migrants and their families at home. Via these cassette-letters the island relatives remind the migrants to be more diligent and responsible towards their families back home, while those toiling on the fields in south Florida use the tapes for defending their lives under difficult working conditions in the US. In addition to these mutual accusations, both sides use the tapes for recording entire rituals carried out in Haiti to be sent to the US to those who financed these ceremonies.

Karen Richman’s long-term ethnography has provided us with a very close look into diverging expectations and needs separating the Haitian transnational community and the ethos of extended families who contest over resources, power and moral integrity. Her observation of long-distance spiritual commitment and the particular interpersonal constellations give evidence of sincere and reliable empirical work; and her way of combining fine literature with interesting photos contributes to a moving ethnography. The book includes an audio CD with six cassette-letters giving examples of recorded rituals and letters exchanged between migrants, island relatives and the ethnographer which those researchers familiar with Haitian Creole can use as first-hand data for making their own interpretations.

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Reference


This book offers highly enjoyable reading for its vivid style and good knowledge of Spain. It is important as an ambitious attempt at macro-ethnography of a European event, offering a critical description of how hegemony can be constructed. The contrast between macropolitics and local cultural negotiations illustrates the widening gap in Europe between elites and the rest.

The event chosen is the Universal Exposition in Seville, Spain, in 1992. Among aspects explored are the effects of such a huge event on a medium-sized European city, intrigues in local and national politics around it, the presentation of a state and nation (Spain) to the ‘world’, the selling of hegemonic messages of Europe and neo-liberalism. Maddox convincingly shows how nearly all communication around the Expo was turned into a form of consumption, transforming active citizens into passive subjects.

In the words of the author, his study can ‘help us better understand in what ways cosmopolitan liberalism encourages and in what ways it impedes the realization of more democratic, egalitarian, and just societies.’

To make anthropology relevant for such issues is certainly important. But difficult. The ethnography offered is perhaps not quite dense enough to carry such a heavy load. It is very much about what can be seen and read. There is more observation than participation.

Maddox has a good understanding of emic categories, however, and he also dares transcend them. He shows how the tensions surrounding the Expo exemplified two features of Spanish politi-
cal culture, the gap between ‘the political class’ and ordinary citizens, and the notion that ideologies and policies often amount to little more than camouflage for personalized conflicts among ‘big men’ and their factions.

All the major pavilions presented some dimension of the process of globalization as a process leading to ever more freedom, more communication and increased control over natural resources. The regional and national pavilions aimed at presenting their traditions and specialties, but they did so using the same general symbolic language, which at the end of the day made them all look very much alike.

The Expo was ‘universal’ but the emphasis was on Europe, and on Spain’s place in it. Spain presented itself as microcosm of European cultural pluralism and of ‘unity in diversity’. In this sense, the Expo was a welcome opportunity to combat the lingering images of Spain as politically and economically backward.

The book’s title is ironic, of course, and fittingly enough; perhaps only ironic descriptions can do Spanish reality justice. Maddox describes for instance several sharp paradoxes in how the relationship between the city of Seville and the Expo evolved.

Another irony was that most visitors did not accept the dominant picture of globalized hegemony. Instead the Expo seemed mostly to have impressed people with a sense of the complexities, polarities, and uncertainties of contemporary life. And this tended to reinforce older forms of identity, e.g. of class or regional culture.

In spite of the size of the event, and all the hype around it, many Sevillians could not care less about it. Maddox’ exploration of the reasons for this is one of the most interesting parts of the book. He contrasts the Expo with local events in a nearby town, where the townspeople participated enthusiastically in local festive events and considered them to be much more worthwhile than the Expo. Not, however, because those events were traditional and the townspeople isolated from the modern world. Rather, the contrast, they stressed, was that the local events were created and controlled by their participants and depended on face-to-face social relations.

The conclusion is that as a mass spectacle the Expo was successful in disseminating messages that normalized and popularized a vision of a globalized neoliberal world. However, the effectiveness of this cultural strategy was reduced by people’s sense that much of what the Expo was about was all too familiar. Employees discovered that the Expo was an employer much like any other. Participating officials saw much of the old Spain at work in the pettiness and rigidity of Expo bureaucracies. Visitors tended to experience the event in ways conditioned by their personal life and by the shaping force of class, regional, and national differences.

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Gregory Maddox is a well-known authority on Tanzanian history with several original and knowledgeable texts to his credit – and here he has embarked on a very daring project: an environmental history of the whole of Sub-Saharan Africa. It is part of a series of global handbooks, ABC-Clio’s ‘Nature and Human Societies’, that aims at generalisations...