

ing thrives in fascinating tensions, and she demonstrates that these tensions serve to enliven and invigorate the orisha tradition more than threaten it. In Trinidad, for example, anti-syncretic or re-Africanizing movements seek to purify orisha of Christian traces (in this mirroring movements in Brazil led by, among others, the late priestess, Mãe Stella; and in the United States, at Oyotunji Village, South Carolina). These actors sometimes travel to Nigeria for special initiations. Seeking authentic, orthodox, Yoruba consensus, they instead are often bewildered. Accompanying Trini seekers to Africa, she learns that there is as great a variety of Yoruba versions of “the authentic” as in the maze of claims back at home. Against the back-to-Africa move, meanwhile, other orisha priests in Trinidad foreground their local, Trini genealogy and inheritance as the foundations of their authority. Then too, Castor invokes the pregnant phrase, “spiritual ethnicity” (68) to suggest identities that are religiously African without being Black. Here Trinidad’s orisha practitioners seem to usefully complicate and push against U.S. notions of race, but this insight remains frustratingly underdeveloped.

Perhaps of most interest is how the “return” to Africa, which (Castor argues) has accelerated since 2001, helped spur the elaboration of Ifá lineages in Trinidad. This is noteworthy because until recently Cuba was the sole site in the Americas where recognized, institutionalized Ifá genealogies are entrenched. Even where Ifá has been replanted in Brazil, as scholars like Stefania Capone have documented, it is mostly due to Cuban and Yoruba religious entrepreneurs, not homegrown. The fact that institutionalized genealogies of Ifá initiation also exist in Trinidad, and are not solely an import, is an important contribution. Trini versions of Ifá are transforming the oracle and its professional guild, not least by at least sometimes initiating women, something rarely, and only controversially, done in Cuba. Yet this nationalized version of Ifá is authorized by appeal to Yorubaland and West Africa. There, or so it is claimed, Ifá is not exclusively male. Transforming returns: Africa, articulated in and through visions of Black Power transnationally, shapes the idea of the indigenized, truly Trini version of orisha.

N. Fadeke Castor’s monograph offers a wonderful tour of such generative tensions. Written in an accessible style, it is nevertheless perhaps not an easy undergraduate or introductory text. To do its work of showing the dynamic, shifting frames of claims-making in orisha, the text asks its readers to already know a good amount about the Yoruba, the Caribbean, and Afro-American religions in general. Even so, given how well Castor writes herself and her processes of learning and initiation into the ethnography, the book offers insights on transforming returns at multiple levels.

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Cepek, Michael L.: *Life in Oil. Cofán Survival in the Petroleum Fields of Amazonia*. Austin: University

of Texas Press, 2018. 286 pp. ISBN 978-14773-1508-8. Price: \$ 27.95

The current context depicted by “Life in Oil” begins with the discovery of oil in Amazonian Ecuador (where the indigenous Cofán people inhabit) and the arrival of the corporate entity (Texaco, Texas Petroleum Company) that explored for oil, built a trans-Ecuadorian pipeline – which brought it over the Andes to the Pacific coast (105) – and extracted oil from 1964 until 1992. More recently, “[i]n 2011, an Ecuadorian court awarded the Cofán and other residents of Amazonian Ecuador roughly \$19 billion for the damages Texaco had done to them” (12) – although it is still unknown when the legal battle (which should be now in the US Supreme Court) will finally end.

In the meantime, the scenario depicted by Michael Cepek is not devoid of those apocalyptic elements that made the Cofán, “victims of history who deserve material compensation for oil’s assault on their lives” (11). The so many oil spills in the lands and rivers surrounding them depict an apocalypse that has already occurred and, more importantly, has stayed with them. The Cofán apocalypse is one they have to live with on a daily basis, and one that is not only “out there” (in a supposedly external environment), but literally inside their sick bodies.

