The politics of nature in Indonesia

About the conflicts and antagonisms of forestry

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Introduction

Using satellite technology, a coalition of Google, North-American academics and research institutes has created a data set that describes forest cover with temporal and spatial specificity (Hansen et al. 2013). On the basis of this data, with the help of Google Earth Engines computing, a detailed map of global forest cover change from 2000 to 2012 could be constructed.[1,2] Globally, 2.3 million km^2 of forest cover has been lost and 0.8 million km^2 gained over these 12 years. The net rate of forest loss has increased. These are fascinating figures, but the potential of the data set lies beyond such global aggregations. In their paper, the researchers eloquently articulate the value of maps: they produce

> […] globally consistent characterizations that have local relevance and utility; that is, reliable information across scales. (Ibid.: 852).

In other words, the information on forest cover change can be analysed and compared at multiple scales, making it useful, among others, for monitoring forests and evaluating policies. For example, national trends can be compared. The paper indicates that the rate of forest loss has been strongly decreasing in Brazil, which can be linked to intensive policy efforts. In contrast, deforestation in Indonesia is increasing faster than in any other country. Increasing with 1,021 km^2 per year, it has more than doubled between 2000 and 2012 (ibid.: 850). In this period, a net sum of 88 million hectares of forest cover was lost (ibid., supplementary materials, table S.3).

This information has been used to raise doubts on the effectiveness of Indonesia's moratorium on new logging and agricultural concessions in primary forests. The moratorium was the most important of a set of actions that the government of Indonesia had in 2010 promised the government of Norway to undertake in order to reduce CO_2-emissions. In the context of the REDD+ carbon-trading programme, Norway would receive carbon credits in exchange for financial support of up to $1 billion (see Murdiyarso et al. 2011). To really assess the effectiveness of this policy, however, the data required further analysis. To be relevant with regard to climate change, the national results had to be disaggregated for different types of forest, distinguishing between forests containing high and low levels of carbon stocks. The paper by Hansen et al. already points to this, stating that the moratorium's effectiveness "*is to be determined*" (2013: 850).

Further analysis consequently focused on primary forest cover loss[3], because primary forests contain the greatest amounts of carbon (and, incidentally, the highest concentration of biodiversity; Margono et al., 2014). The results suggest that the moratorium has not been effective in reducing emissions. The moratorium came into effect in 2011, but the rate of primary forest cover loss in 2012 was higher than in any of the previous years and for the first time even surpassed reported primary forest cover loss in Brazil. This result is so disappointing, that the researchers consider accusing the moratorium for being

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[1] A digital map is accessible on the internet: http://earthenginepartners.appspot.com/science-2013-global-forest [accessed 24/09/2014]

[2] See also the BBC news article by James Morgan (2013)

[3] Primary forest was defined as "all mature forests of 5 ha or more in extent that retain their natural composition and structure and have not been completely cleared in recent history (at least 30 years in age)" (Margono et al. 2014: Supplementary Materials p.2). This category also included a degraded type: "The degraded primary forest class is a primary forest that has been fragmented or subjected to forest utilization, e.g. by selective logging or other human disturbances which have led to partial canopy loss and altered forest composition and structure" (idem).

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counter-effective: "*Questions concerning the moratorium as a driver of* increased *forest loss are worthy of investigation*" (ibid.: 734, emphasis added).

The above goes to show that the landscape of Indonesia is rapidly changing. It also exemplifies how information on the global environment is 'naturally' analysed and interpreted in terms of the dominant environmental paradigms of climate change (and biodiversity).

The map of forest cover change is a powerful tool. It can produce numbers that are hard to contest, even when the categorizations and definitions that underlay these numbers require scrutiny. At the same time, the *interpretation* of this data is a highly contentious matter. What does it mean that, between 2000 and 2012, Indonesia lost 88 million hectares of forest cover, of which over 6 million hectares primary forest (Ibid.: 730)? What kind of places are these forests? What is happening in them? What consequences does the change have?

Climate change provides answers. The forests are important stocks of carbon. This carbon is being released into the atmosphere. The consequence is increased global warming. Similar answers can be given from a concern with biodiversity. Clearly though, these answers do not exhaust the meaning of what is happening. There is a whole array of different and additional meanings and concerns that might be engaged with. Yet, environmentalist thinking tends to be dominated by a few narratives.

This essay is concerned with articulating the dangers of such environmentalist thinking. The first section considers Erik Swyngedouw's thesis that we live in increasingly post-political times, and that environmentalism is contributing to this process. He argues that we need new, alternative imaginations of nature and society to challenge the dominant paradigms of neoliberalism and technocracy. He calls for a politics of nature: a public engagement with the antagonisms and conflicts embedded in nature.

The next two sections build on his concepts and concerns. To find alternative understandings of nature, these sections each review an ethnographic study related to Indonesian forestry. Ethnography is a field of research that aims to understand particular groups of people through combined historical/theoretical research and participatory observation[4]. We shall use ethnographic texts as entry-points to alternative viewpoints and stories. As Edward Schatz wrote: "*Ethnography often expands – indeed, it often explodes – how we understand the boundaries of the 'political'*" (2009: 10). After an extended discussion of the contents, merits and limits of the ethnography under review, both sections end with three questions that reconsider 'the boundaries of the political' with regard to nature. First, what political issues does this ethnography identify? Second, what de-politicizing elements or imaginations of the environment are identified? Third, what possibilities for publicly addressing the political issues are identified?

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[4] For an introduction to ethnography, see Madden (2010)

Section I: A politics of nature

'We have to protect the environment. Humankind has been disturbing the natural balance of the world: we have depleted, degraded and polluted nature. If we continue on this dangerous way, the adverse consequences will exceed our imagination. But it may not be too late for society to change our way of living together so as to make it more sustainable. Therefore, decisive action is needed now.'

This line of reasoning is so widely circulated these days that it has become common sense. It is the rationale behind most efforts at environmental protection. However, in a series of articles Erik Swyngedouw criticises such positions. His argument is not one from scepticism. He does not deny that depletion, degradation and pollution take place. But he rejects the notion of nature as the unified and originally balanced victim of these processes. He does acknowledge that there may be environmental dangers for people, but rejects the idea of a single danger uniformly threatening the whole of humankind. Above all, he rejects the idea that there is a homogenous society that should act in unity. In this logic of environmental protection, he argues, nature and society are imagined in a depoliticising way. This restricts the possibilities for political action that seem available. It inhibits our capacity for imagining radically different futures and consequently stands in the way of real change.

I start this chapter with a discussion of his criticism in two parts. In a first part, I trace his argument that this line of reasoning uses symbolizations that fail to properly represent all of reality. In that part, the notions of 'society' and 'nature' are problematized. In a second part I discuss the political effects of this failure and how it may reinforce a post-political condition. After examining the argument, I turn, in a third part, to his call for a politicization of the environment.

1. 'Nature' and 'society'

Nature is often imagined as a singular entity that works harmoniously and independently from human beings. Because nature is seen as external to and bigger than us, we take it as a point of reference for our thinking and acting. Nature has something foundational in it that sets a norm for us. It is seen "*as something given, as a solid foundational (or ontological) basis from which we act and that can be invoked to provide an anchor for ethical or normative judgements of ecological, social, cultural, political, or economic procedures and practices*" (Swyngedouw 2011a: 72). This nature is "*the externally conditioning frame for human life*" (ibid., 70). In this view, nature is seen to constitute a dynamic balance. Because we are currently disturbing this balance, we are facing global catastrophe. The way to go is therefore to restore this balance.

Against this view Swyngedouw brings in 2 observations. First, as Bruno Latour argued, there are no natural objects that are separate from culture. There are only "*socio-natural quasi-objects*" (Ibid.: 73). The idea of a division between nature and society shouldn't be maintained because all of nature is connected to the human. Even if it once were a useful distinction, since the industrial revolution our impact on the world has increased so much that "*we are not any longer objects of Nature, but have become subjects in what Norgaard* [the North-American ecological economist] *calls the co-evolution of socio-ecological systems*" (ibid.: 70). The widespread support for the idea to define for the present a new geological era called the '*Anthropocene*' illustrates the point: humans have become a geological force. It is hence too simple-minded to see nature as something external to human life.

Second, the heterogeneity of things that are subsumed under the concept of nature is at odds with the view of nature as something homogenous and unitary: "*[…] stem cells, fat bodies, heat waves, tsunamis, hurricanes, genetic diversity, CO_2, to name just a few, are radically different things,*

expressing radically different natures […] (Swyngedouw 2007: 17). "Nature" is better understood as a floating signifier, in the sense that "*the 'content' of Nature is expressed through a range of diverse terms that all collapse in the Name of Nature: DNA, elephants, mineral water, The Andes, hunger, heart-beat, markets, desire, profits, CO₂, greed, competition…*" (Swyngedouw 2011a: 71). Nature is the central term for many positive entities, but the term itself is empty and its meaning unstable. It is this emptiness that allows the concept to designate such a heterogeneous series of elements. An attempt to give to this term a definite and positive meaning will necessarily fail at representing all of the entities that fall under it. As a consequence, there is nothing that constitutes the unity of nature. Nature is just the word we use to designate a collection of things. Another consequence is that there is no normative power in nature, because "*there is nothing foundational in Nature that needs, demands, or requires sustaining*" (Ibid.: 74). When we understand "nature" as a floating signifier, it makes no sense to look in it for an original harmonious condition, which we should strive to regain.

For these reasons we should consider an alternative view, one advocated by Slavoj Žižek: that nature does not exist. In this view there is not one singular external nature but there are multiple nature*s* that are intertwined with human life. That is to say, *"the Nature we see and work with is necessarily radically imagined, scripted, symbolically charged; and is radically distant from the natures that are there, which are complex, chaotic, often unpredictable, often radically contingent […]"* (Ibid.: 19).

Basing politics on the concept of nature amounts populism: it uses nature as a convenient image to unite the masses, obstructing their perception of the political issues that lie behind it. Swyngedouw argues that we should remain aware of the "*inseparable gap between our symbolic representation (our understanding) of Nature and the actual acting of a wide range of radically different and, often contingent, natures*" (Swyngedouw 2007: 18).

The same argument can be made for 'society': society does not exist. Just like there is no foundation that provides unity to nature, there is no unity in society. Society is split by disagreements, antagonisms and differences. People have different and conflicting beliefs, values and interests. Populist politics however, as the activity of policy-making, tends to underplay these differences. It builds on the imagination that it works in and through a homogenous and unitary society. (See Swyngedouw 2011b).

2. Politics and Post-politics

While 'nature' and 'society' do not exist as unified, homogenous and distinct entities, such entities are the imaginary object of politics and policies that are real in their effects on natures and peoples. This is not in itself a problem that can be easily fixed. Politics always functions through a fiction, a "symbolic order" (Swyngedouw 2011b: 373). But the danger of this situation is that imaginations of 'nature' and 'society' may have de-politicizing effects and contribute to the establishment and reinforcement of 'the post-political', i.e. *"a political formation that actually forecloses the political"*, characterized by "*the increasing evacuation of the proper political dimension from the public terrain as technocratic management and consensual policy-making has sutured the spaces of democratic politics*" (Swyngedouw 2011a: 77; Swyngedouw 2010: 214). In a post-political condition, there is no discussion about the properly political questions. These questions include ideological choices on which kind of society is desirable and which goals and values should be adhered to. They also include questions such as how to deal with fundamental conflicts and opposed interests that necessitate taking sides. And they concern the recognition of exclusion and injustice. Post-politics ignores the deep conflicts and antagonisms in society. Instead, a "consensual mode of governance" is taking over, which

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> […] has apparently reduced political conflict and disagreement to either an *ultra-politics of radical and violent disavowal*, exclusion and containment or to a *para-political inclusion of different opinions on anything imaginable* (as long as it does not question fundamentally the existing state of the neo-liberal political-economic configuration) in arrangements of impotent participation and consensual 'good' techno-managerial governance. (Swyngedouw 2011b: 370-371, emphasis added)

This consensual mode of governance can have several foundations. The idea that some people know best, bestows them with the necessary confidence to make political decisions. Such is the case when political problems are framed as technological or managerial problems so that technical experts or managers make the decisions, on the basis of skills exclusive to them. The rationality behind these decisions is deemed to be too complex to be questioned by laymen. Consensual government can also be based on an idea of a self-regulating market that functions separately from politics: a depoliticised economy that will produce desirable results as long as we leave it alone. Further, some sort of populism usually supports this depoliticisation. Through "*the nurturing of fear, crises and the invocation of spectres of pending catastrophe if urgent and decisive action is not taken,*" people are asked to unite and put differences aside for the sake of a greater good (Swyngedouw 2011b: 372).

These foundations are interrelated and the incomplete symbolic representations of 'nature' and 'society' can contribute to all of them. Environmental problems can be framed as technical problems requiring technical solutions designed by experts. Societal problems can be interpreted as arising from lack of coordination, whence we need managers to guide it. Environmental problems can be reduced to a lack of integration in the market. And so on.

Moreover, in so far as environmentalism takes its norm from a purported natural and balanced state of affairs, and claims that this is the lost situation that needs to be regained through environmental protection, it cancels out debate on possible futures. We already know what future we have to strive towards, the only question is how to get there.

