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BOOK REVIEW

Landscapes of Power: Politics of Energy Development in the Navajo Nation. Dana E. Powell, Durham: Duke University Press, 2018, 309 pp.

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The Navajo (or Diné) of the American Southwest are some of the most extensively documented people in anthropology, and after over a century of study, one might think that there are no new insights that can be offered in an ethnographic account focusing on this group. Dana Powell's *Landscapes of Power*, however, offers a fresh, astute, and important look at contemporary life within the context of energy politics on an American Indian Reservation in what is arguably the first modern and consciously post-colonial ethnography of the Diné.

The author's primary purpose is to describe how colonial projects of transnational, extractive energy development unfold politically and play out within a broader context shaped by indigenous histories and experiences. This is a complex account that draws within its purview a range of conflicts and processes related to cultural adaptation and resistance, energy activism, sovereignty, indigenous knowledge and ethical

systems, and claims to social authority and various types of expertise. The analysis is organized around the story of a particular energy development initiative, the Desert Rock Energy Project, a proposed 1,500-megawatt coal-fired power plant that was to operate within the boundaries of the Navajo Nation. In the early years of the 21st century, a partnership between the Navajo government and a multinational energy development corporation, Sithe Global, sought to create an electric power generation station near a remote Dine' community. This book documents the ascent and demise of this effort.

Over the past several decades, a number of previously developed coal mines and power-generating plants on or near the Navajo Nation fueled extractive industries that brought some measure of economic progress, in terms of local employment and a rise in certain material standards of living, but at the same time damaged essential components of the Diné world, including the well-being of people, the health of various flora and fauna, and the integrity of the landscape itself. Powell deftly illustrates how tribal sovereignty as it is enacted in the context of energy development brings about some tribal control over material resources, but she also shows how such control is ultimately predicated on, and in some ways

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compromised by, interdependencies with the federal government and energy development corporations. This is a tribal political and economic structure dependent on a culturally and environmentally damaging energy industry—one that literally takes power from Diné lands and sends it to cities far away to be consumed by non-Navajos. This takes place as many Navajo families remain without electrical power, even as they live under the shadows of transmission lines. Local residents develop their own views of sovereignty and self-determination, which reflect a critical consciousness of the impact of energy development on their land, livelihoods, and families. As a result, they are unwilling to pay the physical and spiritual costs of these forms of extraction. Instead, many look to wind and solar power as clean, sustainable alternatives to coal energy that are more attuned to Diné ethics and codes for living.

The book contextualizes the debate over the Desert Rock project by attending to the decades long legacies of previous extractive energy practices, including coal and uranium mining, and their physical, social, and cultural effects on the Dine'. It shows how a local form of energy activism developed in response to the proposed project, an activism shaped by previous experiences and which grew out of indigenous ideas and practices related to political power and social authority.

The analysis is organized around a conceptual framework consisting of four interrelated modalities of power—arenas of discourse and practices that are deployed, expressed, and contested over the course of the debate regarding the

Desert Rock project. These are the major domains within which struggles regarding energy infrastructure, sustainability, and sovereignty on the Navajo Nation are engaged in by numerous individuals occupying different and often multiple social positions. These four modalities include the material–subterranean, cultural–political, knowledge–practice, and ethical–cosmological.

One of the central questions addressed in this book is how different notions of tribal sovereignty are developed, emphasized, and put into practice in the context of the conflict over Diné energy futures and lifeways. Powell uses ethnographic accounts to establish how sovereignty is an emergent process. This is most evident in the description of a series of local public meetings to collect responses to the draft environmental impact statement associated with the development project. Speakers at these meetings reflected a wide range of individuals and organizations, including elders, environmental activists, scientists, elected officials, local residents, and community leaders. Powell evaluates these hearings as acts of performative democracy that attempt to demonstrate that the public's voice is heard, even as they are tightly structured and meant to avoid certain topics and representations. While corporate and governmental interests stressed various forms of discourse directed at technical and scientific authority, many local residents who would bear the more direct impacts of the development emphasized sociocultural and ethical issues.

One of the strongest and most original aspects of this book is the assessment it

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offers of how contemporary Diné artistic expressions serve as an affective genre for ethical and cultural evaluations of the lingering damage of extractive energy pasts and for envisioning cleaner, more sustainable futures. In addition, the main analytical chapters of the book are interwoven with interludes that offer insights on the ethnographic process and the lived experience of fieldwork. These are reflective descriptions of people enmeshed in everyday webs of energy use, decisions, and their consequences, as well as ruminations on the position of the anthropologist and the legacies of fieldwork. These interludes not only provide greater ethnographic detail to fill out the main analysis but also allow the author to engage with several contemporary issues in ethnographic theory related to positionality, identity, and the lived experience of energy use on the Navajo Nation.

Alongside these and other strengths, there are several lost opportunities. Powell hints at the complexity of her position as both an ethnographer and an energy activist, but she does not offer the reader enough information to get a firm sense of how these multiple positions affected the conduct of research and the final product. It is also unclear how the Navajo Nation tribal government, especially the historic preservation office, controlled the author's research agenda and interpretations and analysis, or the ramifications Diné people faced for participating in this investigation with respect to the Navajo tribal government.

Nevertheless, this book should draw interest from a broad range of readers, including those interested in how

development is theorized in indigenous, post-colonial settings and in historically marginalized communities. Those involved in Native American Studies will likely find this a compelling read, but it should also appeal to others in environmental studies, energy and climate justice, as well as those interested in sustainability in the context of tribal sovereignty. Finally, this work is relevant to those engaged in medical anthropology. It underscores the health legacies of colonial, extractive energy development and indicates how structural violence related to these paths of development is embodied over time, across generations and landscapes, and ultimately affects not just the physical body, but social, spiritual, and emotional balance and well-being.