

presence in state officialdom, made them a force to be reckoned with—and one subject to the same sordid motives and abuses of power as the state, the object of their mimesis. Fast forwarding to the violently contested election of 2007, their unregulated power came to include “the same sense of impunity that police and gendarmes affected” (162); and worse, as “Dozos committed atrocities against the same people they were ostensibly trying to protect or collaborate with in the 1990s: women, the poor, immigrants, Ivorian citizens, and police,” with crimes including documented cases of beatings, rape, and murder (17). The secret society that initially attracted Hellweg with its social poetics and honour-oriented sensibilities later became a menace in a vacuum of accountability within a winner-take-all electoral system.

McGovern concludes aptly when he writes, “watching the degradation of the situation is like watching a slow-motion train wreck” (215). But there is good reason not to avert our gaze. If anything, the two books I have discussed show that ethnography is more important than ever before, in part as the only viable way to interpret such vexed conflicts as that of Côte d’Ivoire. The astonishing plasticity of social forces in West Africa (and arguably elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa) that sit astride tradition and modernity, that defy categorization as civil or uncivil society, that seem to be capable of strategic mimesis in any direction, means that unqualified pessimism may be misplaced. Even things that look like an inevitable train wreck are capable of transformation. For now, one of the best things we can do is to keep watching.

Fitting, Elizabeth, *The Struggle for Maize: Campesinos, Workers and Transgenic Corn in the Mexican Countryside*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2011, 319 pages.

Mathews, Andrew S., *Instituting Nature: Authority, Expertise, and Power in Mexican Forests*. Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2011, 316 pages.

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A Review Essay

Both *The Struggle for Maize* and *Instituting Nature* are exceptionally written, well researched ethnographic monographs that offer contributions that reach well beyond the field of Mexican studies. In both cases the authors analyze modern regimes of natural resource access and management in peripheral areas of Mexico: the mountains of Oaxaca in Mathews’ case, and a southern valley in the state of Puebla for Fitting. Both authors contribute to, and expand on the study of modernity understood as the “great transformation,” as the unfolding of the modern state and the capitalistic market over the national territory (Polanyi 1944). These large structural frameworks, state and market, translate into the transformation from individuals into citizenry and the integration of local

modes of production into larger national economies characterized by mass production and consumption. These two studies provide exceptional political ecology analyses of the impacts and subtle processes of negotiation that accompany the implementation of environmental governmentality in indigenous communities (Agrawal 2005).

There are, of course, obvious differences between both works that are not limited to the geographical and cultural context of Zapotec villages in Oaxaca and a Nahuatl valley in Puebla. The chronology is also different. Mathews compiles a deep historical chronology of state-driven forestry. He scrutinizes the interactions between a modernizing external forestry administration, starting in the first quarter of the 20th century, and the local ways to conceptualize and manage the forest. Fitting, on the other hand, focuses on the impact of late modernity, what Lipovetsky (2005) has defined as hypermodernity, on agricultural strategies, especially those related to corn cultivation. While Mathews engages a territorializing modernity by focusing on state controlled forestry, Fitting considers the impacts of early 21st-century neoliberal deregulation, and the emergence of a post-NAFTA neoliberal nature. These differences, far from making the two books incomparable, help us to discern a political genealogy of different waves of state-market intervention in a Mexican rural context.

Since the main focus of the analyses is the unfolding of international regulations and national administrations, it will come as no surprise that both books invest considerable effort in discussing the role of bureaucracy, science, expertise and knowledge as tools to claim authority and legitimacy for outside managers as they compete against local agents for control of natural resources. The main contribution of these two books, especially Mathews’, is their emphasis on the role of local agency in reshaping the practices of public officials while they are trying to implement a national agenda with bureaucratic and scientific tools. Too often, studies of governmentality tend to focus on the state and the impacts of its policies on locals. These perspectives overemphasize the role of external agents and their top-down approach. Mathews avoids this by focusing on dialogues between forestry officials and indigenous people. In *Instituting Nature*, he offers an excellent genealogy of the emergence and consolidation of modern forestry in Mexico across the twentieth century. He questions the unilateral predominance of expert knowledge and bureaucrats in the actual materialization of the practice of forestry and governance, showing instead that it is a dialogue of performances, a “coproduction,” as he puts it. He argues that scientific and local bureaucracies mutually reshape each other in their attempt to impose their practice and agendas in the field. This analysis allows Mathews to discuss the process of state-making behind bureaucratic practice, and to demonstrate how these processes are dominated by “uncertain authority.”