Let's once more make explicit what the objection against this form of governance is. It is, first, that it doesn't acknowledge antagonistic differences and conflicts. This ignorance will not make them disappear. Rather, when they cannot be addressed in the public sphere of politics, they will re-appear in the form of silent suppression and outbursts of violent resistance. Swyngedouw calls this 'the return of the Real' (2011b: 374). Second, consensual governance impedes the questioning of the larger frameworks of society. Discussion is reduced to disagreement over particulars: which technologies to use or how to allocate the available resources, but questions about which kind of societal order we want are foreclosed (See Swyngedouw 2011a: 77-78). This reinforces existing structures and power relations, which may stand in the way of reaching a more egalitarian future. (See also Swyngedouw 2005, about the disempowering effects of new governance arrangements on the citizen)

I hope to make the abstract argument above more tangible by recounting Swyngedouw's point that climate change is often addressed in a populist way. First, climate change is presented as a universal threat to humanity as a whole. This universalization homogenizes the social, because it constitutes the people as *"universal victims",* a condition that covers up antagonistic differences (Swyngedouw 2010: 221). Climate change thus "*silences ideological and other constitutive social differences and disavows conflicts of interests by distilling a common threat or challenge to both Nature and Humanity*" (Ibid.). Second, climate change invokes an external enemy, CO_2, which is to blame for all the problems. This externalization implies that it is not the larger (neo-liberal) framework, the universal way society is ordered, that is wrong. The structures of society need not fundamentally change. The challenge is merely one of dealing with an external enemy that disturbs the functioning of the system. All this is reinforced by a sense of urgency that is derived from the threat of catastrophe of apocalyptic

dimensions if immediate action is not taken. This kind of rhetoric is de-politicizing because it prevents (1) the articulation of differences and conflict in the public sphere and (2) debate over universal questions of what kind of order we want to live in.

3. A politicization of the environment

The environment has become an important part of politics, but in a way that reinforces a post-political condition. The answer is not, however, that politics should no longer thematise the environment. That would ignore many real dangers and challenges. Rather, Swyngedouw calls for a *politicization* of the environment in a way that can break the post-political condition. This means that 'nature' and the environment need to be re-imagined in ways that allow the expression of dissensus and ideological debates. The post-political condition sustains a particular fiction about what is necessary, foreclosing debate. A politics of the environment on the other hand, always remains contentious. It invokes the environment in a way that makes possible again different visions of the future. What is needed are *"different stories and fictions that can be mobilised for realisation"* (Swyngedouw 2007: 36). These new fictions should transgress the boundaries of what is possible within the current frameworks. This will on the one hand open our eyes to the variability, unpredictability and various possibilities of nature. On the other hand, this may show the contingence of current societal structures and open the way for more egalitarian futures.

A politicization of the environment also means that the political aspects of environmental protection must be recognized and treated as such. Protecting the environment involves making political choices on which people will disagree. Any policy intervention is *"of necessity a violent act"* (Swyngedouw 2011a: 82). Choosing one future over another involves taking sides, favouring one claim over another. This must be acknowledged in the public sphere. There must therefore be spaces for conflict and difference and struggle over the socio-environmental future: *"proper democratic public spaces"* (ibid.).

These considerations of Swyngedouw invite us to take a more critical, less naïve stance towards narratives of environmental protection. The goal of sustainability is supported by virtually everyone. This in itself may be justified. But there are questions that need to be asked, once we reject the idea of a singular nature and the notion of society: what does a sustainable future look like? How are we going to get there? At whose expense? The politics of nature that Swyngedouw calls for, should put questions like these under discussion.

The following sections explore possibilities for taking up this challenge. To that purpose, I shall examine two anthropological books about environmental protection in Indonesia. In them, I will look for the answers to questions that arise from a concern with the politicization of nature.

Section II: Rich Forests, Poor People

1. Outline of the book

1.1 Theme: Forest control and resistance

In *Rich Forests, Poor People* Nancy Lee Peluso[5] describes conflicts regarding access to and control over the teak forests of Java. She identifies two main interest groups. On the one side, the state tries to control the production of teak to use it for state industry or sell it as a source of income. On the other side are the peasants living in or close to forests, who depend on them for their subsistence. State control over forests restricts their legal access to the forest. But when the peasants do not have viable alternatives to make a living, they will continue their forest-related activities against the will of the state. They will look for ways to evade state control, and the state in turn will look for new ways of asserting control and enforcing the law. This dynamic creates an ever more deeply entrenched antagonism between peasants and state. In the first half of the book Peluso traces this conflict through history: how it emerged when the Dutch colonial government laid claim on all forests and how resistance intensified under Japanese occupation and the rule of Sukarno. In the second half, she describes two case studies to describe in detail the ways in which people resist the control of the then-contemporary New Order of Suharto. By then resistance has become a part of village life, embedded in local culture through extended networks of illegal activity.

As a conceptual framework to describe the characteristics of state control and how it changes over time, Peluso distinguishes four aspects of state control over forests: control over land, over species, over labour and over ideology (RFPP: 1) Land control is about the ownership of the land, and the exclusion of alternative land uses. In this case, the state excludes agricultural exploitation of the forestlands. Self-proclaimed legal ownership provides the state with "*agency legitimation*" (17): it legitimizes the presence of the state as an actor in the forest. The state vests legal ownership of the land in itself and derives from this the right to manage and exploit it as it sees fit. (2) Control of species is manifested in the *"planting, maintenance and exploitation of trees"* (17). This provides the state with a source of material (timber) and financial resources, which is an aim in itself but can also be used to strengthen the other facets of control. Additionally, managing the trees contributes to agency legitimation. It allows the state to justify its presence in terms of the common good. The state can claim that it protects the environment, produces timber and provides employment. (3) Control of labour secures the availability of an affordable workforce in the forest to perform the management activities. (4) Finally, through control of ideology, the state tries to set ideological limits to what is acceptable behaviour in conflicts over access to forests, narrowing down the possibilities for resistance. For example, it tries to define its own role as "*government landlord, forest enterprise and conservation institution"*. By assuming the identity of protector and producer the state tries to make their attempts to control the forest seem necessary. The state defines those who resist this control as criminals.

Peluso argues that we shouldn't too easily submit to such state ideology. The pretence of providing environmental protection and employment opportunities must be challenged on the basis of the failure

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[5] Peluso (1992), henceforth cited as RFPP.

of the state to effectively fulfil this promise. The claim can therefore be seen as a way to conceal the true intent of providing revenue for the state. Peluso proposes not to dismiss the behaviour of peasants as unethical or wrong on the basis of its illegal status by law only. Illegal forest activity may also be seen as a form of protest or resistance against unfair policy. The peasants tend to have a different ideology in which their behaviour is justified. They are just using the resources that they traditionally depend on for a living, which for them is a sufficient justification. In fact, from their point of view, it may be that the state is the one who acts criminally, because the state tries to deprive them of their access to the forests they need. Peluso therefore prefers not to call this activity 'criminality' or 'theft' because these terms are imbued with the government's ideology that denounces this behaviour as immoral, a sign of malevolence and a threat to society. She prefers the names 'resistance' or 'counter-appropriation' (RFPP 202), which indicate that this activity arises in reaction to something, viz. the government's oppressive policies. She is not very consistent in this terminology and still regularly uses the term 'forest crime'. But she appropriately redefines forest crime in a non-moral way as "*the cutting of wood or use of the forest (for grazing, burning, charcoal making, or other purposes) without the explicit permission of the state resource controllers"*(147).

Peluso shows how throughout history forms of resistance have coevolved with forest policy, reacting to and provoking new policy measures. The forms of resistance can be classified as specific responses to the different aspects of state control. So there is a repertoire of control and a corresponding repertoire of resistance:

> I posit that forms of forest resistance parallel or complement the four forms of forest access control discussed above. Forest peasants resist forest land control by reappropriating forest lands for cultivation; they resist species control by 'counter-appropriating' species claimed by the state (or other enterprises) and by damaging mature species or sabotaging newly planted species; they resist labor control by strikes, slowdowns or migration; and they resist ideological control by developing or maintaining cultures of resistance. (RFPP 19)

The illegal activities or forms of resistance that are provoked by the state when they cut villagers off from their source of subsistence, have environmentally devastating and socially destabilizing effects. This social conflict between state and peasants is according to Peluso the main driver of deforestation: *"deforestation results from conflict, confrontation, and resistance"* (RFPP 5). An understanding of the social dynamics in forests is therefore a necessary precondition for sustainable forest management: *"An environmental solution to degradation cannot exist apart from the people and societies who use that environment legally or illegally"* (4). Forest management must be aware of the threat of resistance.

The book can be read as an argument against 'scientific' forestry, the name she uses for the Western-European science-based approach to forestry. She calls this consistently writes 'scientific' between quotation marks, to undo the legitimacy that is associated with science. To Peluso, 'scientific' forestry is an ideology (cf. RFPP 24), which influences the way people think about forests. The emergence of 'scientific' forestry during Dutch colonial rule is argued to constitute a *"turning point in forest management and the forms of state control"* (44). The latter underwent a shift in emphasis *"from control of timber and labor to land control"* (24). On the basis of this shift, Peluso distinguishes between the first and the second phase of colonial forest management. In the first phase, the VOC tried to control timber and labour. In the second phase the other two forms of control are added to the repertoire: control of land and ideology.

Peluso argues that 'scientific' forest management on Java has focused too much on the technical aspects of the forestry. She doesn't challenge the validity of the science on these technical aspects. But in practice, she observes, the foresters struggle to cope with peasant resistance. In an attempt to

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maintain the order that 'scientific' forestry prescribes, foresters had to *"put on their para-military hats"* (RFPP 244), enforcing the forest laws by force. 'Scientific' forestry tells them to exclude other users, but this approach is not based on a proper understanding of the social dynamics. Peasants have been pushed towards illegality in great numbers, resulting in complex networks of illegal activity that are hard to control and undermine the government's efforts to set up profitable forestry enterprises.

1.2 History of forest conflict

1.2.1. Precolonial times

Although Peluso indicates that there is *"relatively few data"* available on precolonial forest history (RFPP 23), she manages to construct a clear image. Java, Peluso suggests, used to be a patchwork of different kingdoms and sultanates. Their control of the forest was limited. Especially communities located further away from the centres of rule could operate free from "*effective daily control of any royal court"* (28). Rulers were not interested to control the land or the trees, nor did they have the means to do so: "*the actual prevention of local people's use of forests and products was virtually inconceivable"* (31). Apart from the occasional hunting grounds or royal forests, people were free to harvest wood or cultivate the land. Instead, rulers tried to control the people because they needed their labour to accommodate their royal needs. In return for rights to land and trees, and the additional promise of protection, rulers would demand from his people a contribution in the form of labour, "*to help construct roads and buildings, for military services, to open new lands, or to perform domestic labor for the ruler"* (34). Contribution could also be demanded in the form of a part of the yield.

This image may seem an acceptable or at least understandable model of precolonial forest use on Java. But I think there is reason to challenge this image. The clarity of the image arises from its familiarity and simplicity. The fact that it so closely resembles the feudal model used to describe medieval land use in Europe should arouse suspicion. This resemblance may to a greater or lesser extent reflect a real historical similarity, but may also reflect a certain predisposition of the interpreter. Their being 'relatively few data' might add to the suspicion that this image is partly an imagination. This is not the place to evaluate the extent to which this image is historically accurate. But if we just acknowledge the possibility that it isn't, then we can see how convenient this construct is for Peluso's further enterprise. She uses it as a stage in which the emerging features of the later colonial control by contrast appear distinctly. Because it functions as a background, the description of precolonial forest use constantly anticipates what will come after it. Peluso repeatedly emphasizes *what was different* and *what was not* (yet)[6].

So, in contrast to the situation under Dutch colonial rule, the amount of forest cover was still "*much higher*"; the forest still "*serviced [...] the wood needs of Java's Kings and commoners"* (in contrast to the later focus on export)*;* and the *"massive demands on the forest resources had not yet begun"* (RFPP 28). Also the form of rule was different. The precolonial elites' claim to territory *"could not be defined as state land ownership as it would be today; nor did it match European conceptions of*

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[6] For a general and renowned critique of Western scholarship on non-Western history, I refer the reader to Dispeph Chakrabarty's '*Provincializing Europe. Postcolonial thought and historical difference'* (2009), in which it is argued that writers of history often assume European standards and categories. Chakrabarty challenges the appropriateness of such thinking, in the first place because it impedes an understanding of what is different in other cultures; and in the second place because it builds on a questionable (and colonialist) imagination what Europe is.

property at that time" (33). The elite did not forbid the population to clear the forest for agriculture or to harvest the forest products.

The theme of resistance during this period is not given much attention. The only aspect of colonial control that Peluso recognizes in the pre-colonial situation, is control of labour. Correspondingly, the only form of resistance she mentions, is the occasional avoidance of *"tribute payment or labor service"* (RFPP 68) (which are essentially the same because the tribute offers the fruit of the peasant's labour). But overall, she suggests, resistance was not a big issue. The patterns and circumstances that dictate conflicts around forest use were first established by the colonial management of the 19th century. In precolonial times *"there was a more tenable balance of access to the forest for local people and outsiders with claims on the forest – if for no other reason than that there was a great deal more forest for everyone to use"* (76).