Such scenario explains in part the actions that makes Cepek’s chronicle that of an abdication. In 2013, after years of opposition, “one of the world’s most anti-oil indigenous peoples” (167) finally decided to allow seismic operations and oil exploration on their land (18) to China National Petroleum Corporation (called BGP or simply *la compañía* by the Cofán) (193–195). Whatever its causes might be (which seem to be a mixture of fear and hope), Cepek describes in positive terms the suspension of Cofán opposition: “Saying yes [to oil] would mean more resources, more control, and less damaging extraction process” (217). In general, his book shows a more or less restrained apology of this shift from indigenous reject of oil to its acceptance as part of their lives (and bodies): “Ironically ... the oil industry might allow them to ensure the future of their culture” (220).

Nevertheless, despite this optimism, “Life in Oil” describes with clarity the negative effects of this abdication. It lets us see, for example, one of its most visible consequences: the (consolidation of) monetisation of life in the town of Dureno (*cantón* Lago Agrio, province of Sucumbíos). In fact, the flood of oil was followed by the flood of money, most of which was (predictably) wasted in commodities such as industrial beer (198), parties, and festivals (41). In consequence, if this was not the situation already, it is clear that after this process, the Cofán now “need money as much as they need the forest” (191).

This money, nevertheless, does not eliminate at all the “undecidabilities” (Bubandt 2017) that seem to saturate Cofán lives, from the possible reasons for their abdication, to their ultimate “life in oil ... [as] a form of slow, confusing, and ultimately unknowable violence”

(10). Actually, although Cofán people have been exposed to oil for around half a century, “[t]hey do not know the technicalities of how oil – and the wastes generated in its production – move through the environment and into their bodies” (126). Cepek reminds us that they cannot know it since, in fact, “[n]o one has studied oil’s specific effects on the health of Cofán people” (149). In sum, “*contaminación* is a strange kind of dirtiness and a strange form of poison ... a relatively new concept that is difficult to express” (133).

Both monetisation and uncertainty seem to permeate also Cepek’s involvement in Cofán life. From its beginning until nowadays, money has a visible role in the stay of the author among the Cofán. After working on conservation programs in Dureno as an employee of a museum from the USA (160), he now serves “on the board of an organization that funds Cofán political and environmental efforts” (54). And his own fieldwork seems to have also participated in the apparently unavoidable monetisation of the community’s relationships. His collaborators, his research assistants, and also those who appear in the book’s photographs are paid in cash. In what concerns the pervasive uncertainty of life in Dureno, it could be well illustrated, for example, through Cofán fears of being kidnapped by foreigners (87–90). Cepek is explicitly aware of how this fear of his hosts ends up affecting him: “Cofán people were the ones who drew me into their anxiety and apprehension. It was them, not me, who decided that Manuel [a *cocama*] wanted to capture me” (92).

Regarding his knowledge of life in Dureno, Cepek relies on his twenty years of fieldwork. Uncertainty is thus replaced by certitude when the author relies on his remarkable ability to speak the Cofán language – “I am one of a handful of non-Cofán people who speak A’ingae ... so I could collect the most accurate information from the largest number of people” (14) – and his long-term friendship with some of the families of Dureno – such as that of Alejandro, who frequently appears in “tourist brochures, coffee-table books, and documentary films” (19) and meets tourists eager to drink *yaje* (85). In what concerns friendship, another equally key (but maybe less visible) protagonist in Cepek’s ethnography is Randy Borman, the son of two missionaries from the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) who “identifies as Cofán” (xiii), has become one of their leaders, and whose opinions, perspectives, and support to Cepek are frequently quoted in the book.

As happens with any ethnography, it could partially be seen as a product of how its author did (or not) manage the always complex set of friendships and enmities he or she confronts during fieldwork. If there are no individuals whose images could be strongly contrasted with those of Alejandro and Randy, the reader will find two groups of foreigners that greatly differ one from the other: the members of the SIL and the *cocama* (defined as non-indigenous Spanish speakers).

