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Crude Domination: An Anthropology of Oil. *Andrea Behrends, Stephen Reyna, and Günther Schlee*, eds. New York: Berghahn Books, 2013. 325 pp.

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It has become something of a truism that crude oil underlies all aspects of our lives. Yet only rarely are the specific relations of this well-worn fact subject to much scrutiny. We all know oil matters; exactly how, it matters not. The point of *Crude Domination* is to direct ethnographic attention to the question of how oil matters. This edited volume aims to describe, with boots on the ground, the effects of hydrocarbon development: the easy, fabulous wealth it seems to offer alongside the intractable violence that often swirls around such petro-promises. There is much to be commended in the ambition of this volume, building as it does on the work of Andrew Apter, Suzana Sawyer, and Fernando Coronil and suggesting as it does the timely need for a more deliberate, a more vivid, and a more grounded anthropology of oil.

One would hope such an engagement to be a two-way street: reworking the practice of anthropological inquiry around the particulars of crude oil, from pipelines to pollution, as well as rethinking the significance of crude oil from what modalities of life it enables, from unloosed masculinity to enclosed development (or even stunted ecologies). Ethnographers of all stripes have taken note of the manifold presences of hydrocarbons today, and many would welcome just such a field statement. Yet *Crude Domination*, with a few exceptions, steers close to one specific problem: how hydrocarbon speculation trickles down into adjacent communities. What takes precedence here is not a wide-angled apprehension of the social shape and shaping of hydrocarbons, but

a rather narrow concern with how the glint of spectacular petro-wealth can electrify inherited distinctions and harbored anxieties. On this front, the 12 assembled chapters are quite superb. Crude oil, however, remains a bit player, raising the action here and there but never quite occupying center stage. The voices of company workers and state officials are wholly absent in many places, as is the tangle and tenure of hydrocarbon infrastructure. As a result, this volume is not so much a comprehensive turn “towards an anthropology of oil” (3) as it is an anthropology of out-of-the-way localities visited upon by a massive influx of capital.

In their introduction, Reyna and Behrends attempt a synthesis of the anthropology of oil under the banner of “crude domination” (5). Taking the widely discussed (and debated) macroeconomic correlations of natural resources and authoritarian rule at face value—a proposition that some of the contributors flatly reject—the editors outline an anthropology of oil squarely focused on how ordinary people live under, and make sense of, the structural reality of the “resource curse.” Here, anthropology’s job is to fill in the local flavor of established economic fact/flat. The “investigation of oil’s crazy curse is the research object of this anthropology of oil” (6). The resulting formulation leans heavily on the conceptualization of domination. Suggesting that students of crude oil have all but ignored domination, the editors propose an agenda that will finally turn attention to the kinds of domination that flourish in and around the oil economy. By “domination” they seem to mean the uneven regulation and distribution of petro-cash (here, a discussion of governance or even the perspectives of Achille Mbembe or Timothy Mitchell would have been helpful). This leads Reyna and Behrends to relate hydrocarbon development to a piñata at a children’s birthday party: “When oil is discovered it is as if a gigantic piñata has been found, and everybody wants some of the candy” (23). With this metaphor in mind, “crude domination” is defined as the resulting scramble between stronger and weaker bodies to lay hold of a bit of candy when the goodies come pouring

out. As an analytic tool, “crude domination” is about as sharp as a sledgehammer and just as subtle.

That said, many subsequent chapters are excellent descriptions of how any inkling of sudden wealth can inject new and often violent significance into various curtains of human difference, ethnic or otherwise. Instead of being worn loosely, the arrival of this petro-lottery can turn various colonial and national (not to mention ethnological) partitions into the stuff of trench warfare, breaking the lived world apart with petty distinctions and half-forgotten fault lines. Many of the contributors devote their analysis to the historical excavation of these minor fault lines that the promise of oil rents has transformed into potent political constituencies, either by sins of commission or omission. A prickly question remains on these breakups: is there something uniquely divisive about crude oil or would any impending bonanza do the same? Addressing the Darfur region, Andrea Behrends suggests rampant hydrocarbon speculation in Chad and Sudan has given new momentum to longstanding local disputes. Michael Watts, with his characteristic mix of barely concealed outrage and meticulous analysis, tosses aside flat depictions of Nigeria that consistently misread it as failed in the abstract and describes instead the slow fracturing of a bustling society along the lines of repurposed colonial categories and hijacked hydrocarbon infrastructure. The Niger Delta may be in a social and ecological tailspin, but it is breaking apart in a meaningful manner.