Fitting follows a very interesting itinerary throughout *The Struggle for Maize*, starting with a discussion of the transformative introduction of genetically modified maize in the Mexican countryside, and emphasizing the discourses and

alliances that emerged around it. Her work on changes in local agricultural strategies as responses to fundamental structural shifts at an international level extends Akhil Gupta's earlier work in *Postcolonial Developments* (1998). Global frameworks and transnational homogenous regulations and market stimuli do not necessarily result in the homogenization of all localities. Fitting picks up some of the threads announced by Lind and Barham (2004) in their analysis of maize and tortillas by expanding and updating our understanding of the production of a commodity with a very complex social life: a commodity that has become global and that has recently been affected by dramatic structural changes in the framework that regulates its very nature (at a genetic level) and governance (at a national and international level). The second part of the book discusses how local households have adapted to the extreme pressures brought about by the post-NAFTA years. Fitting presents these households as diversified transnational economic units that subsidize corn cultivation with national and transnational wages (remittances). This is important as it connects the study to two fundamental trends in peasant issues: diversification and dependability.

Diversification is a key feature of peasant economies; pre-modern agrarian communities do not specialize. Monocropping is a contribution of the capitalist economy, while more traditional practices tended to raise a diverse portfolio of cultivars. Their integration into modernizing larger frameworks brought about unprecedented tensions in peasant ways of life, but it also created new opportunities to diversify their economies. In addition, there is a search for dependability. As Fitting puts it, nowadays it is often cheaper to buy imported corn than to produce it. The indigenous households, however, have not stopped producing corn; it is a highly productive cultivar that is a fundamental part of the local diet and has a constant market when cash income is needed. It is a safe investment in a volatile world.

The implementation of modernity often results in a conflict of moral economies. Mathews and Fitting describe two instances of this interaction between different ways of understanding sociality and economy. On the one hand, Mathews emphasizes the hybrid product emerging from the friction between scientific and indigenous forestry. Fitting, on the other hand, highlights the capacity of local communities to expand their traditional behavioral portfolios and adapt to new socioeconomic conditions. In both cases, local, fairly isolated communities and environments are explained as the result of its participation and interaction with international flows of people, information, commodities, and knowledge.

Appadurai could have been thinking about these two books when he wrote "the work of the imagination ... is neither purely emancipatory nor entirely disciplined but is a space of contestation in which individuals and groups seek to annex the global into their own practices of the modern." (1996:4).

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Les études anthropologiques sur le vodou ont une longue histoire, depuis Jean Price-Mars (1928), Herskovits (1937), Simpson (1940) et Métraux (1958), jusqu'à McCarthy Brown (1991) et McAllister (2002), pour ne citer que quelques exemples d'études marquantes. Longtemps, l'anthropologie du vodou s'est employée à une triple tâche, à savoir démontrer 1) que l'on avait affaire à une religion (et non à de la sorcellerie), 2) qu'il s'agissait de pratiques et de croyances normales dans la société haïtienne (et non de pathologies psychiques) et enfin 3) que le vodou était issu de sources africaines et/ou européennes. Nicolas Vonarx se propose quant à lui d'aborder l'étude du vodou dans la perspective de l'ethnomédecine. Après un premier passage dans l'île en 1998 et 1999, l'auteur a mené une enquête de terrain de huit mois en zone rurale (2002-2003), dans le département de l'Artibonite, dans le village de Bwa-Bijou. A partir de cette enquête, il défend une thèse simple qui remettrait « en question plus d'un demi-siècle de production socio-anthropologique sur le vodou » : « le vodou haïtien est un système de soins ou une ethnomédecine », « il faut l'accepter comme un système de soin aux dimensions magico-religieuses, au lieu de le définir d'emblée comme une religion afro-américaine dont certaines dimensions renvoient à la maladie » (p. 32). Le propos a le mérite d'être clair, reste à savoir s'il est pertinent.