

Greenleaf, Maron E. 2024. *Forest lost: Producing green capitalism in the Brazilian Amazon*. Durham, London: Duke University Press. 282 pp. Pb.: \$27.95. ISBN: 9781478031086.

Book review by

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Climate change is about more than just the climate. Maron Greenleaf's ethnography of the Amazonian state of Acre in Brazil between 2012 and 2014 shows us that efforts to reduce carbon emissions from deforestation, more specifically not to produce carbon, in turn produce social relations that extend far beyond the forest.

If "everyone knows how not to cut down a tree," she asks, then what is the corresponding value of *not* emitting carbon into the atmosphere (p. 1)? Greenleaf argues that the effort not to produce carbon produces green capitalism. The stakes of her work reverberate across global contemporary scholarship on nature-based solutions to climate change. Greenleaf demonstrates that we must not only understand how and why these initiatives fail, but also "ethnographically [examine] them as often genuine and...meaningful efforts to address the climate crisis" (p. xiii). *Forest Lost: Producing Green Capitalism in the Brazilian Amazon* thus traces the material, governmental, affective, and multi-species relations that collectively emerge as fragile green capitalism.

Capitalist practices of extraction have been a primary cause of climate change, and Greenleaf illustrates the failure of those capitalist logics to provide nature-based and market-led solutions to climate change. The economy and the environment cannot be readily de-linked. Greenleaf unexpectedly found that valorizing carbon in the forest did not lead to the creation of private property markets guided by an overarching goal of profit maximization. It did not exclusively center the forest's monetary value in the same way as prior exclusionary deforestation-led development efforts. Instead, the state looms large in this ethnographic account, making forest carbon into a form of public

property and wealth that was redistributed as welfare benefits. To motivate beneficiaries not to produce forest carbon, beneficiaries were converted into rural producers who could claim inclusion. Greenleaf's conclusion that green capitalism failed does not stem from conventional neoliberal critiques; rather, green capitalism emerged as an "elusive and contested" process that "shaped lives and landscapes in the Acrean Amazon" (p. 10).

The book is organized into five chapters, four interludes, and an afterword. Each interlude "meanders through the book," and centers the BR-364 road as both connecting and delinking Acre with the rest of Brazil (p. 29). The road was important because the Acrean government "sought to avoid road-linked deforestation" typically exemplified by infrastructure projects (p. 30). For rural Acreans, the BR-364 was both material and symbolic: it showed them that the government "cared" and connected them to the rest of the country (p. 113). However, these logics of integration were juxtaposed against a sense of "tenuous" dependency (p. 85), and revealed how inclusion and dispossession "were entwined" (p. 128).

Chapter 1 contextualizes efforts to valorize carbon within the broader set of socio-environmental relations and historical agronomic context in Acre. The value of forest carbon was "partially based" on the value of rubber trees (p. 34), but this necessitated a co-opting of the story of rubber's colonial history. The retelling of the rubber narrative centered on rubber tappers' access to land and work, and was framed around social inclusion, environmental protection, economic efficiency, and cultural heritage. In this way, carbon was articulated as valuable through "place-specific but globally legible stories" (p. 53).

Chapter 2 demonstrates the ways in which the government incentivized smallholders to "deforest less by producing more" (p. 69). Carbon was multi-cropped through commodities like açá berry and was produced by intensifying and extensifying agricultural cultivation. This "inclusive productivism" was part of the "aspirational landscape of governmental imagination" of generating carbon offsets through sequestration while also transforming the lives of rural smallholders (p. 71). Greenleaf observes that this transformation was, ultimately, not so inclusive, since green capitalism's logics of productivity reveal longstanding pitfalls of inclusion, exacerbating some smallholders' "continued marginality" (p. 82).

In *Chapter 3*, Greenleaf raises the question of "who" benefits from nature-based environmental initiatives (p. 89). In Acre, the state adopted a Robin Hood approach to decide. Forest carbon was valued as a form of public property and wealth to be redistrib-

uted to rural Acreans. This was accomplished by shifting the logic of resource distribution away from private property and towards labor. This inclusive approach redistributed wealth as “benefits” rather than “wages,” engendering new relations between the state and its beneficiaries (p. 101). Some viewed this giving as a form of “good” government (p. 105), but Greenleaf challenges this by observing that redistribution occurred at the state’s discretion, limiting the scope of who can access public value.

Chapter 4 elaborates on the dynamic relationality between the state and beneficiaries. As an “iteration of forest citizenship,” or *florestania*, the figure of the forest beneficiary was constantly negotiated (p. 120). On the one hand, benefits could be “inconsistent, inadequate, and temporary,” so smallholders demanded more and better benefits (p. 117). This negotiation work was the basis for cultivating a sense of citizenship, belonging, and hope. On the other hand, state officials critiqued their dependence as recipients and envisioned a temporary flow of benefits to “forge” independent, productive farmers (p. 118). The result was a constant and mutual exchange between the state-as-provider-of-benefits-for-not-deforesting and the beneficiary-as-potential-productive-and-protective-farmer.

Chapter 5 extends the notion of forest citizenship to the cultural. To understand the cultural valuation of the forest in rural Acre, Greenleaf draws our attention to the capital city of Rio Branco. Here too, we initially read a “logic of social inclusion via cultural change” in the way that the forest became the center of Acrean identity (p. 139). This economic and cultural symbiosis between rural and urban Acre was undermined by a “consequential gap” between ways of life, perceptions of progress, and trust (p. 142). In rural Acre, benefits enabled residents to “avoid the forest” altogether (p. 149).

Green capitalism continues in Brazil, but its logics of inclusion returned to “deforestation and fire-led forms of development” (p. 154): we know how not to cut down a tree, but we still don’t know “who will pay” for it to stay standing (p. 162). There are cultural limits to the cultural process of economic change. Maron Greenleaf’s *Forest Lost* is a compelling depiction of the socio-economic relations behind economic development. We are left to wonder at the end, is this inevitable? What are the alternatives?