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Review of *Life in Oil* by Michael L. Cepek

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Life in Oil makes for an unconventional academic read, making the task of reviewing it somewhat challenging. The book deals with the survival and co-existence of the Cofán people, an indigenous community that predominantly inhabits the Ecuadorian Amazonia, with oil extraction and production over a span of almost half a century in and around the village of Dureno. It tells the story of the Cofán as they have interacted, engaged, and negotiated with oil—the material itself, the institutions that are introduced with the establishment of the industry, the people that it brings, and the intermeshing of each of these not only with their lands and water, but also with their bodies.

The book adopts a narrative style that is easy to read and steers clear of abstractions, in an attempt to "share the largely unknown stories Cofán people create themselves" (p. 14). The primary contribution of this work lies in the realm of re-instating agency to the Cofán as a people, neither merely helpless victims of an extractive, polluting, and exploitative oil industry, nor simply as bearers of an ancient wisdom or an "authentic" Cofán cultural repertoire. Instead, we come face to face with a people who, even as they are neither exotic "others" nor tragic victims, continue to exist in their cultural differences and specificities, interpreting and understanding oil from within that situated worldview, and negotiate with the oil industry even as they suffer the exploitation and spoilage caused by oil. The Cofán are then a people, just like any other people, who encounter, assess, evaluate, and act, in the face of powerful capitalist lobbies. (Excerpt from book review)

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