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Book Reviews

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The Marx of Mondragón?

The Myth of Mondragón: Cooperatives, Politics, and Working-Class Life in a Basque Town. Sharryn Kashmir. State University of New York Press. 1996. 243 pp. \$23.95 (pb)

The Mondragón cooperative system in Northern Spain is one that should be of great interest to ecological anthropologists because it is a potential alternative to unsustainable economic systems. The cooperatives are notable because they are industrial, as opposed to the more common type, consumer cooperatives. Based on the "one worker, one vote" principle the cooperatives are both worker owned and managed. In fact, because the Mondragón system raises (and redistributes) capital through its workers it can provide a working model for community based development in undeveloped countries (Stepp 1996). *The Myth of Mondragón* by Sharryn Kashmir is an ethnographic study of the Mondragón cooperatives with an emphasis on the lower tier laborers. Previous studies of Mondragón, especially ones by economists, begin by stating, "When I first visited Mondragón I had serious doubts about its ability to compete with capitalist firms, its ability to be efficient, etc." The researcher then usually claims that Mondragón erased all doubts and that they now believe in the cooperative system. Kashmir's book is the opposite. She states that she began research on Mondragón with the belief that it offered a viable alternative but soon became aware of a high degree of worker dissent. She goes on to claim that the level of worker dissatisfaction is equivalent to those of similar sized capitalist firms and that any claims to harmonious labor-management relations in cooperative firms is indeed a myth. Kashmir places great emphasis on the fact that her work is the first "anthropological" investigation into the Mondragón cooperatives. In addition she places anthropological methods upon a pedestal on which usage of these methods leads to insights that have been neglected by previous social scientists (albeit non-anthropologists) doing research on Mondragón. By failing to do in-depth research with a "working class perspective," in the words of Kashmir, the reader is expected to believe that the numerous economists, sociologists, and other social scientists before her have been oblivious to worker dissatisfaction and dissent in the cooperative (cf. Whyte and Whyte 1988; Bradley and Gelb 1982; Thomas and Logan 1982). There may be a degree of truth to this. Previous studies have

tended to concentrate more on organizational structures and the like than on ethnographic studies of individual workers. So if one accepts her claim that she has uncovered previously undocumented worker dissatisfaction what does this mean? It simply indicates that Mondragón workers have a stake in the cooperative they are more vocal and prone towards complaint because they can actually change the conditions. Kashmir claims that class conflict is rife throughout the Mondragón cooperatives and that it is an inherently failed venture. The assumption is then that only through recognizing class differences can better labor conditions be promoted for the working class. The Marxist bias is clear throughout the book and leaves one wondering if Kashmir found exactly what she wanted to find (despite her previous belief in Mondragón). Of course, Mondragón is an imperfect system and of course, class conflicts will continue to exist in cooperatives. However, Mondragón has presented the best non-capitalist model for an industrial corporation yet, because the emphasis is on maximization of worker satisfaction, not product output.

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The HTO Influence

Maximum Power: The Ideas and Applications of H.T. Odum. Charles A. S. Hall (ed.) University Press of Colorado. 1995. 393 pp. \$49.95 (cloth)

This volume grew out of a symposium held in Chapel Hill to celebrate the lifetime achievements of Odum and contains chapters by many renowned systems ecologists, most of whom are former students of Odum. Included in the book is a sort of "academic tree", tracing Odum's career through various institutions with over 100 of his doctoral students forming the branches off of the trunk. The book is divided into six sections, of which four roughly parallel the evolution of Odum's ideas themselves. Odum's earlier work is placed into context with the observation by Hall that there are now at least six scientific journals of which Odum published either the first, the first significant, or the first systems-oriented paper. These areas include ecological modeling, ecological economics and tropical ecosystem ecology.

The title of the book is based on Odum's thesis that maximum power relationships are generalizable in both physical and biological environments but few of the papers in this volume actually explicitly deal with this. Instead it is a kind of guiding principle that informs much of Odum's (and his students) work. The papers range from straightforward application of Odum's theories applied to real world situations, such as in ecological engineering, to more broad based theoretical inquiries. Of note to anthropologists is a chapter by Stephen Lansing and James Kremer on modeling rice irrigation and water temples in Bali. Odum is credited with providing the theoretical underpinnings for the entire article. In addition, some chapters contain personal anecdotes and the like, which although not providing any groundbreaking theory, do help to illuminate the creative processes which guide Odum and are worth understanding for their heuristic value.

For anyone interested in a broad overview of Odum's thinking, this book provides a good introduction, while also indicating some of the trajectories his ideas have taken on in others' work. A quote included in the preface sums up Odum's work by stating that the real beauty of it is that once stripped of all its special language, underneath there is incredible simplicity and common sense. This is an approach that many researchers in a wide variety of fields can benefit from.

Biodiversity Revisited

Biodiversity II. Marjorie L. Reaka-Kudla, Don E. Wilson, and Edward O. Wilson (eds.) Joseph Henry Press. 1997. 551 pp. \$34.95 (cloth)

The publication of *BioDiversity* (Wilson and Peter 1988) brought into being a word for which both scientists and the general public had been eagerly seeking. All of a sudden there was a term explaining exactly what was being lost by the growing extinction crisis. Biodiversity's rapid rise to prominence as a buzzword in not only scientific but also pseudoscientific and green circles demonstrated the need to succinctly express what was disappearing from a biosphere that supports almost 6 billion humans. Today the book still stands as an important milestone in defining the issues at hand, yet the need to develop concrete strategies to deal with the loss of biodiversity has resulted in a sequel, entitled *Biodiversity II*.

The new volume devotes a few pages to restating points made in *BioDiversity* and then moves on into new realms. A careful balance is achieved between sections that deal mainly with quantitative assessment (such as Part II. Patterns of the Biosphere: How Much Biodiversity is There?) and more qualitative attempts at problem solving (e.g. Part V. Building Towards a Solution: New Directions and Applications). Several papers are devoted to a renewed call for training scientists in systematics, a welcome move away from reductionism in the biological sciences.

Notably absent are contributions from social scientists. Many anthropologists are now working on biodiversity issues (see Orlove and Brush 1996). Their exclusion from this volume is thus an oversight that should be corrected when (and if) *Biodiversity III* is published. In the meantime it is crucial that anthropologists continue to show the relevance of their field to these issues and engage in interdisciplinary research with natural scientists.

The book itself is printed on the highest quality recycled paper with vibrant color plates interspersed between chapters, making its \$34.95 cover price seem quite reasonable. Since the book is intended to reach a wide audience it is pleasantly jargon-free yet still filled with important data and conclusions regarding the biodiversity crisis. It should prove an invaluable resource to anyone working on conservation and biodiversity issues.

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