

JAMES M. COOPER, CHRISTINE HUNEFELDT (EDS.). *Amazonia. Environment and the Law in Amazonia: A Plurilateral Encounter*. Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2013.

This volume compiles the papers given at the 2010 iteration of an annual conference held at the Center for Iberian and Latin American Studies at the University of California, San Diego. That year, the conference convened “environmental experts” and anthropologists who carried out research in various parts of the Amazon basin. The editors note in the short introduction their aspiration that the book will contribute to a “heightened consciousness about what is happening in and with Amazonia.” This is quite a general goal and it’s true that the twelve chapters range widely across topics and national boundaries. Almost all of them, though, do address environmental issues and many engage the law as well; as for the rest of the title, the editors do not explain if they mean something specific by “a plurilateral encounter.” The chapters are divided into three sections: International Domains, National Politics and Policies, and Genocide and Plunder. The book also includes a DVD with a feature film called “El Perro del Hortelano” and a short video accompaniment to Claes Andreasson’s chapter about water issues associated with climate change.

Publishing conference proceedings has advantages and disadvantages. The contributions can have an immediacy that long-form pieces compiled over a longer time might lack. Also, by treating interesting questions in a concise format, they can offer readers an accessible overview on a range of topics. The best chapters from this book demonstrate these virtues. For example, Richard Finkmoore provides a succinct and cogent discussion of global climate change and the Amazon. However, the underside of the approach is also discernible. Many of the chapters read like the suggestive but unpolished conference papers they presumably began as, and some clearly lacked sufficient editing before appearing in print. Few of the chapters draw on empirical research, generally synthesizing secondary material instead. Lawrence Herzog’s meditation on sustainable development theory provides a catalog of well-known ills in the Amazonian region without offering strong definitions of or insight into the theories he explores. One wonders, for instance, what exactly he means when he says the Amazon is “one of the most potent ecosystems on earth.”

With most of the chapters addressing environmental issues, one would expect to encounter some repetition. After rereading basic facts, such as the Amazon is the world’s longest river and it harbors some fifteen percent of the world’s fresh water, I began to wonder whether the introduction should have covered these issues to allow the authors to go deeper into specific detail. There are also varying assessments of the rates of deforestation in the region. But given the range

of topics covered and the comparative lack of an organic or intuitive framework holding everything together, it seems likely that the majority of readers will pick up the volume for one or two chapters at a time. This would probably not serve effectively as a course textbook, for instance, though it could make sense to include a chapter here or there in an environmental studies, anthropology, or geography course.

Two of the book's most useful chapters clearly focus on compelling areas of debate. Nancy Postero analyzes some paradoxes in Evo Morales' administration, pointing out a pattern of "new extractivism" that contradicts Morales' rhetoric about protecting Mother Earth. J. Christopher Brown and Matthew Koeppel use Brazil's moratorium on Amazonian-grown soy, established in 2006, to explore the debate about neo-liberal vs. state-led conservation models. They point out that even apparently market-led efforts like the soy moratorium generally have a history of state-led efforts behind them that make their approach viable. In the case of soy, the very means by which Amazonian biomes are demarcated and measured depends on state agencies. The authors also criticize the moratorium for being crop specific and for being bound by national frontiers. Denise de Alcantara Pereira describes the Initiative for the Integration of Regional Infrastructure in South America (IIRSA), which seeks to knit neighbors together, overwhelmingly with roads. Alcantara Pereira argues that Brazil has used the effort as a means of pursuing consensual hegemony on the continent.

Finally, the film "El Perro del Hortelano" adds a great deal to the volume (though it's worth noting that it is available in its entirety on Vimeo). The movie itself is quirky, funny, and compelling, its amateurishness frank rather than grating. Using volunteer and generally untrained actors, the filmmakers follow a plot about oil exploration in the Peruvian Amazon that presents local, largely indigenous points of view. The phrase ("the gardener's dog") refers to a fable about a dog who won't eat the food on a farm while at the same time he prevents other animals from eating it. Invoked in 2007 by Peruvian President Alan Garcia to accuse Peru's lowland indigenous population of obstructing his developmentalist policy agenda, it has become a polemical touchstone. Devin Beaulieu's chapter describing the making of this "activist film" provides an essential accompaniment to the DVD, offering insight into the collaborative writing of the screenplay and the choices made during production.

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