The question remains: was the pre-colonial forest really more peaceful? We shall not answer this question here. I only want to make the point that because Peluso focuses so much on the effects of 'scientific' forestry, we shouldn't make too much of her analysis of what precedes it. She observes that the social dynamics that the practice of 'scientific' forestry sets forth had not yet been in operation before. But an analysis that applies categories from later times to earlier times, risks ignoring crucial information, giving a distorted view of the situation .

1.2.2 Colonial times 1: the VOC

When the VOC (*Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* = United East India Company) arrived in Indonesia in the beginning of the 17th century, it sought access to the teak trees mainly because they were well suited for the construction of ships. The Dutch hoped to strengthen their fleet.

In the beginning, the VOC did not have any control of the Teak forest. To gain access to wood, the Dutch negotiated with local elites. The early attempts to make agreements on the delivery of wood *"were neither easy not uniformly successful"* (RFPP 37). There were struggles over control of trees and of labour. Resistance to the first came from the local elites, resistance to the second from the labour force. Control of land and control of ideology were not yet important themes. We shall later see that this changes with the introduction of bureaucratic colonial management.

Elites resisted the export of wood products. The Dutch tried to persuade them with gifts: luxury products from Europe and Persia. Leaders that continued to resist were conquered by military force or replaced by leaders more willing to collaborate. The labour force also resisted, especially the 'Kalangs' whom the Dutch tried to contract for the delivery of wood. The Kalangs were a group of forest dwellers that lived separately from other Javanese people and specialized in all matters concerning wood: logging, transporting, carving. The Kalangs were responsible for the largest part of the forest-related work on Java. The VOC had difficulties trying to contract them because the Kalangs were already under the obligation to provide wood to the local elites. On top of that, they *"refused to be bound by contracts – they were prepared only to cut and deliver the trees they wanted to cut"* (RFPP 38).

But these forms of resistance could all be overcome. The VOC did not perish from resistance, but from the unsustainable nature of its logging practices. Over time, one way or another, the Dutch acquired the collaboration of local elites, who supplied the Dutch with a labour force and agreed on quota for the delivery of wood. But the VOC's approach to forestry could not be sustained. Towards the end of the 18th century, the coastal areas were largely deforested. The extra costs of transporting

wood from further inland to the coast, led to the bankruptcy of the VOC in 1796. Private firms continued to make damaging use of the forest until the introduction of 'scientific' forestry.

1.2.3 Colonial times 2: Dutch government

In 1799 the Dutch state took control of the administration of java. In 1808 Marshal Daendels was appointed governor-general of Java. He would lay the philosophical foundations for a new kind of forest management, which was to be implemented over the course of the century. The actual implementation was not a continuous process, because the government's ideas on how to properly manage the forest waivered over time, and successive governors would reject and adjust parts of the plans of their predecessors.

The historical aberrations that Peluso describes are a necessary part of any comprehensive history of forest uses. They may also serve to interrupt stories of linear development towards modernity, uncovering the contingency of history by showing the alternative projects that have been pushed aside[7]. This, however, is not an argument Peluso makes. On the contrary, she gives a rather deterministic view of history, suggesting that the main elements of 'scientific' forestry, once they were laid down by Daendels, have persistently influenced forest history until the day she writes (*in spite of* aberrations, not *through* them). These elements are: the appropriation of all forest land by the state; the creation of a separate state department for forest management; the breaking up of the forest into discrete management units called 'tracts'; and the restriction of the local population's access to wood and other forest products (cq. RFPP 45-46).

The Dutch took formal control of forest land in 1870 with the Domeinverklaring, "*which declared all unclaimed and forest lands as the domain of the state*" (RFPP 50). This declaration made all previous claims to forest ownership obsolete. The appropriation of the forest was accompanied by an intensification of control of trees. Forestry laws that were developed over the course of the 19th century severely restricted local use of forest products. Only under strict conditions could villagers use wood from the state forests. It became impossible to continue traditional ways of livelihood within the legal limits. Customary systems of forest use were thus criminalized. But many villagers saw no other option than continuing their activities, despite their illegal status.

In 1880 a forest police was set up to guard the boundaries of the forest and catch villagers who engaged in illegal activity.

Meanwhile, control of labour assumed new forms. The VOC had been supplied with a labour force through agreements with local rulers who forced part of their people to perform services for the Dutch, so-called "*blandong-diensten*". This system of compulsory labour continued during Daendels' administration, but was challenged by subsequent administrations and eventually abolished in favour

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[7] Such a project could be called counter-hegemonic history: it undermines the common sense and historical necessity that hegemonic forces (such as states) typically make claim to. It would build on Antonio Gramsci's writings on hegemony (see for example Gramsci 1971 [1929-1935]) and may also draw from Foucaults interpretation of the concept of genealogy in Nietzsche (see Foucault 1971 and 2004 [1977-1978]). For a powerful example of counter-hegemonic history, I refer the reader to Goldman's critique of the World Bank ('*Imperial Nature. The World Bank and Struggles for Social Justice in the Age of Globalization*' 2005) in which he writes: '*By offering a few observations on the history of the World bank, I seek to show the value of a critical ethnographic approach that emphasizes historical conjunctures (...) in order to reveal vulnerabilities and contingencies*" (Op. cit., 25).

of a system of free labour in 1865 (RFPP 57). Instead of being forced to work, villagers were offered wages in return for labour. But this system of free labour, which had been introduced under "*the pretence of liberating the forest people from oppressive systems of labor obligation*" (RFPP 58) was in fact supported by a new, more indirect form of compulsion, which was "*at least as oppressive as the blandong system*" (58). The forest labourers were no longer exempt from land rent hand head taxes (as they had been when labour was compulsory). Additionally, villagers were no longer allowed to extract wood for building houses from the forest but had to purchase it from the state. These changes created a need for cash amongst villagers, which effectively forced them to perform the paid forest labour.

A second mechanism that was effective in controlling labour, was the so-called *tumpang sari* system, with which the first experiments began in 1873, which became widely used by 1883, and by 1928 provided the labour force for over 94% of reforestation of teak in Java. In this system, workers who reforested clear-cut land were allowed to grow crops between the planted teaks for the first one or two years. This made smart use of the land shortage that resulted from the appropriation of the forest by the state and was particularly effective in more fertile areas. The system was efficient because it allowed the state to keep wages low not only for reforestation labour, but also for other forest work such as woodcutting, because tumpang sari land provided the peasants with an extra opportunity for subsistence.

The ideology of conservation that the state introduced to justify its forest control was, Peluso claims, often misplaced. This ideology maintained that forestry should be performed by the state in the common interests of all, because the state could safeguard the hydrological function of forests. But while the hydrological function of trees establishes the importance of keeping mountainsides forested, it cannot justify planting teak on all sites where it can grow well, especially when it replaces other tree species or fertile agricultural land. In fact the main task of forestry was to provide revenue for the state. Arguments of conservation often served to hide this self-interest. (cq. RFPP 67)

The difficulties that the new controls posed for villagers led to an increase in resistance. Peluso focuses on one resistance movement, that of the Saminists, who were allegedly "*the most visible of rural protesters in the teak forest during this period*"(RFPP 71). The Saminists were followers of a certain Surontiko Samin, who started talking to villagers about injustice around 1890, and the villagers were eager to listen. His followers exercised a non-violent form of resistance: refusing to talk to foresters, refusing to pay taxes, refusing to leave their lands. The Dutch responded by putting the leaders of the movement in exile and confiscating their lands wherever they thought the movement was starting to flourish. Although Saminism failed to become a mass movement, Saminist communities continue to live in the forests today. Peluso attributes mainly symbolic value to them: "*the Saminist movement can be used to symbolize a longstanding battle over villagers' rights of forest access*" (RFPP 72).

1.2.4 Japanese occupation

From 1942 until 1945, the Japanese occupied Java. During this occupation, "*extensive forest damage*"(RFPP 97) was inflicted. The Japanese needed many resources to sustain their war activity. They cut trees "*at breakneck speed*" (96) while replanting much less than the Dutch had done.

Before the Dutch surrendered, they destroyed useful infrastructure so that their enemies couldn't use it. Indonesian peasants saw this retreat as the end of the restrictions to their access to the forest. Many landless peasants took the opportunity to claim lands in the forest, occupying "*thousands of hectares of the State Forest lands*"(RFPP 100-1). The belief that state forest control had come to an end was

soon proven misguided. Not only did the Japanese use an oppressive system of forced labour, but even after Independence had been achieved, the Indonesian government continued colonial forest control in many ways. The peasants that had claimed the land after Dutch surrender, were denounced as "*penduduk liar*", wild occupants or squatters (101) and actions have been undertaken to evict them. But their occupation of these forest lands and the refusal of many to be evicted would form a model for protests to come.

1.2.5 Struggle for independence

After the Japanese left in 1945, Indonesia declared independence. The Dutch tried to regain their control of Indonesia through military force. The fight for independence went on until 1949. The military battle created some dilemmas for the Indonesian Forest Service.

First, because so many men had joined the fight, there was no workforce available to perform forest labour. Second, the government wanted to "*eliminate those elements of forest management that conflicted with the more egalitarian philosophy sported by the independent republic*"(RFPP 97). But at the same time, the government needed forest resources to support its battle for independence. Moreover, the path of 'scientific' forestry laid out by the Dutch seemed to be the best way to maximize production.

Younger nationalists started to debate with older foresters on how the forests should be managed. The older foresters represented the ideology of 'scientific' forestry: a macro-economic orientation, aiming to create revenue for the state and to protect the hydrological function of the forest. State control was required, they argued, to optimize the traditional functions of the forest, both production and conservation. The younger nationalists, on the other hand, valued more strongly the rights of villagers to access the forest products they need to subsist.

When in 1946 the new Forest Service adopted new objectives, these more egalitarian concerns were taken into account. The function of the Forest Service would from then on be to "[*distribute] wood fairly, inexpensively, and directly to the people*"(RFPP 98). This new objective was supposed to shift forestry away from the Dutch orientation towards trade and export.

Nevertheless, there were more continuities than discontinuities between the old and the new Forest Service: "Despite the changes in its stated philosophy and goals, the 'new' Indonesian Forest Service consistently invoked its power and legitimacy and reacted to the upsets on forest lands in almost predictable 'old' ways" (RFPP 99). To the foresters, Dutch forestry was still the norm. Although some demanded change, there was no "cohesive alternative plan for involving forest villagers in forest management"(122). Foresters had been trained in the principles of 'scientific' forestry and, faced with the task of restoring order in the forest after the Japanese had left, they automatically envisaged this order in terms of these principles, because this was all they knew. This order required the consolidation of state ownership of forest lands and the restriction of villagers' access to the forest.

Even though an Indonesian instead of a Dutch colonial state now controlled the forest, the situation of the villagers did not improve. The new Forest Service acted no less colonial towards them: it imposed the same boundaries and restrictions upon forest access.

1.2.6 Independence

In 1949 the Dutch forces withdrew and the revolution ended in an Indonesian victory. Internal debates and struggles over "*the appropriate state forestry and ideology*" in general and especially on *"the*

relevance of the Dutch forestry system to the needs of the Javanese people" continued (RFPP 102). Peluso identifies and describes four main political factions:

(1) The *Darul Islam/Tentara Islam Indonesia* (DI/TII) aimed to create an Islamic State through guerrilla warfare. They protected the forest because they needed forest cover for hiding places. They tried to prevent forest villagers from cutting trees. So their presence stimulated the growth of the forest, even though it made the lives of the villagers more difficult. They risked getting shot when collecting wood, had to give part of their food to the rebels, and were afraid to go out to work their lands. (2) The activities of the *state military* on the other hand were *"decidedly harmful to the forest"* (RFPP 105) (although the DI/TII has been blamed for leaving them no choice). The military tried to defeat the rebels by destroying their hiding place, the forest. In addition, highly placed individuals within the army *"misused their position to steal teak"* (105), for their private benefit. (3) The *Partai Komunis Indonesia* (PKI) was the Indonesian Communist party that fought for the rights of the working class. The PKI organized the villagers in political unions to influence policy and demand better working conditions. (4) On the other hand, the Forest Service, represented by the *Partai Nasional Indonesia* (PNI) was in practice still concerned with securing state control of the forest to ensure revenue for the state from forest products.

The conflict between foresters and peasants reached its climax when the PKI launched the so-called *"uni-lateral"* actions. The PKI tried to mobilize peasants in a mass movement to *"[occupy] lands belonging to large landowners, private states, or the Forest Service, and cut down trees on forest lands and plantations"*(RFPP 117). Groups as big as *"hundreds or thousands"* of peasants entered the forests, driven by famines and encouraged and mobilized by the PKI. The PNI responded by organizing mass trials that *"addressed hundreds of individual cases a day"* (120).