On the one hand, although SIL was forced out from Ecuador in 1982 by different indigenous organizations,

its missionaries present in Dureno are described as making “life-saving medical interventions” (244) or warning Cofán people “that untreated water from the Aguarico and most other rivers was far too contaminated for consumption” (144). On the other hand, the *cocama* – mostly incarnated by “poor Ecuadorians from crowded Andean and coastal provinces” (107) – are associated by the Cofán with “violence and death” (92) in such a degree that “[m]ore than anything or anyone else, the *cocama* cause the inhabitants of Dureno to question their survival as a people” (92). The balance of their presence sometimes seems to be so categorical – they “brought virtually nothing to the Cofán except trauma, disease, and dispossession” (195) – that one could see no other alternative but Cofán rejection – which is expressed in different forms from interdiction of intermarriages (117) to the denial of *cocama*’s suffering (194). In sum, whether or not the missionaries’ friendly image might be partly justified by the fact that “[f]ew Cofán people have anything bad to say about them” (67), one cannot but observe its strong contrast with the image of the *cocama* settlers – who in fact constitute the majority of inhabitants of Amazonian Ecuador (194).

These are the main protagonists (but not all of them) that we find in “Life in Oil.” Natives such as Alejandro and his Cofán family, and foreigners such as the son of SIL missionaries and the *cocama* (who staff both mining corporations and conservationist NGOs) are also the usual components of the narratives that show what Cepek calls “the dismal imagery” (51) of the usually well-intentioned accounts, news, and descriptions written by ethnographers, travellers, tourists, and journalists. Although “not entirely inaccurate,” Cepek finds them “entirely one-sided” (52) and unfortunately persistent: “outsiders will continue to ... search for remnants of digestible cultural difference ... They will use the community to tell a story they already know: oil is a nearly unstoppable force that lays waste to humans and the environment ... [They] will not take the time to listen closely to the people of Dureno and to learn something new from them. Few will understand what oil has done to the Cofán and how they have managed to survive in its midst” (55). As happens with so many other ethnographies and news about Amerindian peoples, instead of listening to them, foreigners depict “Cofán’s cultural difference only in order to note its adulteration or bemoan its disappearance” (52).

As any good ethnographer, Cepek intends to “hear Cofán people’s message in the terms they favor” (12), and “to share the largely unknown stories Cofán people create themselves” (14). Avoiding “common understandings of the simplicity of the Cofán-oil encounter” (235) that take Cofán people either as victims or as beacons, Cepek suggests that what he describes is not only “one more chapter of the story of violence, sickness, and dispossession they already knew” (235), and that they are able to “mobilize” oil in order to create “a more promising space for themselves” (235). Cofán people “are poor, sick, and unable to maintain many of their

most valued traditions. Their sense of themselves, though, remains strong" (10), their "way of life is not completely dead" (42), their "ever-present humor" (168) seems unbeatable.

Finally, one of the more interesting suggestions of this very insightful and personal chronicle of an Amerindian experience of extractivism, is "the possibility of reimagining the omnipresent commodity [oil] from a novel, provocative perspective" (15). According to Cepek, an ethnographic approach to "the impact of oil on Cofán lives will motivate us to rethink and transform our own relationship to the substance [oil]" (15). To the extent that ethnography can aspire to become a form of reflexive reimagination of our relationships with the main components of the world, "Life in Oil" will remain a courageous, honest and nuanced account of contemporary Amerindian lives and dilemmas.

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Domdey, Jana, Gesine Drews-Sylla und Justyna Gołabek (Hrsg.): *AnOther Africa? (Post-)Koloniale Afrikaimaginationen im russischen, polnischen und deutschen Kontext*. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2016. 409 pp. ISBN 978-3-8253-6616-2. (Akademiekonferenzen, 23) Preis: € 48,00

The volume appeared as a result of a conference held in Heidelberg in 2012. It contains 15 articles divided into four sections with the introduction written by the first two of three editors of the volume. A short section with the biographies of the authors comes at the end of the volume. Four articles are in English, the other ones (including "Introduction") in German. One of the English articles presented during the above mentioned conference was already published in another collection, though in German, in 2014 (that fact was duly acknowledged there by the contributor).

