

obstacles, and yet their inability to break through a glass ceiling should not be considered a failure, as even such an assumption is based upon masculinised notions of success. Instead, women resort to different individualised paths in their pursuit of progress and development. Drawing on detailed ethnographic descriptions and analysis, Liu shows the agency of women at work as they comply with and resist these double standards. The book sheds light on how gender and sexuality are integral to the processes of compliance and resistance in structural masculine domination. It is a welcome addition to feminist theory, which is grounded in local research and which takes into consideration complex realities embedded in the wider world. In this way, the approach engages in a deimperialisation of knowledge, which challenges Western feminist comprehension of gender inequalities in the workplace and in the family.

Despite this, corporations do seem to use “Chinese beauties” and the demand for women to perform aesthetic and sexual labour in their encounters with clients strategically. Such forms of labour are mandatory for the job, and yet they are unpaid. In addition, making oneself beautiful and acting in a “feminine” way implies a considerable investment of time, energy, and money. Of course, detailed ethnography and analysis of such labours would be welcome in feminist studies, which, until recently, focused mostly on Western contexts. Despite this shortcoming, anyone eager to learn more about the lives of young, highly educated urban women in China will find this book an exciting resource. Researchers interested in a comparative analysis with other East Asian countries will find good material in this publication. Feminist scholars interested in gender and sexuality in a global context will find this book insightful.

## References

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**Boyer, Pascal**, *Minds Make Societies: How Cognition Explains the World Humans Create*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018, 376 pages.

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Pascal Boyer is a French and American cognitive anthropologist teaching at Washington University in St. Louis. He gained renown for his study of religion as a by-product of specialised brain machinery (Boyer 2001). *Minds Make Societies* champions the same approach in new fields, using mostly second-hand data. Boyer intends to draw the outlines of a new social science arising from convergent research in biology, psychology, economy, anthropology and other disciplines. As a new natural science of social phenomena, it distances itself from distinguishing nature from nurture and reverts to the infra- or subpersonal working of neural circuits rather than to agents’ conscious will, social facts or cultural norms. Boyer wants anthropologists and

fellow social scientists to use natural selection as a methodological estrangement against false evidence, and as a ground on which to build precise, testable hypotheses about puzzling aspects of the human mind.

Each of the seven chapters attempts to demonstrate that we exhibit specific preferences and myopias in several domains because our biological cognitive systems were designed by natural selection to meet what pressures were recurrent in the Pleistocene (2.5 million to 12,000 years before the Common Era). The rival hypotheses Boyer considers are said to share a naive conception of information as something entering agents’ minds without any need for dedicated mechanisms with rules and content of their own.

In Chapter 1, ideological depictions of ethnic others as invaders are seen as secondary interpretations of intuitions sparked by an unconscious framing of situations as zero-sum games, a framing adapted to keep encroaching groups away from key territories (such as water holes or hunting grounds) and to put threatening males of the other group in a subordinate position. Cognitive specialisations to recruit social support and to perform (or prevent) raids and ambushes are taken to account more satisfactorily for ethnic tensions in contemporary urban settings and for the “predictable script” of civil conflicts than social psychology’s hypothesis about tribalism and discriminatory stereotypes.

An evolved epistemic vigilance helps us detect liars and manipulators, by motivating us to gain reputational information and to question the likeliness of others’ sayings. However, people fall prey to rumours and even show up wanting to see these taken seriously. This apparent paradox is unfolded throughout Chapter 2, where Boyer hypothesizes an adaptively lighter and faster processing of threat signals, and an evolved capacity not only to seek support, but also to moralise recruitment (turning the acceptance or refusal to disseminate the threat signal into an “either with or against us” thinking).

Building on *Religion Explained* (Boyer 2001), in Chapter 3, Boyer defines supernatural concepts as by-products of cognitive systems dedicated to inanimate things, to animate beings, to intentionality, to fairness and the like, systems whose intuitive expectations are overtly violated or subtly confirmed by supernatural concepts. He holds that the “primitive” supernatural concepts were mainly imagistic and pragmatic-minded, not contained in any doctrine, nor uniting believers in communities. As such, they would have few, if any parallel with religions, understood as professionalised organisations born of large kingdoms, empires and city-states, which standardised both the content and the use of supernatural concepts. On this account, the functionalist explanation of religion as a human universal, answering an urge to make sense and to cooperate, is no longer tenable. Religion as such no longer has a *raison d’être* as a concept.