We can summarize that the period 1942 to 1966 was a turbulent time for Indonesia, with open and violent conflicts regarding the forest. The forest was damaged through these conflicts. The state's attempts to control the forest continued, but resistance grew, became more open and became more politically organized over time. For a while, there was an atmosphere in which the desired aims and methods of forestry could be debated. Political factions engaged themselves and parts of the population in struggles over forest access.

This open resistance ended with the establishment of Suharto's New Order, which started with the violent execution of thousands of PKI supporters and continuously suppressed open and political opposition. Peasant resistance continued, but it was *"forced underground"* and shifted towards *"more clandestine"* strategies (RFPP 123).

1.3 Forest conflict during New Order

1.3.1 Unsustainable scientific forestry

About state forestry under the New Order Peluso argues that this too, like the Old Order, continued the forms of oppression that had been introduced in the days of Dutch rule: *"The structures, laws, ideologies and labor policies shaping foresters' management strategies are essentially the same today* [i.e. 1992] *as under the late Dutch colonial state"*(RFPP123). All forms of forest control that were imposed by the Dutch, control of land, of labour, of species and of ideology, have been reproduced. Forestry was still viewed as a source of revenue for the state rather than in terms of facilitating the needs of the villagers living in it. Western 'scientific' forestry remained the dominant ideology. The state continued to claim legal possession of all forest land and deployed an armed forest police to look for illegal agricultural plots and illegal collection of forest products. The system of labour control

through tumpang sari and wage labour was also continued. Peluso describes these forms of control in their new variations and adaptations in great detail. But essentially, nothing really changed: "*From the point of view of local people, outsiders – no matter that they be Indonesian rather than Dutch – are still trying to control their local resources.*"(140)

Meanwhile, Teak forestry was becoming increasingly unsustainable. Timber stocks were depleting because reforestation efforts were failing. Peluso proposes three explanations for these failures. First, the perceived necessity to keep increasing profits pressed foresters to cut more forest than management plans prescribed. Second, the *tumpang sari* system gave farmers who had earned temporary control of regenerating forest lands an incentive to prevent the healthy growth of the forest so that it would remain reforestation land so that there would be more *tumpang sari* land available for farmers. Third, forest crime proliferated in complex networks of illegal teak extraction. She elaborates on these last two aspects with the help of her own field research on forest villages in Java. She uses one village, which she calls *Kalianjat* (a pseudonym), to illustrate the problem related to the *tumpang sari* system. To illustrate the problem of forest crime, she uses her observation of events in what she calls "*the prime teak zone of Central Java*" (RFPP 203).

1.3.2 Resisting reforestation

In her case study of 'Kalianjat' Peluso describes the social relations within the village and the local history of forest use. For over 30 years, she writes, foresters have tried to reforest the area, but their attempts have failed because of the resistance that the farmers were able to put up against it: "*By participating, actively or passively, in the repeated foiling of reforestation, they are reclaiming what they perceive as their traditional right in the land from a series of hostile outsiders*"(RFPP 199). The farmers set fire to the forests, chopped down trees or purposely planted the seedlings in such a way that they would not survive for long. They thus managed to increase the area that was to be reforested, which gave themselves more access to land and labour. Because all farmers claimed not to know who was behind the forest destruction, the foresters could do little against this form of resistance: "*In this forest, the foresters could control neither the lands, the crops, nor the people*" (195)

1.3.3. Counter-appropriation of teak

From her field research in the teak forests of middle Java, Peluso gathers that unlawful use of the forest is widespread and embedded in local culture.

Peluso describes a repertoire of tricks that villagers use to escape the control of the police. For example, loggers have ways to dampen the sounds of their saws at night. Also, illegally logged teak trunks are buried under agricultural fields before ploughing the fields and dug up after the harvest. This practice renders stolen wood harder to trace because the time underground makes it look and smell older. Another method is to store the wood in secret spaces between the walls of a house.

Peluso also describes the complex social networks that have evolved around the practice of "re-appropriation" of teak. Many people are involved: woodcutters; intermediaries who hide and sell the wood; businessmen; people from the military or ordinary villagers who buy the wood for different reasons; and those officials of the forestry establishment that either coordinate networks themselves or have been bribed. There is a thriving black market, which is accompanied by an atmosphere of toughness that Peluso calls "*frontier culture*" (RFPP219).

1.4 Peluso's proposal

Peluso has shown what is wrong with 'scientific' forestry. Not only is the current continuation of colonial restriction of villagers' access to the forest socially unjust. Also it cannot be justified with an ideology of environmental protection, because environmental objectives cannot be achieved through this form of forestry. The current system of forestry is ineffective, she concludes from her research, because it cannot control the environmentally harmful social dynamics that it triggers. Criminalizing customary use of the forest has not kept the villagers out of the forest. Because they had to viable alternatives for subsistence, they continued using the forest. The struggle over forest control has created a deeply felt antagonism between the state and the forest villagers. The former tries to impose control of the forest, with enough success to make the life of the villagers tougher. But the latter effectively resist these controls by blocking attempts of reforestation and organized counter-appropriation of teak. In short, this situation is detrimental to both sides.[8]

The way out of this impasse is to involve the villagers more in the management of the forest and to address the problem of poverty. Apparently, this was to some extent already acknowledged, because since 1981 efforts have been undertaken to develop "social forestry" programs aimed at community development in forest villages (RFPP 238, see also lemma PMDH in glossary, p. 264). These programs aimed at improving *"the economic circumstances of the farmers in the vicinity of the forest"* and *"giving them more of a stake in the success of reforestation"* (238). The rural poor were to be given more rights to exploitation of land and trees, in the hope that better social conditions would *"improve the forest's chances of restauration, rehabilitation, or reforestation"* (238).

In her last chapter Peluso explains why these attempts would not achieve their goals. The projects did too little. They failed to address the structure of the social relations in the village and the organizational structure of the Forest Service. From these conditions arose a *"structure of access"* (RFPP 239) that hampered the flow of the benefits of these programs to the poorest peasants.

A first problem concerned the *"functional identity"* of foresters (RFPP 242). Access to social forestry programs was still distributed by field foresters who are trained to perceive their main task to be the protection of the forest. Moreover, they are under time pressure from their superiors to show results, *"and 'results' to foresters means trees in the ground, growing"* (242). Planting trees was thus given priority over the redistribution of welfare, even if the latter had been acknowledged to be an important factor for *keeping* the trees in the ground. Therefore, the foresters preferred to engage workers they trusted to do the job quickly, which often were not the poor people but the more wealthy farmers or *"his own men and their wives and children"*(243). A second problem was the lack of capital that prevented the poorest people from abandoning their subsistence activities to join a project which would not provide income until after *"five or six months"* (245) when the first harvest could be expected. Poor peasants didn't have the financial reserves to cover this gap and credit was hard to come by. The SFC as an institution refuses to provide credit on the grounds that it isn't part of its *"intended mandate"*(248) and because it is a complicated and risky procedure. Individual foresters, however, have felt the obligation, deriving from persisting traditional ideologies of patron-peasant

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[8] Peluso notes however, that some individuals have found ways to benefit within this situation, but not in ways that are socially desirable. For one, the unauthorized cutting and selling of teak can be a profitable business for some individuals within the military, the forestry establishment or for companies from outside. Peluso also notes that more wealthy farmers have been able to secure access to better and larger plots of *tumpang sari* land, at the expense of the poorer peasants. This increases the income gap.

relations, to provide credit from personal funds. But these limited resources can be partially diverted from the poorest by the wealthier farmers, because the foresters, being "*constrained by ideology and obligation*" (249), feel that they cannot discriminate between loan requests on the basis of wealth.

Peluso therefore calls for "*integrated social forestry*" (RFPP 250). The Forest Service should undergo a fundamental reorganization in order to become more "*responsive and open to the range of rural problems related to the forest*" (249). It should abandon its strong orientation towards the planting of trees and divide its attention more appropriately between environmental and social issues. The foresters should start learning from the population by really listening to what the problems and needs of the local population are, and then cooperating with them to find appropriate solutions. The Forest Service should provide more labour opportunities, access to land and affordable credit.

2. *Rich Forests Poor People* and the politics of nature

2.1. RFPP and political issues

We can use the typology of forms of forest control that Peluso works with, to phrase some of the political issues that she exposes. First, concerning control of land, the political question is: *who should own the forest land?* Is it desirable and fair that the state should own all forest land on Java? At the least, Peluso's history shows that this is not a natural state of affairs: state ownership was established through artificial boundary-setting and forced evictions under colonial rule, in the interests of the Dutch. Second, concerning control of trees, the question is: *who should have the right to use and exploit which trees and plants?* Excluding forest villagers amounts to cutting them off from their traditional source of subsistence and criminalizing their customary rights, against their will and without their consent. Is this justified? Even if it is, we should then think about appropriate compensation to those who lose their access to the forest: can viable alternative livelihoods be provided? Peluso has shown that such alternatives, when provided, have often been insufficient. Third, concerning control of labour, we may ask: *who should perform forest-related work and under what conditions?* Systems of organizing forest labour have been oppressive and exploitative. What would a just and fair system look like? Fourth, concerning control of ideology, we may ask: *what should the aim of forestry be?* What do we want the forest to be? This is perhaps the most important question, since the answers to the first three questions depend to a great extent on how this fourth question is answered. The ideology of 'scientific' forestry says that the forest should on the one hand provide revenue for the state and on the other hand be conserved in the name of environmental protection. But the forest may also provide a livelihood for poor forest villagers. Is this not also a desirable function?

All of the above confirms Swyngedouw's thesis that the environment should be seen as something political. Looking at these teak forests from Peluso's perspective, we see that there are indeed conflicts of interest. Her historical research shows how this conflict has developed over time, and her field research shows how deeply rooted this antagonism had become by 1992. These insights contradict a-political narratives of environmentalism. Forestry since governor Daendels has attempted and claimed to base its practices on the neutral and objective calculations of rational science. But Peluso shows that forestry isn't just a technical affair. Treating forestry as a matter of planting and cutting trees according to a management plan, doesn't make the antagonisms disappear. This is also in accord with Swyngedouw's thesis that political conflicts cannot be ignored into non-existence, for they will return in the form of repression and resistance (what he calls 'the return of the Real,' Swyngedouw 2011:374). That the state denounces villagers who try to access the forest as subversives and criminals, does not make forestry a matter of good governance. Many 'criminals' see no alternative to their

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activities, which are to them the legitimate re-appropriation of what was rightfully theirs. Peluso suggests we take these alternative ideologies seriously. They point at the repressive aspects of state forestry, and at potential resistance.

The book shows the political backgrounds and implications of Indonesian State forestry. The way one chooses to manage the forest implies taking sides politically, which can and should be questioned. Practices of forestry can firstly be questioned from the democratic ideal of equality: do they enhance the attainment of this ideal, or do they contribute to the further marginalization of the poor? Secondly, forestry practices can be challenged on its own terms: can they actually establish healthy and productive forests? Given the fact that it makes social antagonisms grow worse, the practice of 'scientific' forestry may be counterproductive. Not properly addressing the social conflicts embedded in the environment may in the end cause environmental harm.

2.2. RFPP, environmentalism and de-politicization

Environmentalism features as an element of the ideological justification of state forestry. Another element is the reference to the 'scientific' method that underlies forest management. The state justifies its claim to the forest on the one hand with the argument that they have access to 'scientific' insights, which guarantees an optimal exploitation. On the other hand, they use environmentalist rhetoric about how the state should ensure the conservation of the forest. Swyngedouw's concern that environmentalism may have de-politicising effects is confirmed here, because the state uses environmentalism to cover up the political aspects of forest policy as for example discussed in section 1.2.3. The reference to a purported common good tends to hide the fact that forestry in practice benefits some but puts others at a disadvantage, just like the rhetoric of climate change does according to Swyngedouw.

The de-politicizing effects do not only express themselves in the justifying populist rhetoric from the state towards the people. They are also embedded in the organizational structure of the State Forestry Service. Forestry, at least at the time Peluso wrote the book, was expected to be a source of income for the state. Foresters are trained to see their job in terms of caring for the forest, which gives them the problematic 'functional identity' discussed in section 1.4. The Forest Service holds them primarily responsible for planting trees and harvesting wood. Although there was a tendency to start demanding that forestry also serve the needs of the poor, the foresters in the field were not in a position to make this secondary goal compatible with the goal of making forestry a profitable enterprise. They were being asked contradictory questions: *" 'Are the trees in the ground, growing?' and 'Are the poor people getting the benefits from these programs?' These are the questions they should be asking, but does the field forester have the tools to be able to answer yes to both questions?"* (RFPP 244) Clearly, Peluso thinks the forester does not have these tools, and this contradiction hampers forestry's engagement with social problems.

A third depoliticizing aspect of state forestry is the use of law as a legitimizing ideology. The continued exploitation of state forests by local peasants, Peluso has argued, can be seen as an act of resistance and is therefore a political issue concerning conflicting interests (see section 1.1). But since colonial times, this form of resistance has been stigmatized as criminal activity. This deprives this activity from legitimacy and eliminates the political aspects of the problem. As it is generally accepted sound judgement that criminal activity is against the interest of society, the state can address this

problem in non-political terms: how do we get rid of this criminal activity? What policing measures can effectively discourage the criminals? The political issue is, literally[9], "*reduced to the sphere of the police*" (Swyngedouw 2011a: 78).