Other contributors find a gentler, if no less consequential, unfolding of distinction around hydrocarbon windfalls in Latin America. Tracking the spatial reverberations of a student demonstration in Camiri, Bolivia, Bret Gustafson describes how protesters throw a wrench in the region’s energy network by occupying a key chokepoint. While the impact of their immediate demands may be fleeting, Gustafson suggests the political scales and constituencies articulated by their protest will have lasting influence. Naomi Schiller offers a clever

tale of how Venezuelan barrio residents and state officials both jockey to legitimate their political position vis-à-vis the other in a petro-funded community media project. John Gledhill, in a contribution that moves against the tempo of this volume by staying close to hydrocarbon workers, offers a helpful comparative overview of popular investments in, and state manipulations of, the promise of crude oil in Brazil, Mexico, and Venezuela. He is particularly good at teasing out the sometimes revolutionary and sometimes reactionary role of labor unions in the state management of hydrocarbons in Latin America.

Crude Domination is adept at describing processes of social differentiation in proximity to hydrocarbon developments. Although it would have been helpful to put this in dialogue with what we already know of social differentiation in the expanse of capitalism or colonial rule—Eric Wolf or Ann Stoler would have been a welcome point of reference—the chapters offer striking examples of what happens when a petro-lottery, or perhaps any lottery, arrives in a place of sedimented difference. (Do note: the chapters are divided on whether the social differences refracted through hydrocarbon development exist as the basic units of history or are made meaningful in history.) The newly active fault lines shown in this volume will no doubt be of interest to students of energy politics in Africa, Russia, and Latin America (the Middle East and North America, two fairly important energy regions, are not included).

Many journalistic and scholarly depictions take the hydrocarbon complex to be, in Hannah Appel’s (2012:693) memorable phrase, a “black box with predictable effects,” namely cash, and explain accordingly. It certainly can be that (and often labors to appear just so), but it is also much more and much less. An intentional anthropology of oil is certainly needed today, but the breadth of such a field should go beyond the local reverberations of petro-promises and attend equally to hydrocarbons as an embedded social, ecological, and infrastructural project. This means taking what hydrocarbons do as seriously as what is done with them.

References Cited

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Distilling the Influence of Alcohol: Aguardiente in Guatemalan History. *David Carey Jr.*, ed. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2012. 212 pp.

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Although the history of Guatemala is often told through externally oriented commodities like coffee or bananas, *Distilling the Influence of Alcohol* upends these more familiar narratives by looking at distilled sugar cane spirits, a commodity produced internally for local consumption. Readers interested in Central American political economy and social history will find that *Distilling the Influence* thus takes a significant step in "decaffeinating" Guatemalan history. But, perhaps more importantly, for those less concerned with Guatemala or foodstuff commodity chains, Carey's edited volume provides a wealth of historical data around unexpected gendered contestations against the state, debates over privatizations of public goods, and resilient cultural and class-based arguments repeatedly levied in order to challenge the morality of elites. *Distilling the Influence* is at its strongest in relation to the Maya, mestizo, and even African American voices and lives reanimated in its pages. By focusing on alcohol "drinkways"—especially the production and consumption by indigenous communities, the book treats Maya contrabandists and moonshiners as Gramscian organic intellectuals who challenge ladino elite state norms.

In the first chapter, "Consumption, Custom, and Control," Stacey Schwartzkopf argues for a "cultural commodities perspective" that incorporates methodological lessons from both ethnography and historical document-

based research. Like the ethnographic custom-centered inquiry of the 20th and 21st centuries which challenged simplistic images of indigenous drunkenness, Schwartzkopf attends to the ways economic demand is framed by relational and religious contexts in colonial and early national Guatemala. He does so through an attention to changes in recipes and to elite versus indigenous approaches to alcohol disclosed in the archival record. Before the introduction of sugar cane and the technology necessary for distillation (cane stalks traveled with Columbus on his first journeys, distillation came later), honey, a rarity, served as a precolonial sweetener and as a base for fermented drinks. As a sign of elite status, alcoholic beverages were regulated in the imperial centers of precontact Mexico and Peru. However, the less-centralized control of alcohol consumption in Guatemala permitted more experimentation with newer forms of drink and a quicker democratization of consumption, once fast-growing cane made sugar much more accessible. The accessibility allowed locally fermented cane beverages (*chicha*, not to be mistaken for the Andean corn-based drink of the same name) to play a central role as a social lubricant, an important accompaniment in religious and political ceremonies.

But while state and church authorities had tolerated the unregulated production and consumption of fermented alcoholic beverages from the 16th to the 18th centuries, the rise of contraband stills pitted the Maya against a growing political-economic elite with transnational capitalist linkages. Schwartzkopf finds three transitions in the 19th century that mark consumption and production in the early national period. First, as distilled aguardiente took over from less potent fermented beverages, large-scale producers came to dominate the legally recognized alcohol industry, thus concentrating sanctioned production in the hands of a few. Concordantly, the permissive attitude that permitted lax enforcement of laws regulating the making, transporting, and vending of alcohol shifted. Instead, the 19th century saw such an increase in the selective application of alcohol laws that the rural judicial system focused on little