

suggests that a chaotic and localized left will have little impact on enacting real and long-lasting change.

Apart from offering a set of snapshots from around the globe, *Contesting Neoliberalism* documents a fundamental tension within the politics of contestation. This tension exists between reifying neoliberalism and reifying resistance; between community service and a politics of oppositions, between community-based struggles (which may reinforce inter-community competition) and struggles that call for macro-structural reform; between coping and exploiting neoliberalism's contradictions. These are not incommensurable tensions for if neoliberalism is an ideology that touches down at multiple scales, so too can a more progressive alternative.

References

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Jake Kosek, *Understories: The Political Life of Forests in Northern New Mexico*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006. 380 pp. ISBN 0-8223-3847-5 (paperback).

Jake Kosek has delivered a critical, compelling analysis of an enormous topic. *Explaining* New Mexico is no easy task. It's an inscrutable place with a violent, complex history. Doing it critically has, to my mind, not been done, until now.

Previous geographic volumes on New Mexico have focused on cultural hearths and ethnic homelands. And any visit to New Mexico would suggest that this approach is intuitive. But these books, despite the inference of history and tradition that goes with the *hearth* and *homeland* concepts in geography, have often produced synchronic analyses that ignore race and political economy and reinforce cultural analyses of poverty and environmental degradation (eg Carlson 1990; Nostrand 1992).

In *Understories* we find an examination of environmental politics through an extended case study of the politics of difference, particularly the way race and class establish the contours for that politics over land in New Mexico. Kosek dispenses with the *Hispano Homeland*, a concept that has so hamstrung previous analyses of New Mexico, and instead approaches the politics of nature in New Mexico through an attention to the ways difference is created and policed. His is a dialectical approach, so the politics of difference are also shaped by the politics of nature. Kosek seeks to “expand the terrain on which we understand forest politics” (p 274). For this reason, Kosek offers an ethnography of forest politics in which we

spend very little time in the forest. His methodology follows from his central claim: "Environmental politics, questions of access and control of resources, and issues of traditional land-use practices are conditioned not just in the forests themselves but in nuclear laboratories, industrial waste grounds, genetic research centers, and other diverse locales where future natures are being made" (p 275).

In the Introduction, Kosek explains the "racial and class tensions that powerfully haunt so many aspects of everyday life" (p 5) in New Mexico. From the beginning, he rejects previous "cultural pathologies" analyses. He argues that northern New Mexico has never "existed in isolation from the international circuits of extraction" (p 21). He maps a book that seeks to suggest a "more critical interrogation" of the paths the politics of nature and the production of difference travel in debates over the forest in New Mexico.

Chapter 1 is an examination of two acts of resistance to historic land loss, one by New Mexico's heirs to Spanish and Mexican land grants and the other by Pueblo Indian activists. Juxtaposing these events allows Kosek to connect contradictory historical claims over land and identity. Kosek suggests, relative to Hispanos, that these events illustrate how memories of past injustices and longing tie Hispanos to historic grant lands and ultimately to each other, yet do so in profoundly contradictory ways. This suggests "[t]hese stories of origins and the injustices associated with the land are both collective fictions and undeniable truths" (p 34). This is a difficult chapter in which Kosek tries to make an explosive political point. It reflects Kosek's theoretical commitment to the past as being produced in the present. But I'm not quite sure he pulled it off in this chapter. I appreciate the theoretical point here but Kosek transforms the violent enclosures to the common lands into a nostalgic tale of memory and grieving that binds Hispanos together in a shared sense of loss.

Chapter 2 examines the trajectories of forest governance in New Mexico. As Kosek describes, the United States Forest Service came to manage most of the former Spanish and Mexican land grants rejected by US courts and operates as a "de facto governing body" (p 66). The chapter traces the foundations of forest management through the ideas of George Perkins Marsh, Gifford Pinchot and Aldo Leopold.

Chapter 3 is a direct critique of the *Homeland* thesis. New Mexico has never been an isolated backwater, but rather an important node in the circuits of capital: "the village of Truchas did not persevere because people doggedly resisted external economic changes; indeed, it owes its continued existence to these same labor practices and their attendant patterns of exploitation and migration" (p 116).

In Chapter 4 Kosek argues that mainstream environmentalism is "haunted by the specters of its own racist creation" (p 180). He traces the development of western environmentalism within the context of white anxieties over racial purity and pollution. Kosek suggests that the same eugenic-driven desires for pure racial categories have infected the preoccupation with pure wilderness among environmentalists. Kosek is careful not to call environmentalists racist, but rather suggests that the silence regarding this racist history produces a profoundly problematic environmental politics, particularly in New Mexico as the chapter so deftly shows.

The title of Chapter 5 is worth the price of the book alone and brilliantly encapsulates the often surprising politics of nature in New Mexico. In the fascinating "Smokey Bear is a White Racist Pig", Kosek insightfully argues that Smokey Bear

is an exclusionary racialized nationalist history. Smokey is an agent of the state and represents the replacement of local forms of resource control “in favor of the national good” (p 188).

Chapter 6 is the best in the book. This powerful chapter, if not the entire book, should be required reading for every person who calls themselves an environmentalist. It is theoretically sharp and empirically rich. Anyone who has spent any time in New Mexico understands the strange relationships and deep contradictions between the Los Alamos National Laboratories (locally referred to as “the bomb factory”) and the rest of northern New Mexico: a place of great wealth amid extensive poverty; a place where the agents of national security produce significant local insecurity; a place where so many locals find jobs and yet those jobs seem to reinforce the economic marginalization of the region. Through an analysis of the natures produced and reproduced through the realities and anxieties of nuclear bomb making, Kosek demonstrates how the meanings people attach to the forest are produced in the strangest of places. The nuclear–industrial complex in New Mexico produces new forms of nature that have material impacts on forest conflicts and everyday life. In this important chapter Kosek accomplishes his ambitious goal of expanding the terrain of political struggle over the forest in New Mexico.

This smart and well-written book is the best and most important volume on New Mexico ever written by a geographer. It is the first *critical* political ecology of New Mexico. It builds slowly but eventually does achieve the goal Kosek sets for himself: “to write natural histories and engage in forest politics without recourse to essentialist ideas of nature, while at the same time acknowledging the consequential materiality of the forest in political struggles” (p 285). It will be useful in graduate political ecology seminars. It will also be useful in the ongoing political struggles over the control of forest resources in New Mexico.

References

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~~Neil Castree and Derek Gregory (eds), *David Harvey: A Critical Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006, 324 pp. ISBN 0-631-23518-6 (paperback), US\$ 33.95~~

~~David Harvey is a charismatic representative of the dialectical Marxist, and like any committed delegate he makes it his task to, both, speak of Marx and speak for Marx. His writings, at a minimum from *Social Justice and the City* (1973) to *A Brief*~~