2.3. RFPP and politicization

After identifying the forest conflicts, Peluso briefly mentions possible policy measures, as discussed in the end of section 1.4. She basically proposes to address the problems through a reorganization of the Forestry Service. By reorienting the Forestry Service more towards facilitating the needs of the forest villagers, the conflicts may be resolved. As one reviewer, Martin W. Lewis, has remarked, "*[t]he ideas presented here are appealing, but they are also surprisingly mild and inadequately formulated*" (Lewis 1993: 793). Indeed, Peluso is quick to acknowledge that "*[m]ore research and policy changes – and probably more mistakes – are needed to identify the appropriate solutions*" (RFPP 250). But Lewis has a more fundamental problem with the proposed solutions: they contradict with the critical attitude towards top-down policy in general that characterizes the rest of the book:

> Throughout the book she remains sceptical of all forms of bureaucratic power and top-down management systems, and she seemingly champions the autonomy of forest villages. Yet, in the end, she admits that the state itself would have to intervene drastically in the central structures of village social life-to an extent never before contemplated-in order to reverse the socioeconomic processes leading to forest degradation. (Lewis, ibid.)

This sudden optimism towards a policy solution, which so surprises Lewis, can be explained with recourse to Peluso's account of precolonial forest history, which I outlined in section 1.2.1. I noted that she creates a remarkably peaceful image of forest use at the time, as if forest conflict was not yet an issue then. Serious forest conflict first emerges in the Dutch colonial policies, as discussed in section 1.2.2 and 1.2.3. The main drivers of this conflict are identified: the Dutch orientation towards profits for the state, the restriction of local peasants' access to the forest lands and products, and the repressive system of labour. Then Peluso observes that these colonial policies have been taken up by succeeding regimes, be it with certain variations and adaptions (sections 1.2.4 to 1.3.1). The contemporary complex conflict can thus be understood as the result of the co-evolution of new forms of resistance and repression, a dialectic that was initiated by the Dutch government some 300 years ago. In short, I think Peluso has attempted to trace back the forest conflict to its roots. The roots of forest conflict are the Dutch colonial policies. These have been very influential. But Peluso does not blame policy *in general*. It is a *specific kind* of policy that underlies forest conflict. It is therefore no contradiction for her to make policy recommendations. It makes sense to propose to resolve a conflict by changing those principles that lie at its core: provide villagers with ways to access and exploit the forest, improve their economic circumstances and undermine the exploitation of their labour.

However, I have also argued that Peluso's image of precolonial history might be misleading. Her focus on the effects of colonial policies might have caused her to miss other sources of conflict. We should therefore be careful: even if her solutions can succeed in remedying the adverse heritage of a colonial past, they should not serve to obscure and thereby intensify other antagonisms. This is not to say that it isn't a good idea to develop and implement the kind of policy Peluso proposes. If there is a

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[9] Swyngedouw uses the term 'police' in its historical meaning, which refers to what we today call policy. However, the quote in this case also applies if we understand 'police' according to its present-day meaning.

way to reconcile poverty alleviation with plantation forestry, then surely we should try to find it. But we should remain attentive to the other problems that she may have missed.

And what is even more important: what if we cannot find a perfect solution? Isn't it likely that such a complex issue cannot be completely solved at once? And will we be able to keep track of the new contradictions that emerge as we try to solve the old ones? Lewis ends his review on a positive note. We need not reproach her for failing to solve the contradictions that haunt Indonesian forestry, for *"contradictions are always easier to recognize than to resolve"* (Lewis 1993: 174). But here we come back to Swyngedouw's challenge of opening the way to a politics of nature. For Swyngedouw the most difficult thing is to acknowledge the contradictions. The danger lies exactly in the ease with which policy makers can claim to solve a contradiction once this contradiction has been identified. The danger is that this may close the space for debate, while at the same time it keeps intact the societal order that underlies these contradictions, so that '*nothing really changes*' (Swyngedouw 2011b: 377). The foremost issue for Swyngedouw is therefore how to create openness for political questions, which first allows the order to be challenged. It makes sense to linger on this point and try to hold on to this openness that allows us to see the contradictions and antagonisms, before closing this political space with new policy measures.

So by giving policy recommendations, does Peluso go a step too far? We should ask what motivated her to make this proposal. Why did she not just stop after her analysis? First, her criticism of the then-contemporary attempts at social forestry speaks against the idea that she is being naive. She is aware of the danger that some policies do too little to achieve real change. She proposes precisely to go further. Second, from the historical experience of years of open forest conflict during and after the struggle for independence, we can build a strong argument for her choice to insist on the development of a concrete plan.

As discussed in sections 1.2.5 and 1.2.6, in the period between 1945 and 1966, political issues were on top of people's minds. Egalitarian idealism fuelled the struggle for independence, and there was much debate on how to best realize this ideal in material reality. Within the Forest Service, there were discussions on what the role and function of forestry should be. Young foresters challenged traditional notions of 'scientific' forestry and demanded structural change. After independence, differences in ideologies could grow into violent political resistance. Religious rebellions hid in the forests as they fought the state army. Communist political parties organized peasants to oppose the Forest Service and fight the conditions that kept them under suppression. In these years, nature was political.

Yet, these politics of nature didn't lead to more egalitarian forests. Foresters, when faced with the immediate challenge of restoring, conserving and profitably exploiting the forest, resorted to the old system of 'scientific' forestry. In spite of the changes in the official objectives, the "*structural changes required to change the production relations in forestry and improve social relations between the Forest Service and forest villages, briefly recognized during the revolutionary period, were never made*" RFPP 113). Forest villagers did not gain more access to resources. Peluso explains why: "*no cohesive alternative plan for involving forest villagers in forest management had emerged from even the most radical foresters*" (RFPP 122). The same lack of a cohesive alternative plan is argued to have undercut the political efforts of the PKI: "*Without a specific plan that considered both environmental and social impacts of forest use, the political manipulation of the forestry issue would not have sufficed in the long term*" (RFPP 109).

This is why it is sensible for Peluso to propose a plan. Political openness alone is not enough. In the absence of a good plan, it doesn't lead to the structural changes that are needed. Swyngedouw warned

us that a policy plan might foreclose real change. But Peluso teaches us that the absence of a plan may just have the same effect.

Section III: Friction: an ethnography of global connection

1. Outline of the book

1.1 Theme: Friction in global connection

In 'Friction' Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing (2005) [10] offers an ethnographic account of events and developments related to forest use in the Meratus Mountains of Kalimantan between roughly 1980 and 2000. Ethnography is about describing cultures. Tsing tries to explain why things happened the way they did, by analysing the meanings that the various actors attach to the places, events and concepts that are involved. She shows that these meanings diverge, as the actors are different in their ways of life, identities and social positions. The gaps between these different perceptions of reality can be so big, that respective accounts of the same events seem incompatible. Yet, the social groups she describes are not formed in mutual isolation. They are constituted through connections and interactions. Because of the differences between the groups, these connections are characterized by 'friction': "*the awkward, unequal, unstable and creative qualities of interaction at a distance"* (Friction: 4). When actors adjust their ideas and actions in response to the interactions with others, this is never simply a transfer of a stable meaning from one actor to the other. The friction that arises when meanings travel across differences, transform meaning. These transformations may be unexpected and unpredictable. Herein lies the productive potential of friction: it opens up new possibilities.

Tsing expands her research beyond what is (or was) the usual scope of ethnography. She does not limit herself to immanent stories of the local and the particular, which would be restricted to a place and of limited validity. Faithful to ethnographic tradition, detailed, local descriptions constitute the main content of the book. But she is especially interested in their connections with the 'global' and the 'universal'. Tsing argues that a proper description of the events requires attention to the larger scales and transnational values to which the actors try to connect. The global comprises for example international trends, organizations and trade relations. The universal comprises ideas about freedom, prosperity and true knowledge. These play an important role in the way actors position themselves, because they are associated with large amounts of legitimacy, resources and authority. Successfully connecting to the global and universal can therefore empower local actors. (Cq. Friction: 2)

By emphasizing the friction that accompanies global connection, Tsing opposes dominant narratives of globalization. Many scholars, she laments, portray globalization as the inevitable coming of a global era as a result of technologies of transportation and communication. Differences will be effaced by the homogenizing proliferation of universal ideas. Such hyper-globalist theories make it seem as if the future of the world is fixed and knowable. Tsing proposes a more complex image, in which friction creates new meanings through global connection. She argues that we should recognize that local cultures are produced in connection with the global. But we should go beyond this recognition and also adhere to an inverted version of this statement: "*that global forces are themselves congeries of local/global interaction"* (Friction: 3). There is not a single hegemonic culture that is produced in a centre and consequently spreads out to peripheries that passively consume this global culture. The frictions that arise in the encounters are productive. The global is not homogenizing but forms an

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[10] Henceforth cited as 'Friction'

interactive patchwork of cultures that interact; not a predictable progression towards order but unpredictable, creative and messy. Moreover, she points at "*the importance of cross-cultural and long-distance encounters in forming everything we know as culture*" (4). Thus cosmopolitan culture is not made in isolation from the so-called periphery, but urban and rural cultures develop in interaction.

In her account of the connections between the local and the global, Tsing gives primacy to neither. The global does not dictate the local. But also vice versa, the local cannot absorb the effects of the global under its own conditions. The local is affected by friction, which not only creates possibilities but also restrictions. Tsing compares this to the effects of a road: "*Roads create pathways that make motion easier and more efficient, but in doing so they limit where we go. The ease of travel is also a structure of confinement.*" (Friction: 6)

Tsing's intent to write an ethnography of global connection leads her to methodological considerations, as ethnography has usually been about the local. She wants to study the global within the local, so she asks herself: "*Where would one locate the global in order to study it?*" (Friction: 3.) Her answer is to look at how the global practically functions in the lives of the people she studies.

When trying to understand global connections, we can't get around universals. Everybody appeals to universals, as these are supposed to have a validity that transcends the particular: "*the universal is what, as Gayatri Spivak has put it, we cannot not want, even as it so often excludes us*" (Friction: 1). In positioning herself in relation to universals, Tsing tries to find a middle ground between on the one hand scholars who operate completely within universals, and on the other cultural relativists, because "*[n]either those who place their ideas inside the universal nor those who discredit it as false pause to consider how universals work in a practical sense" (7)*. For the one, local knowledge is irrelevant to understanding universals, for the other local knowledge is the only knowledge there is. Tsing, for her part, wants to retain the insight that universals can only exist as local knowledge, but acknowledge their special ability to *move*, in two senses of the word. Universals are mobile, able to travel, and universals mobilize, they affect people (Cq. 213-214). But in their traveling and mobilizing, the universals do not remain the same. They are transformed by friction. Studying global connections includes examining how people engage with universals: where do universals travel, how do they move people in different places?

1.2 Prosperity: how a forest can be destroyed

Part 1, 'prosperity', is about the proliferation of global capitalism, the destruction of the forest landscape through resource extraction in South Kalimantan and the associated social injustice. As the three are linked, the observations on the way global capitalism functions are not very positive. Such is announced in the opening intermezzo: "*I will tell stories of destruction*" (Friction: 26). Yet, this does not imply a total rejection of capitalism. Capitalist practices are admitted to produce prosperity for some, but they do not produce *only* prosperity. So two viewpoints can be contrasted: enthusiasm about the entrepreneurial possibilities of capitalist development and pessimism about its destructive effects. This contrast expresses a certain heterogeneity: an "*unevenness of expectations and fortunes*" (21). In 1997 activists in Jakarta are optimistic about the possibilities for community development. Making communities aware of their resource rights would make development more sustainable, environmentally as well as socially. The situation in South Kalimantan however, is more confusing than these activists acknowledge. Entrepreneurs and migrants are ambitious about the possibility of quickly making a lot of money through resource extraction schemes. But others are angry about the loss of landscapes and cultures that result from resource extraction. Tsing focuses on the latter,

looking at the inequalities that are produced alongside prosperity as a way of understanding how global capitalism functions in a local culture.

Forest degradation is described in the form of emotional impressions. Only in a footnote does she provide quantitative data: a scientific research about deforestation rates found a 56 per cent decrease in Kalimantan's protected lowland forests between 1985 and 2001 (Friction 273 n.3). Mostly, she emphatically describes her own experience of the landscapes as she walks on abandoned logging roads ("*Whole hillsides slide down beside you into the stagnant pools where the mosquitoes breed*" (29)) and cites statements of depressed villagers ("*'Kalimantan is being destroyed,' he says. He is not optimistic. 'This is the end of Kalimantan [...]'*" (23)). This style of narration is in line with Tsing's poetic intention to make us feel the crudeness of resource extraction and provoke a feeling of anger. Maybe her point would have gained in strength if a more objective description of the degradation had been added to the poetic imagery. But that kind of records are widely available and it is easy to convince us that deforestation in Kalimantan was indeed very severe during the 1980's and 90's. So let us turn to the real contribution of this part of the book, that is, the cultural explanation of these events. How was it possible, she asks, that nature be transformed so traumatically? Her thesis, developed in chapter 1, is that this process was supported by a particular imagination of the area as a frontier.

