless laborers. The book studies the social movement group Shetkari Sanghatana (Sanghatana henceforth), translated as the agriculturists' union (p.1), a long running mass movement based in the Indian state of Maharashtra, which has sought better remunerative prices for their agricultural produce. The contrast between the province's capital Mumbai (India's commercial capital formerly known as Bombay) and the surrounding rural areas was highlighted by the Sanghatana's charismatic leader Sharad Joshi (1935–2015) through his claim that the Indian and provincial governments have an urban bias at the cost of neglecting the countryside and its farmers. This is captured by his invocation of the populist slogan Bharat vs. India. Bharat is the Hindi and Marathi (national and provincial languages respectively) word for India, while India is used commonly in English (pp. 1, 35). The book is based on extensive fieldwork conducted over a two-year period during 1996–99, that included participation in various protest rallies in rural and urban centers across Maharashtra, some of it on a motorcycle, as well as living in various villages to conduct interviews and observe developments linked to the movement (pp. xiii; 30). The study also draws on periodicals including vernacular dailies and the movement group's publication to construct its narrative. Michael Youngblood provides a rich and insightful study with an original analysis that delves into the history of the region drawing on its religious and cultural roots and links them to the movement processes in the present.

The study focuses on how the movement and its mobilization is reproduced on an everyday basis and its varied meaning for its multiple participants. Along with its top leadership, these participants include solid, badge wearing workers who have been an integral part of the movement group for over 12 years, on and off workers, as well as occasional workers whose participation is strictly issue-based (p. 174). The book begins by highlighting the limitations of existing studies on rural peasant mobilization across a wide spectrum, ranging from the Marxist anthropologist Eric Wolf and rational choice political theorist Samuel Popkin as well as other strands such as resistance theory and frame theory (p. 14–17). Moreover, it points out how the debate among the various Marxist scholars studying Indian farmers such as Utsa Patnaik and Gail Omvedt over types of social classes 'was greatly abstract' and 'failed to take account of the actual subjectivity and experience of the people under examination' (p.19). Youngblood categorizes earlier studies of social movement process under the rubric of progressive solidification which maintains that collective social dissent depends largely on broadly shared thought