

Paprika, Foie Gras, and Red Mud: The Politics of Materiality in the European Union. By Zsuzsa Gille. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016. 164 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Illustrations. \$28.00, paperback.

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Zsuzsa Gille's new book is the most creative monograph among the thirty-some books published in 2016 that I read as a judge for the ASEEES Davis Center Prize. A delightful read, it stands out in its engaging expository style and daring use of social theory. The question is, does it deliver on its aims? The answer is not simple.

Paprika's deliciously layered complexity and bold ambition operate on multiple levels. At one layer, it addresses an issue of current import – Hungary's relation to the European Union since accession in 2004 as seen by the Hungarian public. Hungarian political sentiment about Brussels has become an urgent question about European integration. This question has become more immediate with Viktor Orbán's right-wing party Fidesz's landslide victory in 2014 and again in April 2018, after the book's publication. For Gille, understanding Hungarian senses of grievance about their treatment by the EU requires thinking beyond economic measures, the stuff of Eurocratic justifications. Rather, one needs to uncover the social imaginaries of Hungarians, about how they make sense of themselves with respect to "Europe" and the post-Cold War world. To do that, Gille advances three detailed case studies surrounding events—crises, really—in Hungary during the first decade after EU accession, which provoked intense public discussion about how Hungary relates to the EU. Each case centers on a concrete object: paprika (the iconically Hungarian spice), foie gras (goose or duck liver, integral to Hungarian cuisine), and red mud (tailings from aluminum production, a proud centerpiece of the country's socialist period modernization). These cases divulge sites where deep senses of self-identification take hold with respect to supranational regulatory regimes that constitute a distinctive feature of the EU project.

We arrive at another layer of the book's argument. "To understand Hungary's relationship with the EU is in part to understand what the EU is. ... [The three cases] illuminate a new modality of

power” (4). Gille finds that part of what enacts EU coherence and power is a politics of size, “the political attention to small versus big” (95). Before Hungary’s accession, EU propaganda about the advantages of joining a big entity like the EU, which were to confer economies of scale and geopolitical heft, played this sort of politics. But more persistent and capillary in operation is the exercise of regulation, “the art of connecting small with big things” (98). Here, grand narratives of European integration, common prosperity, and humane values find expression in the minutiae of food quality standards, animal raising practices, environmental metrics, etc. While much social science tends to treat the small scale as uninteresting instantiations of large-scale processes, Gille and her fellow travelers in interpretive sociology (notably Michael Burawoy) assert that micro-level events reveal unforeseen complexity that contribute non-trivially to macro levels. The book’s case studies confirm this premise, which is rather uncontested among cultural anthropologists, STS scholars, and human geographers (who might go further and abolish the very notion of scale as an analytic category). The three post-accession crises emerged from tragi-comedies of unintended consequences, when what appeared to be unambiguous, meticulously crafted, and well-intentioned EU regulations went horribly wrong. But does the EU regulatory regime represent a beneficent ordering that accidentally failed the Hungarian people? Gille says no.

This brings us to yet another layer. Gille, joining the recent material turn in the social sciences, argues that the EU’s new modality of power is founded on a politics of materiality. For her, paprika, foie gras, and red mud are not merely synecdoches standing for political issues. Rather, she argues that the material properties of those objects – their taste, texture, color, smell, viscosity, toxicity – and of the conditions of their production and circulation/dumping have direct bearing on the unfolding of the crises and their public discourse. In other words, materiality is substantive to the politics; the book’s title is not trying to be cute (well, maybe a little). Gille’s big argument is that an older politics “started with the realm of politics and ended in the realm of the material” (130); that is, legislators worked out solutions to human needs with deliberation and compromise, which then had implications in the deployment of technology and raw materials. The EU project reverses this ordering: EU legislators and unelected committees work at the level of prescribing the technologies and materials to be used; they obsess over the exact curvature of bananas and knobbiness of tomatoes. Their regulations are buried in the materiality of things but have tremendous political implications to EU citizens, particularly to newly admitted ones like

Hungarians. EU bureaucracies can shape outcomes in new member countries without raising public scrutiny or objection at time of legislation, because discussions center on technicalities rather than socio-economic outcomes. When the outcomes come to roost, it is too late. Consequences happen often to the detriment of the recently added eastern members, because producers and national apparatuses do not have the history of adaptation to EU regulations that their older western neighbors have: “In sum, political goals have been achieved not with political tools but rather by material means. Politics has in effect been materialized” (131).

The book’s organization is a bit unconventional in how theory and case are handled. After an introductory chapter that lays out the political stakes of the problem in clear, concrete terms (roughly the first layer discussed above), the exposition turns to each of the three cases separately, presenting intriguing detail with little explicit connection to the book’s conceptual framing. The last two chapters abruptly changes footing into fast-flowing theorizations about scale, power, agency, regulation, neoliberalism, materiality, and a little Latourian actor-network theory. Those ideas are handled deftly but are connected only in passing to the three cases. I wish that the specifics of the paprika, foie gras, and red mud crises were discussed with the theory closely interwoven and animated by particularity. I wanted to see more discussions like, what sorts of things can objects do in politics? How do they “push back” on human intentions? How can a scholar truly “ventriloquize” a fungus and enter into its lifeworld to tell a story that a conventional account misses?

If a reader is looking for a rich empirical study illuminated by current theories about materiality and power, this monograph only partially delivers. It does succeed in revealing the nature of EU power in terms of the politics of size and materiality. I highly recommend this book to graduate students and researchers with those interests. It encourages us to consider that perhaps the Hungarian right wing of Fidesz and Jobbik are not so wrong in seeing a rigged game.