The frontier is described as "*an edge of space and time: a zone of not yet – not yet mapped, not yet regulated*" (Friction: 28). It is placed at the border of civilization and wildness: wild, but ready to be incorporated into the prosperity of civilization. It is therefore full of potential for those who dare to venture into it. The potential is grounded in the resources that are hidden in the wilderness, waiting to be exploited: wood, gold, agricultural land. The promise of quick gain attracts adventurous entrepreneurs. They are excited by a sense of urgency. Because the frontier is a temporary state of being that lasts only until all resources are discovered, claimed and exploited, it is of essence to be quick enough to profit. The combination of wildness and temporariness makes the frontier a place of exceptions: normal rules don't apply here.

The frontier for Tsing is not "*a place or even a process but an imaginative project capable of molding both places and processes*" (Friction: 32). The forests of Kalimantan were not out of themselves a frontier, but imagining them as a frontier triggered processes that made them function as a frontier. The imagination of a frontier as wild, uninhabited and unknown neglected the forms of order and the ways of living and knowing that existed in these places. But led by this imagination, people came to behave as if these did not exist, and the area effectively *became* a wild place. The natural resources that were supposedly unclaimed and newly discovered were accordingly extracted as if they belonged to nobody. Logging and mining turned the landscape into what was indeed a bare and desolate wildness. But as Tsing argues in part 2, the forest was in fact neither uninhabited nor unknown. There are old ways of living, which she describes as collaborations between humans and other beings, and practical ways of knowing. Only, these lives and forms of knowledge are poorly understood and often not recognized. Here lies a task for the anthropologist. An understanding of these alternatives will shed a new light on the story of prosperity. The story of the frontier is one of discovering and exploiting new possibilities. Tsing in contrast holds that the natural resources were "*wrested from previous economies and ecologies in violent extractions*" (50).

The concept of frontier is understood as a universal. Tsing does not did not explicitly use the word 'universal' in relation to it, but does attribute to it all characteristics of a universal: "*The frontier, then, is not a natural or indigenous category. It is a traveling theory, a foreign form requiring translation. It arrived with many layers of previous associations*" (Friction 31). For example, the frontier was a

concept in 19th century America, used to signify the border between the colonized eastern part and the wildness with unlimitedly available free land to the west of it: the Wild West. It has also been used in explaining the large-scale resource extractions in the Amazon. Since the disastrous outcomes of frontier culture experienced in the Amazon, the frontier has been associated with the dangers of environmental destruction. This lesson has been integrated in the new frontier in Kalimantan, albeit not in a very effective manner: "*[p]lans were set in motion to save the environment in the process of destroying it.*" The answer to soil degradation was sought in industrial tree plantations to quickly fill up the gaps in the forest. The perverse consequence of the introduction of plantation schemes was that forest destruction was stimulated in order to make room for plantations.

As this is the clearest instance of a universal in the book so far, we might have hoped for a more elaborate discussion on the origins of the concept of frontier, the differences it had to bridge when coming to Kalimantan and a comparison of the differences and similarities between the Kalimantan frontier on the one hand and its earlier manifestations on the other. Such a discussion would have supported the theoretical arguments on the productive nature of friction. Alas, these topics are only touched upon by a short reference to the earlier manifestations of the frontier. An opportunity is pointed at, but not explored further here. Tsing focuses on the local characteristics of this specific frontier.

The chapter proceeds by telling unrelated stories of Tsing's experiences in this frontier, which together provide a lively and unsettling impression of frontier culture in Kalimantan. So-called "chain saw men" roam through the jungle and talk about the perils and adventures of illegal logging, monocrop plantations proliferate, the military claims with force the natural caves in which valuable bird nests can be found, masculinity is celebrated at the expense of women, and corruption is standard amongst civil servants. After the financial crisis hits Asia in 1997, the frontier gets out of control, resulting in huge forest fires, plagues of rats and grasshoppers, land grabbing, narrow-mindedness and ethnic violence. She attributes these developments to a confusion of the senses: what from afar are clearly irrational actions, such as burning the land of the neighbour, seemed necessary to those who did it because they were confused by the effects of frontier culture.

In chapter 2 this frontier culture is linked to national and international projects. On a national scale, elites dreamed of a nation-state in which their authoritarian rule would be funded by foreign enterprises. In return for their funds, enterprises would receive 'Contracts of Work': permission to extract natural resources. On a global scale, there were dreams of global finance capital. Opening up spaces for foreign investment would allow prosperity to grow faster worldwide. Both of these projects stimulated frontier making because they depended on it for their success. In order to attract investment funds, a spectacle had to be "conjured" that would make the promise of high returns seem plausible. Tsing elaborately illustrates this with the example of a Canadian gold prospecting company, Bre-X, which claimed to have found gold. The company successfully invoked the image of the frontier to convince investors that it was possible that there had been a very lucky find of gold. The value of the stocks then grew spectacularly, but after further investigations it turned out that there was nothing of value. The presence of gold had been conjured. The story of Bre-X is a powerful illustration of how the image of frontier is an imagination. At the same time, it shows that such imaginations can trigger real change: holes in the bare soil ("*the land lay pock-marked and deeply eroded beyond recovery*" (Friction 40)) and mercury in the rivers. Throughout the chapter, Tsing stresses that the imaginations that underlay these projects were motivated by dreams: dreams of quick profit, of a stable nation and of global investment opportunities.

1.3 Knowledge: how people see nature

1.3.1 The making of nature

In part two Tsing turns to the different actors that play a role in the Meratus Mountains, and their forms of knowledge. But chapter 3 first explores more generally how different universals of nature are created. Four famous examples of the making of a universal of nature are examined as an illustration of a general argument about the process of generalization.

The general argument is that universals come to be seen as natural or self-evident because the conditions under which they are created are covered up. Universals have to be created by finding some common ground between things on the basis of which a generalization can be made towards the universal. In order to start looking for this basis, we first need to assume that it exists. In order to find it we need to collaborate across cultures. Once the generalization has been convincingly made, the universal comes to appear as natural. Consequently, the conditions under which it was made, the collaborations as well as the assumptions, "*no longer seem relevant because the facts come to 'speak for themselves'*"(Friction 89). In the examples we shall see how this works.

The first example is botanical classification as a way to constitute nature. The project of botanical science was to discover the order that was assumed to exist behind global biological diversity. Originally, this assumption was based on the belief in a single creator, a rational God. Uncovering the order was deciphering the book of god. After years of collaborations, a convincing system of classification was created, in which any plant species, even if it had been newly discovered, could be assigned its proper place. This possibility of subsuming the particular under a universal reduces its mysteriousness. The unknown plant species is no mystery; it is part of nature.

Botany thus constituted a universal conception of nature. This generalization was so successful that God as the foundation of unity could later be replaced by the theory of evolution: "*a logic within nature usurped God as the unifying source*" (Friction 91) To establish such a system, European researches made use of local knowledge around the world. The knowledge of indigenous people about the habitats of different plants greatly facilitated research. But these collaborations were not attributed any importance to. They were seen as irrelevant. European knowledge, once established, stood in direct relation to the nature it described. Because of the neglect of its collaborative origins, the conception of nature that is constituted by botanical classification can be criticized for having an "imperial gaze" (95).

The second example of making universal nature concerns the idea of national parks, the origin of which Tsing traces to the North-American writer John Muir. For Muir, nature was a place of beauty, inspiration and reverence. Like in the case of botany, the axiom of unity was founded in the idea of God. But unlike botany, where this idea was later replaced by evolutionary theory, Muir's vision became increasingly religious over the years. He saw nature as a temple, a place where we can directly experience God. When, on one of his travels, Muir saw the Yosemite Valley, which aroused in him great affection, his vision of nature culminated in the ideal of a national park. This nature had to be protected, not to conserve the resources for sustainable extraction, but in order to preserve it for the sake of nature, a place of reverence.

Now, whereas the vision of nature implicated by botanical classification could be criticized for its imperial gaze, Muir's vision can be criticized for having a cosmopolitan gaze. He saw the nature from the perspective of a traveller. Consequently the idea of a natural park "*privileged those who could imagine themselves as cosmopolitan and civilized travellers, and thus potential park visitors*"

(Friction 96). For those who could not, the idea of a park had little to offer. Moreover, in many places indigenous residents have been evicted in order to create natural parks. They could not be included in this vision of nature, because they were seen as users of nature, and the park had to be protected from such exploitation. But this issue was not given much attention because of the emphasis on individual experience that underlay the idea of natural parks. This viewpoint caused an *"inability to know one's own collaborative position"* (101), because it seemed unimportant. The connection of God and Nature that motivated the creation of the Yosemite National Park, hid the fact that it were collaborations with powerful people that allowed the idea to become successful. Scientists, nature lovers and environmentalists supported it for obvious reasons. But the most influential allies were those that were interested in tourism: the owners of a railroad company who expected to benefit from turning Yosemite Valley into a national park. But these collaborations, as well as the enmities involved, seemed unimportant from Muir's religious vision of nature. The axiom of unity covered up the collaborations that facilitated the universal.

The third example concerns global climate models that create nature as a global system in the process of warming up. These models, Tsing argues, are consciously created to serve the political aim of stimulating international negotiations on climate regulation. These models have been successful in making the global the internationally accepted scale to view climate problems from. But they have been contested on the basis of their collaborative structure. The global South has criticized the model for being a product of the global North and accordingly biased towards their interests. The way the model is designed urges the global South to help the global North by cutting their emissions to an extent that doesn't reflect the differences in responsibility and capacity between countries. So here we see how a universal can be contested when the structure of its underlying collaborations are not covered up. Actors struggled to get the model changed and succeeded in incorporating a distinction between southern and northern countries in the United Nations Framework Conventions on Climate Change. However, this did not unambiguously lead to a successful and more equal collaboration. Because the US saw the resulting Kyoto protocol as in conflict with domestic interests, they withdrew from it, which considerably lessens its potential as an international instrument.

The last example concerns the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO), which Tsing characterizes as a failed attempt at setting universal nature. The ITTO brought together stakeholders from trade, conservation, forestry and industry around the concept of sustainable forest management. Through international cooperation, the ITTO hoped to achieve consensus on universal standards for forest management. However, they have not been very effective. The only meaningful standards that the ITTO has contributed to, concern either technical issues, e.g. how to reduce the ecological impact of logging, or the issue of illegal logging – the only social problem on which international consensus could be reached. Politically more difficult social issues (*"the problems of legal logging, the loss of local livelihoods, and the opening of forests to destructive forms of settlement and mining"* (Friction 110)) have not been addressed. What is more, the ITTO functions as *"an 'anti-politics machine' that converts social issues into technical ones"* (110). Tsing suggests that this need not surprise us, since the ITTO was originally proposed by the Japanese government with the aim of blocking out other processes of standard-setting of which Japan feared they would compromise its business interests. Thus, she mockingly concludes, *"given its penchant for blocking more meaningful forest solutions, the organization's ineffectiveness is perhaps its best quality"* (111)

1.3.2 Nature lovers

Chapter 4 tells about the Indonesian nation-wide Nature Loving movement to illustrate how a universal plays out "on the ground," in the so-called periphery of global culture. In the 1980s and

1990s, the period Tsing focuses on, nature lovers' clubs were widespread throughout Indonesia's universities and high schools. These clubs organize trainings, trips and expeditions and constitute an intensive social network. Being a member of such a club is for many an import part of their identity. Tsing describes these clubs as being "*self-consciously cosmopolitan*" (Friction 122). Members look for a connection to the global through the organized appreciation of nature. They let themselves be inspired by ideas from different parts of the world. Yet the distinctive form in which they shape their activities and identities is not a mere copy of some universal blueprint from the global centre, but rather the product of multiple "*contingent lineages*" (127). To understand this form of nature loving we need to look at the different historical trajectories that happen to come together in it. The inspiring ideas of among others John Muir are part of the story, but the importance of national, local and individual histories should not be underestimated. In this chapter Tsing turns to some of these more located components of nature loving to show "*the inextricability of interconnection and location*" (122) in support of her overarching claim about the cultural productivity of friction. The romance of nature was transformed into something new and surprising when it came to Indonesia.

The peculiarity of Indonesian nature loving that Tsing focuses on, is its nation-wide association with youth. Whereas in the US nature was a place where young and old would meet, in Indonesia exploring nature was seen as an activity for middle-class young people. Nature loving clubs were rare outside universities and schools. After graduation, alumni might still support their old clubs with advice, but they would no longer participate in their activities. To explain the attractiveness of nature loving for Indonesian youth, Tsing shows how four contingent lineages come together in nature. From this confluence emerges the possibility of a strong national nature loving movement for Indonesian youth.

