

MARON E. GREENLEAF. FOREST LOST: PRODUCING GREEN CAPITALISM IN THE BRAZILIAN AMAZON. DURHAM: DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS 2024. 304 P. PAPER ISBN: 978-1-4780-3108-6

OLIVIA BIANCHI¹

*In speculative enterprises, profit must be imagined before it
can be extracted.*

– Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing (2005: 57)

The Brazilian state Acre, the location of Maron E. Greenleaf's research, has continuously had to grapple with a complex positionality between periphery and frontier. To exist has long meant to have to deforest (15) – this counts for the whole of Brazil, as well as the small state located at the far-western border to Perú and Bolivia. In 2012, at the beginning of Greenleaf's research, green capitalism had been praised as solution to the climate crisis and deforestation of the world's lungs. Set out to do a supply chain analysis of forest carbon offset (13, 159) – green capitalism's showcase commodity – the author instead wrote a well-thought-out account disentangling the relationships at play in a place which, at the time, was celebrated for being 'a leader in forest-focused development' (19).

For consumers in the Global North, some compensation of our carbon-offsetting lifestyle has naturalized into just agreeing to some extra travel fees (157). The complex yet obscured work that takes place in regions we thus task with keeping carbon in place is the focus of the book, work underpinned by multilayered socioenvironmental relations (14, 157). This work is needed to valorise the forest and keep the carbon it holds protected. Integral to green capitalism, as Greenleaf illustrates comprehensibly and in an accessibly written fashion, are the mutually dependent beneficiary relations that emerge: be that between state, forest, people and/or other entities, such as the formative BR-364 road, that runs both through the state and the book. Five ethnographic vignette-rich chapters are underpinned by four descriptive interludes. Together they fulfil the book's aim in transmitting the complex and connected nature of the relations locally at play.

The first chapter creates a strong base for Greenleaf's relational approach by elaborating both the context of the prior carbon boom, and the regionally crucial component called the 'rubber narrative'. The narrative retells the story of the rubber tapper-led socio-environmental and political movement: after the commodity's boom (late 19th century) and bust (1910/1920s) (37), the workers that stayed in the Acrean forest practiced the nonlethal rubber tree tapping technique despite its continuously falling price, along with other forest-based means of subsistence. With the moving in of the southern Brazilian cattle ranchers at the behest of the dictatorship and the local government (1970s/1980s), the workers collectively organized against the violent land claiming and clearing, resulting in an

¹ MSc candidate in Visual, Material and Museum Anthropology, University of Oxford. Email: olivia.bianchi@stcatz.ox.ac.uk

internationally known movement pioneering a new tenurial form for protected yet extractively used areas (34, 42). Building on this grassroots movement, the self-titled 'Government of the Forest' (1999-2010) redefined Acre's extractivism as socially inclusive and environmentally sustainable, explaining and supplementing the quantitative data on deforestation rates that sought to make Acre worth investing in through admittance into programs such as California's cap-and-trade program (35, 51).

The second chapter centres around the exploration of 'inclusive productivism' through elaborating the exemplary case of açai berries, eloquently outlining the tensions and frustrations that arise in the economically and ecologically changing Amazonian landscapes. Chapter 3 and 4 subsequently examine the creation and distribution of forest benefits. Throughout the chapters Greenleaf reiterates just how green capitalism, characterised by explicit inclusion, can reinforce exactly the kinds of marginalization it seeks to combat (31-32). Furthermore, her positionality and background in both anthropology and law shape the discussion throughout the book. The latter proves important in Chapter 3, as Greenleaf discusses the locally specific political and legal complexity of land rights, and the resulting jurisdictional approach of attaching forest carbon's new value to labour instead of private land titles (99). Acre did so through the concept of 'ecosystem service providers' wherein smallholders' well-being and status are linked to activities that reduce emissions through protecting the forest, and sustainable use of its natural resources (100, 109). The redistribution of benefits created the means and narratives to constitute the state in rural areas (108), and with it a new type of citizenship. The conflicting understandings of these relationships are explored in Chapter 4. The smallholders receiving state support were – often for the first time – moved from being on the margins to being included in political processes, forming the basis of a relationship with a previously neglectful and at times violent state (126-127). This resulted in requests for a long-term and stable relationship fostered through continuous benefits, as well as guaranteed governmental crop purchases (124), which runs contrary to the state officials' stance on benefits as limited impulses (122).

The last chapter illustrates the cultural dimension of Acre's forest valorisation by turning from the rural to the urban forest. Through forest-themed public spaces and performances in Acre's capital Rio Branco, feelings of pride and belonging are meant to be fostered for urban 'forest citizens'. Their pejorative accounts of avoidance or fear (144) towards the forest speak of the gaps between the state's imagined valorised landscape and persisting views of the '*mata*' (147) as something to be cut back to make space for cattle or monocrop plantations. In these gaps many Acreans see 'robberies and lies' (142) – a context brought up in the Afterword as integral for the high percentage of Acrean votes (160) going to Bolsonaro's administration (2019-2022).

The book succeeds in balancing between going into depth to understand how performance, productivity, politics and culture (131) interplay, making the forest valuable, while also explaining how this transformation failed, without falling into pitfalls of framing carbon as simply bad or a 'standardized commodity that epitomizes green capitalism' (155). While referencing feminist anthropological work regarding capitalism as (culturally) produced (9), Greenleaf unfortunately did not nuance the gendered components of the processes that make up Acre's green capitalism as a fragile 'incomplete experiment' (10). Considering the overall balanced and holistic nature Greenleaf's account presents, by integrating landscape and other more-than-human actors and underpinned by few carefully chosen and strong images, such shortcomings should rather be seen as curious questions, many of which have been discussed in the recently written Afterword.

Bibliography

Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt 2005. *Friction: an ethnography of global connection*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

This work is copyright of the author.

It has been published by JASO under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NonDerivatives ShareAlike License (CC BY NC ND 4.0) that allows others to share the work with an acknowledgement of the work's authorship and initial publication in this journal as long as it is non-commercial and that those using the work must agree to distribute it under the same license as the original. <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