Against their description as natural or self-evident parts of human nature, family and kinship are shown in Chapter 4 to be compromises between diverse evolved preferences that work independently and sometimes in conflict. The evolutionary rise of stable pair bonding is reconstructed through the once hotly debated “primitive contract” of sex for meat, which Boyers reappraises to mean meat and protection against rape and infanticide for the certainty of fatherhood. This latter concern, Boyer advances, motivates male control over female mobility,

dressing and sexuality in private and public spaces. The evolved wiring of the male brain to manage conflicts with surrounding groups would account for male social dominance in circumstances that include production surpluses.

In Chapter 5, Boyer reconstructs the growth of markets out of prehistoric exchange routes to our current monetised one and attempts to explain the tension between market and justice. A combination of cognitive specialisations would have helped markets grow – specialisations for viewing things under a common utility measure, for monitoring the intents of others and for avoiding the ruinous egoistic appropriation of “commons” such as rivers or pastures. Intuitions of property and fairness evolved in the contexts of sharing the spoils of hunting, and of a “market for cooperators” with partner choices, which meant ditching free riders and cheaters. On this account, the lack of a coordinating metacognitive system between fairness and property leaves these two as irreconcilable, which creates the space for both endless academic debates and intuitively appealing, but inconsistent folk conceptions.

Chapter 6 follows a route similar to that of Chapter 5. The extension of social groups from tribes to nations is said to rest on a set of cognitive systems for dividing labour according to each agent’s skills and for building production and coordination hierarchies that partly replace those commonly found in other ape species, which stand on resource monopolisation and bullying. The working of large-scale societies is seen as parasitic on information-processing suited for small groups. It is said to be opaque to our mind but made manageable by cognitive by-products that consist in essentialising societies as agents with intents of their own and power as a physical mass, putting pressures on us from top to bottom.

Rather than a summary, the Conclusion is a chapter unto itself. A theory of communication as “intent reconstruction” is presented, which relates to how intuitive thoughts are turned into reflexive ones and to how our evolved preferences and biases contribute to the formation of traditions. Boyer opposes separate chains of transmission to culture as a whole integrated system. He critiques cultural transmission as imitation (which only captures the surface features of behaviours) and as internalisation (which presumably fails to see that agents constantly transform and select whatever information they get and that communication does not come with a ratchet preventing interpretative or inferential drifts).

Elegant, dense, ambitious, but somewhat dry, *Minds Make Societies* is yet another attempt to explain large-scale – social or cultural – dynamics by the aggregate workings of individual minds. The overwhelming presence of our unconscious, intuitive thinking is aptly put to light without being boiled down to a celebration of homo economicus, as critics of prior evolutionary thinking would have led us to suspect (Sahlins 1976).<sup>1</sup> Anthropologists interested in challenging their view of their discipline and its relations to biology and psychology should give it a careful read. It remains to be seen if specialised cognitive systems can only be built through biological inheritance, as Boyer seems to claim. Other work in neurosciences forcefully argues for the opposite (Barrett 2017; Heyes 2018). It may also be that, beyond certain communicative and cooperative skills, explaining culture by specialised mechanisms, either learned or biologically inherited, is uncalled for (Morin 2016). Further clarifying such issue may lead to an

even more informed bet in the race between the new natural social science that Boyer advocates and anthropology as we know it.

## Notes

- 1 “The fact that humans everywhere engage in collective actions in many different domains, and in all known human groups, would suggest that classical economic models were perhaps based on the wrong assumptions” (Boyer 2018, 210).

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**Martínez-Reyes, José E.**, *The Moral Ecology of a Maya Forest: The Nature Industry and Maya Post-Conservation*, Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2016, 200 pages.

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*The Moral Ecology of a Maya Forest*, by José E. Martínez-Reyes, offers a lucid critique of the “nature industry” and the limited understanding of human–environmental relations applied by conservationists and anthropologists. It is a compelling ethnography of an Indigenous Yucatec Maya *ejido*, which stands out among recent anthropological studies of the politics of environmental conservation. It draws on detailed fieldwork with the Tres Reyes *ejido*, near the Caribbean coast of the Yucatan peninsula, to examine the *ejido*’s relationship to regional conservation efforts in the context of the global “nature industry” and to present a critique of current approaches in environmental anthropology.

Martínez-Reyes is a Puerto Rican anthropologist and environmental historian who studied with Arturo Escobar and now teaches at the University of Massachusetts Boston. He frames his book as tackling “how the nature industry in the Sian Ka’an Biosphere Reserve and the Zona Maya are emblematic of the problems inherent in the question of nature in the global era, and examines the challenges and resistances offered by the moral ecology of the Maya Forest” (31). The book explores the concept of moral ecology and offers the new concepts of post-conservation, nature industry, coloniality of nature, critical ethnoecology and political ecological ontology as frameworks for understanding human–environmental relations and Indigenous lifeworlds. The six chapters present a colonial and postcolonial