The content was divided into four sections. The first – "Popular Africa – Lines of Development in (Travel) Literature and Film" – contains four articles. Matthias Schwartz writes on the origin of the images of Africa in the Soviet adventure novels and science fiction. Dirk Götsche deals with the narrative on Africa and history politics presented in new German novels about Namibia. Irina Novikova takes on the racial question in the Soviet cinema. While Justyna Tabaszewska searches for traces of postcolonial reflection in the contemporary popular Polish travel books written by celebrities. Section two – "Multifaceted/Multiple-Coded Africa – Shifts and Projections" – contains another four articles. The first two by Paweł Zajas and Dirk Uffelmann deal with the 19th-century material written by Polish writers (A. Rehman and H. Sienkiewicz). Nadjib Sadikou focuses on Arnold Stadler's novel "Ausflug nach Afrika" (1997, 2006²), while Jana Domdey analyses the novel "Schutzgebiet" (2009) by Thomas von Steinaecker. Still another four articles come in the third section – "(Post)Socialist Africa – Imaginations between East and West." Apollon Davidson and Irina Filatova present the

reasons and ways in which some Russian historians and political scientists wrote about South Africa between the 1920s and the 1950s. Ingrid Laurien focuses on the West-German narrative about South Africa till the Soweto uprising. Svetlana Boltovskaja's interest is placed on the images of Russia, the Russians, and the Africans from the perspective of the sub-Saharan students in the Soviet Union and the Russian Federation. Carlotta von Maltzan deals with the controversy concerning the socialist perspective of the GDR on Africa presented in the novel "Tintenpalast" by Olaf Müller. Section four – "Travels to Africa – With and in Literature" – contains only three articles. Justyna Gołabek focuses on the matters raised by the expedition of Stefan Szolc Rogoziński to Cameroun in 1882–85. Michaela Holdenried deals with narrative figurations of inversion in recent German novels (Urs Widmer's "Im Kongo" [1996], Arnold Stadler's "Ausflug nach Afrika" [2006], and Alex Capus' "Eine Frage der Zeit" [2007]). Finally, Gesine Drews-Sylla writes about Viktor Erofeev's novel "Pjat' rek žizni" (1998).

An attempt to enclose so diverse material in a volume under one common title presents itself as a hugely demanding challenge. The diversity of contents analysed in the volume and a variety of perspectives employed surpasses almost all expectations. In a way, "Introduction" gives a good overview of the diversity of the contexts and it contains an attempt to bind the various contributions together. The editors also indicate the difficulties that appear when one tries to operate too narrowly within a discourse that has been developed in the English and French postcolonial studies. The colonial experiences of the Germans, Russians, and Poles are quite different from the English and French ones. It could have seemed that these three cultural spaces – the German, Russian, and Polish ones – were so closely entwined during the last two hundred years that setting the results of research together in an apparently comparative perspective with an eye on the postcolonial studies could be quite enriching. That has proved true to some extent. However, these three cultural contexts show themselves very diverse at any closer examination, i. e., they had developed according to completely distinct dynamics. Difficulties in retaining the all-encompassing perspective are already seen in "Introduction," where the description combines the Russian and Polish contexts together, while the German one is described separately. That division is quite ironic, while the 19th-century Polish material analysed in the volume is more related to the German milieu than to the Russian one. In addition, the contemporary travel books authored by the Polish celebrities and analysed in another article also draw on the old Western stereotypes.

The variety of the volume's content is multidimensional. The types of the analysed material are diverse – travel books, successive reporting from journeys, various kinds of novels, and in addition films. Some authors focus their attention on one work, others compare and assess a number of them. It is not always quite clear