First, under Suharto's regime of political repression, nature was one of the few objects that students could acceptably organize themselves around. In 1978, Suharto had forbidden all student organizations because of the threatening revolutionary character of youth politics. The revolutionary potential of youth had been demonstrated during the struggle for independence from colonial rule, as well as during the tumultuous period that led to the resignation of president Sukarno and the instalment of president Suharto. Both times youth had been an important driver of change. During this last period nature loving clubs first emerged at universities, attracting students who were weary of the politically oriented student activities. Nature was a place of peace where students could retreat from political struggles and around which they could organize in harmony. Their a-political character helped the nature loving movement to regroup and even flourish after being closed down. Collaboration with the army, exchanging expertise for equipment and political permission, further reinforced their avoidance of social criticism. Their nationalism, in short, was of a kind that was highly appreciated by the New Order: a nation-wide network taught the youth to view Indonesia as a unity in a way that didn't invite their engagement in political debates.

Second, the organized appreciation of nature was in line with processes of class formation. It gave shape to the new middle class that was going to have to deliver the "*mediators for the influx of international money during the years of Indonesia's economic 'miracle'*" (Friction 130). Through the nature loving clubs, students learned to experience nature as "*something transcendent and romantic*" (Friction 130). In this way they created a distinction between themselves and the rural people they encountered. They saw themselves as young metropolitans with a successful and cosmopolitan future. Their belonging to a national network and their use of modern technology and international standards of training further reinforced this image. The rural people, in contrast, had not learned to experience nature thusly. They lacked access to the global and consequently retained traditional beliefs and practices. This distinction between city and countryside helped give cultural substance to the economically induced process of class formation.

Third, nature loving was also appealing because it allowed young people to identify themselves with international adventurers. Because they could imagine international tourists doing the things they did, these activities reaffirmed their own cosmopolitan identities and accordingly their imagination of the countryside as the periphery. It was not necessary for nature lovers to actually go abroad or for foreign tourists to go to the same places; it sufficed to play with the possibility. For example, brochures with adventure advertisement would be written in English even though there were only domestic tourists. And even though only very few went abroad, their reports would inspire many to participate in national activities.

Fourth, nature was commercialized, opening it up for consumption by youth. Nature lovers were consumers of special equipment and fashionable attire. International cigarette manufacturers used images of outdoor adventure to gain foothold in Indonesian cigarette markets. This brought about that there was commercial interest in branding outdoor activity. A large amount of resources was thus made available, which were used to boost the image of outdoor activities with the aim of making cigarettes or other products look good by association.

1.3.3. The social-natural landscape

Chapter five describes the central Meratus Mountains as a *"social-natural landscape"* (Friction 173), both created by humans and outside human control; the product of collaborations between humans and non-humans. Studying these collaborations from up close, we can see things that do not fit into the conceptual framework that is used by governments and international forums. This framework includes "*demarcations of human livelihood versus nature conservation, productive farms versus forest reserves, and settled culture versus the wild*" (175). Such categories, Tsing argues, are not unknown to the local populations. They make their regular appearances through external actors such as governments and NGO's. Local leaders have learned to adopt this rhetoric in order to communicate with these external actors. Using these categories gives them a voice, even if they do a poor job in describing the social-natural landscape they live in. Tsing shows the limits of these demarcations by looking for what she calls 'gaps': "*conceptual spaces and real places into which powerful demarcations do not travel well*" (175). A rich and complex picture of the social-natural landscape emerges, that suggests that traditional livelihoods may be more compatible with forest conservation than can be acknowledged when we stay inside the powerful demarcations.

Four gaps are discussed, being those between the following categories: cultivated and wild; subsistence and market economics; farm and forest; settlements and hinterlands. In the gap between cultivated and wild, we can see many plants and animals that are neither. For example, fruit trees are allowed to sprout next to people's homes and become part of the regenerating forest after the people move to their next site. Other species, such as the honey trees, arrive naturally, but are then looked after so that they produce valuable things. Pigs are raised to like people, then left to forage on old swidden fields, where they can be found back when needed.

In the gap between subsistence and market economics, we see activities in which subsistence and trade purposes are intertwined. For Meratus collectors, the market is an external and unreliable force; demands for forest products vary over time. They therefore need extensive knowledge of which useful plants grow where. To make commercial collecting feasible, they have integrated it into subsistence activities. Trade provides cash to buy for example clothing and tools, but everyday maintenance is provided for locally. Theirs is neither a subsistence nor a market economy. But in fact, Tsing argues, this integrated way of supplying forest products to the market is on the long run likely to perform better than purely trade-oriented collecting. The integrated collectors have an incentive to preserve the

forest and the non-human populations in it, since they partly rely on them for their subsistence. Moreover, their detailed knowledge of the forest allows them to harvest in a sustainable way and to replace one species by a suitable substitute when stocks run low.

In the gap between farm and forest, we see enriched forest regrowth on old swidden sites; many products can still be harvested in the years after the farmers move on. These secondary forests are not really abandoned: some species are encouraged and others not. However, development organizations recognize only the categories farm and forest. This can be related to the fact that these organizations' imagination of a landscape is shaped by the industrial landscapes in which farm and forest are permanently separated. The history of these landscapes ranges back to imperial times when governments enforced this distinction to gain control of timber supplies. Forests have consequently been imagined as being outside of society. Conservationists too have adopted these categories and strive for national parks and reserves: places where nature is protected from society. Seeing the forests in the Meratus Mountains with such distinctions in mind, we may find the practice of swidden agriculture disturbing, because it messes with these distinctions: it intrudes in nature and lets agricultural fields grow full with weeds after abandonment. But if, conversely, we see the forests in the Meratus Mountains as the product of collaborations between humans and non-humans, we may gain an appreciation of the value of the richness of these forests, an understanding of the processes that are specific to them and admiration for the intensity of local knowledge about these sites and plants.

In the gap between them we can see shadow communities: the remaining social bonds and material reminders of old settlements, such as fruit trees and overgrown roads. These past communities still constitute social networks. Because communities and settlements are not stable, it is hard to distinguish settlements from hinterlands. Yet, community leaders do pretend that clear distinctions exist when communicating with outsiders: "*Ambitious for their own recognition, leaders portray Meratus communities in terms that outsiders can understand*" (199). They need to adopt these categories to make contact with the outside world.

In short, many common-sense distinctions that are used by governments and developers to describe rural landscapes, lead to representations that do not properly reflect reality. At least, Tsing shows, these categories leave gaps: parts of reality that are not accounted for. Paying attention to these gaps allows us to recognize and value the landscape in a new way.

1.4. Freedom: how hope is possible

In part I it was explained how global connections have contributed to the emergence of a destructive frontier culture in the East of the Meratus Mountains. Part III turns to the other, hope-giving side of global connections: the story of national and regional activism that reaches out to the global. Efforts to protect forests and livelihoods, just like those processes that destroy them, occur within friction between cultures as well. What is more, Tsing claims that "*[s]ocial criticism and political mobilization could only advance through friction*" (Friction 206). She uses the word 'only' *not*, I think, to claim that mobilization would not have been possible in an imaginary situation in which there are no cultural misunderstandings, and thus no friction. This would be a silly assertion, or hard to defend at least, because it seems obvious that collaboration would in such circumstances be in fact much easier. We should rather take Tsing to mean that, considering the fact of cultural differences, friction is inevitable; restricting and enabling at the same time. To obtain a political voice, activism had to be a collaboration across different scales: local, regional and global. Campaigns had to appeal to the interests of people operating at each of these scales. This required intercultural translations and

collaborations which caused a friction in which something new became possible: "*the coalitional structure of such engagements is not just a matter of adding allies, but also of remaking ideas, practices and local, regional and global histories*" (212).

During the New Order, environmental activism was centred in Jakarta. Activists aimed at national solutions and the creation of alternative imaginations of nationalism. Although they attempted to influence policy, activists also appreciated the importance of raising awareness and changing consciousness. So a failure to change policy might still be a success with regard to raising "*political expectations*" (Friction 218), when the attempt received much attention. Their strategy was to use transnational standards as a point from which to legitimately criticize national policy, under the protective support of foreign movements. Whereas regional movements could be violently suppressed, it was more difficult for the regime to silence this kind of activism, as the regime itself also used its connections to global standards and actors to legitimize itself.

One tactic was to use liberal principles and practices to challenge liberal institutions from the inside: "*New Order pretensions of transnationally acceptable democratic standards were challenged by taking liberalism seriously*" (Friction 218). For example, activists used the possibility of filing lawsuits to challenge the pretence that justice could be maintained or achieved through the Indonesian legal system. Indonesia did have environmental laws, but lack of enforcement made their effectiveness questionable. Even though activists would usually end up losing the suits, the court provided them with a platform on which to raise issues of social justice.

Another tactic was to reinforce transnational alliances through translation. Translation enables new connections and alliances. So activists would publish reports on campaigns in both English and Indonesian. Also, influential texts and concepts were translated to make their force available to the project of alternative nation-making. Again, such translations were not possible without friction. In another language and culture, concepts take on different connotations and uses. Tsing illustrates this by the concept of "indigenous rights," which was used in South America to protect the forest dwellers there, but could not directly be translated to the Indonesian context because the issue there was not one of indigenous people versus non-indigenous people.

After 1998, new political opportunities became available. Activism became more dynamic; it was no longer confined to Jakarta-based nationalism. Movements could emerge in the countryside. Policy decentralization further moved the location of political struggle to the provinces, encouraging the decentralisation of activism. But also the more regionally operative activists also connected to the global. They used principles and experiences from abroad to inspire new collaborations. These principles, Tsing argues, travel in 'charismatic packages': "*allegorical modules that speak to the possibilities of making a cause heard*" (Friction 227). They take the form of symbolic stories of success and failure. Through the example of the story of Chico Mendes, the Brazilian rubber tapper who mobilized transnational opposition against deforestation in the Amazon, Tsing shows that the spread of such stories depends on how suitable they are for local causes, and how their meanings change as they travel and become involved in different political processes. The story of Mendes was first adopted by North American conservationists as an example of successful Northern intervention in Southern problems. The story was then applied in Malaysia in support of a transnational campaign against logging. But because national Malaysian environmentalists movements were largely bypassed – local protesters collaborated directly with foreign experts – this campaign was criticized for its 'eco-imperialism': "*the imposition of a northern cause on a southern people*" (233). It was argued that this campaign against logging denied the local population their right to development. So the Chico-Mendes story became associated with intruding northerners, which did not suit the nationalist environmental

movement under the New Order. However, after the fall of Suharto, the story was repackaged to emphasize the possibility of successful alliance building between grassroots movements and global actors. It could again be used as a success story to motivate local people to engage in political activity.

In the final chapter Tsing tells the story of a successful collaboration, which she thinks contradicts common-sense notions of what it means to collaborate. The story is about the conflict between a small village she calls by the fictive name of 'Manggur' in the West of the Meratus Mountains and a timber company. In 1986 coalition of local village leaders, a provincial organization of nature lovers and a national activist organization for environmental protection organized a campaign that in a short time managed to attract such public attention to this issue that the regional government decided to stop giving the timber company permits to log on the traditional lands of the villagers. Tsing presents this as a success story: "*an environmental success*" *(*Friction *248)*. The timber company has been halted. The forest returned to community-based management. What gives even more hope, is the way this was achieved: through a collaboration on multiple scales: national, regional and local. So it is possible to forge such alliances in a way that empowers community based forest management. This collaboration may therefore provide a model for future collaborations.

When Tsing was investigating what factors had led to this success, she found out that the three parties of the collaboration all held different views of what had happened. Their stories were incompatible: "*[these stories] are not just different spins on the same facts; they offer different facts*" (Friction 249). So this collaboration differs from what collaboration is often assumed to be like, in that its cooperating actors are not homogenous and there is no consensus on the ultimate goals or the nature of the problem. The collaboration is based on a contingent, temporary and partial convergence of interests. Tsing calls this "*collaboration with friction at his heart*" (246). Misunderstanding and disagreement are an integral part of it. This is, to her mind, the kind of collaboration that makes new connections and alliances possible: "*I propose this kind of overlapping, linking difference as a model of the most culturally productive kinds of collaboration*" (246).

The actors had different views of themselves and what was at play. The provincial nature lovers group saw themselves as standing on the edge between a culturally isolated forest-dwelling people and the surrounding world. They were "*[c]ivilized people who reach out to touch the wild*" (Friction 253). This special position allowed the nature lovers to become advocates for the environment and the rural population, even though they were not professionally trained in any environmental science. The traditional culture of the local population had to be protected from destructive forces while at the same time their culture had to be improved to ensure that their relation to the forest remained environmentally sustainable.

To the national activists in Jakarta, the events in this village were mainly interesting as an example that supported the image they were trying to promote of the forest as not a wild place, but occupied by organized communities that have special skills in forest management. Unlike nature lovers, they didn't want to portray the village as a wild place, but emphasized the rationality and local knowledge of these communities. They needed to emphasize this kind of rural wisdom to promote community based forest management as an alternative way of managing resources that was not only more just, but also superior to state-based regimes in terms of environmental effects. So, the activists in Jakarta and the provincial nature lovers' group held different views on what these communities were like. But they shared the basic idea of a community as "*a traditional, coherent, well-organized consensus of people who lived relatively stably with the forest*" (Friction 256). This was enough to base an alliance on to enable the village leaders to speak.

