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Review: Living with oil : Promises, peaks and declines on  
Mexico's Gulf Coast (L. Breglia)

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Lisa Breglia, *Living with Oil: Promises, Peaks, and Declines on Mexico's Gulf Coast* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2013), pp. x + 313, \$55.00; £39.00, hb.

The political economy and everyday politics of oil extraction are currently highly topical: problems with oil overproduction, decreasing market prices, and the multifaceted environmental harms and social disturbances inflicted by extractive economies on local communities have merged to produce a global crisis. Yet, despite an increasing number of books and articles on the extractive industries published in recent years, the complexities of oil exploitation in Mexico have received scant attention. Lisa Breglia's *Living with Oil* helps to fill this lacuna by offering a unique analysis of the extraction challenges faced by the Mexican parastatal company, Petroleros Mexicanos (PEMEX) – the eleventh largest oil company in the world – in a period of post-peak production and ground-breaking energy reform. The book combines sophisticated political-economic analysis of prospects for the Mexican oil industry in terms of global energy markets and hydro-carbon politics, with the author's rich ethnography among the coastal fisher communities of Isla Aguada, Campeche, south-eastern Mexico. Through in-depth analysis of the fishers' experience of oil as both blessing and curse, Breglia presents the everyday concerns characteristic of oil-affected communities struggling to cope with injustices related to air, soil, and water pollution, and the uneven distribution of oil-related benefits and burdens.

The book is divided into three parts. It begins by analysing theoretical models of extractive economies, characterised by peaks and declines, linking them to discussion of the effects of extraction booms and busts on the fishing communities in Laguna de Términos, Campeche.

Part two presents a detailed ethnographic portrayal of the everyday lives of the fishers of Isla Aguada, dissecting the impact of multiple pressures from globalised oil extraction, a declining shrimping industry, and dwindling artisanal fishing. It also examines the ambiguous negotiations and trade-offs inherent to the oil industry's compensation policies and responsibility programmes. The third section analyses the post-peak politics of oil exploitation, characterised by neoliberal resource governance and an intensification of oil production activities. I also explore the technological complications, environmental risks, and geopolitical uncertainties of instigating oil exploitation in the deep waters of the Gulf of Mexico.

*Living with Oil* is a very welcome contribution to the existing literature on the conflicts over resource extraction and claims for oil justice. Breglia's analysis addresses the multiple actors involved in the booms and busts of oil extraction in Mexico: from transnational oil corporations and the national oil industry to federal, state, and municipal-level government officials, environmental activists, labour unions, local political leaders, and a heterogeneous group of local fishers, including both authorised commercial and unauthorised artisanal fishers. Through her historical overview, Breglia demonstrates how post-peak oil extraction in Mexico is linked to wider patterns of global exploitation of tropical commodities as well as struggles over territorial control of onshore and offshore resource spaces. Simultaneously, she shows how these repetitive boom-and-bust cycles invoke multifaceted hopes and expectations alongside confusion and desperation in the affected communities.

Instead of equating ongoing neoliberalisation in the global energy sector with privatisation, Breglia demonstrates how national oil companies (NOCs) are expanding their role in oil

production to dominate the global oil industry in terms of markets and reserves. Nonetheless, she notes that transnational corporations play a crucial role in conducting the everyday business of oil marketing and profit-making. Thus, while NOCs maintain their access to the global oil supply, multinational oil corporations and oil-services companies increasingly act as their co-dependent private partners. In Mexico, this provokes complex debates about national sovereignty and security in a situation where oil extraction continues to be a cornerstone of Mexican nationalism. Ultimately, Breglia provides a thorough analysis, contextualised by the global energy crisis, of the political economy of Mexican oil extraction wherein important future oil sources are located in the deep waters of the Gulf of Mexico – territories which are technologically demanding and economically costly to exploit.

*Living with Oil* provides a meaningful contribution to both understanding and theorising localised experiences of environmental suffering and social injustice in the midst of globalising resource extraction. It paints a vivid ethnographic portrait of how macro-scale policies and global market forces reinforce complicated power struggles, economic deprivations, and social sufferings within oil-affected communities. Rather than considering local communities merely as passive victims of global forces, however, Breglia offers the convincing case that the fishers are striving to develop their own resilience and resistance strategies against an extractive industry that deeply affects their lives.

In my view, this fine monograph would have been even more interesting if Breglia had added greater ethnographic detail concerning the everyday struggle for environmental and social well-being in the local fisher communities. More discussion of how the fishers perceive the

changes associated with post-peak production and how they cope with environmental risks and social uncertainties related to shifting resource politics could have deepened analysis. Given that most studies of extractive economies in Latin America focus on peasant populations, it would have been enlightening to learn more about the struggles for environmental justice and social dignity among the frontline *fishing* populations.

Despite this small caveat, *Living with Oil* cogently deals with issues of great relevance to several disciplines and fields of research, including anthropology, development studies, environmental sciences, global studies, geography, and political sciences. It offers diverse challenges to conventional literature on resource extraction by urging us to pay closer attention to the complex forces that come into play when oil extraction confronts frontline communities. It is highly recommended to natural and social scientists, policymakers, development experts, environmental activists and social-justice advocates, as well as to anyone interested in critical analyses of global governance, extractive industries, local livelihoods, and concerns for human rights and social justice in the contested territories of resource exploitation.

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