However, if we look at the stories of the villagers themselves, this kind of coherent community has never been self-evidently present. Social relationships and networks were not stable, but changed continually as people moved to new swidden sites. The forest itself played an important role in structuring and reshaping these communities. The forest was not an inert place that was managed by a stable community. It was a place of commitment, where villagers returned to tend the fruit trees, and a place of memories of past settlements. The idea of the village as a discrete political unit was an imagination that contrasted with the reality of a wide and fluid social network. But, because this imagination was widely shared by powerful actors on the provincial and national level, village elites were eager to present their villages in a way that complied to this powerful imagination, and to present themselves as the leader of this stable community. They would create "*the landscape of international environmentalist desire*" (Friction 261) to establish connections with authorities and powerful organizations. Elites could use connections to base their rule of the local population on: "*a number of smart leaders copied the rhetoric and symbolism of a particular sector of authority, hoping to draw and maintain a constituency with the legitimacy and aura they gained in this process*" (261). Villagers would often respect the authority of the elite and acknowledge their leadership on the basis of these connections. But yet, they could not be transformed to match their leaders' rhetoric. Leaders tried to demarcate clear borders for their villages, but in reality these borders remained fluid. The village was never a homogenous community.

Tsing argues that a shared discursive field, the shared understanding of the project as a 'grassroots alliance,' was essential to make this collaboration across difference possible. The shared framework, interestingly, was based on the state hierarchy of the New Order. This hierarchy consisted of a three-levelled order. At the top was the national capital: Jakarta. Here policy was made. The lowest level of organization was the village: the place where rural people lived, who were represented by village leaders. Between village and capital there was the intermediate level of the provinces where the national policy was put into practice. The collaboration reproduced this hierarchy: the activists all identified with one of these levels. This order appeared to be "*a natural feature of daily life*" (Friction 250). Adhering to it provided them with pre-defined roles and allowed them to identify each other as partners.

So more than anything else, the collaboration was based on a shared understanding of authority. Respect for the authority of the capital and the province drove leaders to adopt the language of development, human rights and environmentalism, which made them an attractive partner. Reproducing the hierarchy of the New Order made collaboration feasible, even if it limited its potential for radical change. After all, decision-making power was still vested in elites. But seeing what could be achieved within these limits is for Tsing a reason to be hopeful about possibilities to protect forests and people: "*leaders were able to reach out to tap the fantasies of provincial nature lovers and national activists*" (Friction 266). They consciously complied with these imaginations to successfully apply for their help in the struggle against corporate logging.

2. *Friction* and the politics of nature

2.1. *Friction* and political issues

Tsing's ethnographic method is that of telling small stories and interpreting them with regard to big questions. The big questions she chooses to focus her interpretation on are those of globalization and cultural hegemony. This approach results in the critique of homogenizing and deterministic models of globalization that we have discussed in the beginning of this chapter: We set out to read these stories

with regard to questions on whether and how environmentalism can support a democratic politics. In what follows we shall explore what kind of answers these stories allow for.

In line with her ethnographic method, Tsing focuses on political issues related to the forest-dwelling people she studies. The conflict between local forest use and corporate resource extraction takes central position. These two ways of using the forest are incompatible. So who has the right to use the forest? Extractive enterprise is economically attractive; it promises quick revenues, at least on the short term. It can point to benefits for the national economy, or use money to attain the personal collaboration of elites. The destruction of livelihoods and forests can be justified by pointing at the need for development. The forest-dwelling people do not have to regret losing their traditional livelihoods, because they can get a real job helping to extract resources. And after that they can use their accumulated capital to integrate into the modern market economy, which brings benefits for all (because that's what markets do). Extractive enterprise will free the forest-dwelling people from the bonds of tradition. There is also no need to fear environmental consequences: highly productive plantations will replace the wild forest.

Advocates of local forest use usually adopt the language of community-based natural resource management. They point to long traditions of forest use, which arguably constitute the right of continued use. They also argue that these communities possess local and traditional knowledge that can contribute to the protection of the environment, and underpin their argument with a historical record of relative stability. Moreover, to undermine the argument from development, they point to the history of destructive effects of extractive activities on local environments and populations.

Throughout the book Tsing supports the advocates of local forest use. As we have seen, she elaborates on the particularities of local forest use and local knowledge, shows how effective these are in managing forests and demonstrates how they can be easily misunderstood because of inappropriate, colonial categorizations. She also shows the adverse effects of projects that promise development in her description of the 'frontier', in the East Meratus Mountains. The environment has been destroyed and the local population has been economically marginalized.

The main political issue for her is to create an understanding of local forest use and to give the local population a voice in politics. She asserts that this is currently being suppressed by the 'suffocating' hegemony of development initiatives (Friction 207). Tsing thus writes with an explicit political objective, hoping that her writing can contribute to breaking this hegemony. Her support for community-based natural resource management is strategic: "*I am inclined to be generous with projects as long as I see how they strain against the common-sense forms that hold us to destruction and injustice as business as usual*"(268). Even though, as we discussed, community-based natural resource management misunderstands the social-natural landscape of the Meratus Mountains, it can still be used to forge coalitions against development initiatives.

2.2. *Friction*, environmentalism and de-politicization

In striking contrast to Swyngedouw's concern about the de-politicizing effects of environmentalism, the environmentalist movement in Indonesia has been a crucial carrier of political activity during the New Order: "*In the 1980's and the early 1990s, a period of serious government repression, environmentalism was essentially the* only *pluralist social justice movement that flourished in Indonesia*" (Friction 17). This movement was possible precisely because of the seemingly a-political character of the environment, which made it "*one of the few topics open for critical discussion*" (216). Whereas Swyngedouw points to the danger of an a-political imagination of the environment, it can be enabling when under a repressive regime. It has enabled the Jakarta-based activist organisations,

which were able to gather *"under the banner of environmentalism"* (216), to create alliances on multiple scales, which resulted in a movement that was strong enough to criticize the regime in the tentative ways described in section 1.4 above. And it has enabled the student nature lovers' organizations. Admittedly, nature lovers officially and intentionally abstained from all political activity, collaborated with the military regime and created a misguided image of nature and rural people as wild. Yet also, nature lovers' organizations have shown their potential to mobilize people for political issues. Their members became advocates not only for the 'wild nature' they love, but also for the 'wild people' they got to know in nature. In short, Tsing encourages us to see also the hope-giving side of environmentalism. The environment was a topic around which critical political activity could develop, a platform around which a multitude of political issues could be discussed, such as human rights, labour rights and customary property rights. This movement prepared the way for a quick blossoming of activism after the fall of the New Order.

However, there are still criticisms to be made of aspects of environmentalism. Tsing is most concerned about colonial distinctions. The distinction between nature and culture was enforced in the appropriation of forests to enable resource extraction and scientific enquiry about nature. The idea of farming as a monocrop system was introduced to enable the use of cheap or slave labour without agricultural knowledge. The distinction between modern and traditional justified interventions in local populations. These categorizations not only remain present in development thinking, but also influence thinking about the conservation of nature, as became apparent in John Muir's ideas on natural parks. Imagining nature as separate from society causes the idea that it has to be protected from it, which justifies the eviction of local populations for the sake of the natural park. This imagination therefore stands in the way of a proper discussion about local rights. Moreover, because of the religious character of Muir's environmentalism, the local population comes to be seen as abusers of a holy place, which further undermines its position.

Another depoliticizing idea is that of the frontier. Because it neglects the existing ways of living with the forest, it forecloses a proper discussion about the interests of the forest-dwelling people. Frontier culture is one of the main explanatory factors of the destruction of forests as well as livelihoods in Kalimantan, together with the conjuring of investment opportunities to attract global capital and the interests of national elites. But these imaginations do not even claim advocacy for the environment, so they fall outside the scope of an investigation of environmentalism in Indonesia, however influential they may be. Finally, the ITTO is criticized for being an anti-politics machine, as noted above. The ITTO does advocate for the environment. Its failure to contribute to meaningful solutions can be traced to the fantasy that the concept of sustainable forest management could bridge differences and form the basis for consensus, which has been proven to be unrealistic with regard to many issues.

2.3 *Friction* and politicization

In 'Friction' I can find three ideas that help to address the political issue of local rights for forest-dwelling people. First, the idea to imagine the environment as social-natural landscapes may help overcome the dangers and limitations of a hard distinction between nature and society. The forest could be seen as a collaboration between humans and non-humans. Tsing beautifully shows how this perspective may allow us to see the gaps between widely used categorizations. They show us that such categorizations cannot everywhere describe everything. They are thus not natural but have to be imposed on a landscape. In section 1.3.3 I have mentioned some of insights this allows for, although the strength of the argument lies in the detail of the descriptions as provided in chapter 5 of 'Friction'. These insights may be used to challenge development as well as conservation projects.

Second, the idea of community-based natural resource management can be used to mobilize actors into strategic alliances. The idea is to let local communities manage the forest, because they have the most suitable knowledge, skills and incentives and because this protects them from displacement or expropriation. The community is not in fact the stable political unit that it is imagined to be. But this imagination gives shape to a political actor that has a voice through the community leaders and can be the object of support from provincial, national and transnational organizations. Tsing recognizes the dangers of such programmes. Community leaders may not actually look after the interests of the community he purports to represent. Powerful institutions may adopt the concept to acquire a cheap labour force with the promise of autonomy in an uncertain future. But Tsing wants to stress the possibilities for political mobilization. The Ford Foundation, which through its Rural Poverty Alleviation Program provides funding to research and projects of community-based natural resource management, has bestowed the idea with a large amount of resources and legitimacy.

Third, and this is perhaps the main message of the book, Tsing points more generally to the possibility of collaboration with friction. The collaboration at the village of Manggur we discussed in section 1.4 may provide a model for further collaborations. Through collaboration, the local, national and global scales can be connected to create powerful political agency for the forest-dwelling people. Acknowledging the possibility of collaboration across differences broadens our concept of collaboration and may allow us to see more possibilities to engage with political issues.

Concluding thoughts

In the introduction we discovered the fact of increasing forest cover loss in Indonesia. Before we had the opportunity to ponder the meaning of this event, our attention was quickly drawn to debates on climate change. But we decided to resist this suggestion. Inspired by Swyngedouw, we set out to look in ethnographic books for 'a politics of nature' in Indonesia. Because this was above all a quest for different perspectives on the forest, we have studied these ethnographies in their entirety, which meant going through detailed stories without initially asking how they could be used to politicise nature. We did not select the useful parts on the basis of pre-existing ideas of what is important about forests, but tried to understand and adopt a new perspective. From there, we assessed whether Swyngedouw's theoretical considerations were relevant to the Indonesian condition, as understood by Peluso or Tsing, and only then looked for strategies on how to approach the identified challenges.

Before we turn to these, let us remark on Swyngedouw's thesis that populist representations of the environment and especially climate change reinforce a shift towards a post-political condition. We did find that environmentalism can de-politicise. But it is questionable whether the term 'post-political' properly describes the direction in which the Indonesian society is developing. If the political issue is, put simply, a conflict over the right to forest land, then a post-political condition may be understood to be a condition in which the government no longer represents this conflict as a matter of concern, either because it can be solved through improved technocratic management or because it is irrelevant in the face of a greater collective purpose (for example the aversion of a global threat – climate change). But as we have seen, environmental arguments and claims of expertise have been used to justify oppressive government policies since at least the times of Dutch colonial management.

It does not follow that political issues were not on people's minds. A government's rhetoric may not succeed in suturing the whole of political space. Even though the Dutch kept up the pretence that their rule was ethically justified (through the education of the Indonesian people, the development of infrastructure, etc.) it must have been clear to many Indonesians that colonialism presented an injustice, and this shared judgement contributed to the strength of the liberation movement after WWII.

So, in a country with such a recent history of authoritarian rule (let us also remember Suharto's dictatorship), it seems inappropriate to say that the political organization is becoming less open to political discussion, especially when we consider the high expectations that many people have of the newly elected future president of Indonesia, Joko Widodo.

What is more, as Tsing described, environmentalism has also been used as a banner under which activists can raise a variety of political issues. Environmentalism and customary rights are not necessarily only adversaries, they can be allies. Ambitious activists should be pragmatic and try to tap into the resources that are made available for environmental protection by translating their projects into the language of environmental protection. This strategy of collaboration across difference is fundamental to her approach to a politics of nature, which we shall now discuss and compare to Peluso's approach.

In both Peluso's and Tsing's study, we find a conception of a politics of nature that revolves around empowering customary landowners. They try to represent the perspective of the forest villagers. Both Peluso and Tsing feel that this perspective is at risk of being suppressed by dominant ideologies of development and conservation. They write with the explicit political objective of protecting the rights of these peasants. To this purpose, they both invoke alternative conceptions of the forest. The forest is not just a carbon sink, it is also a place where people live, on which people depend for a living, and

which has been shaped by people throughout history. The loss of forest cover is the result of complex social processes, and leads not only to global warming but also to the loss of livelihoods. These strategies successfully politicize Indonesian nature. It has become clear, in accordance with Swyngedouw's argument, that a forest can be a place of social and political contestation. Above all, there is conflict about who has the right to the land, and what is the proper use of the land. These are to some extent conflicts between villagers and 'outsiders' such as the government, the army or corporate business. But the conflicts also pervade the villages themselves, because the harmonious and homogenous village society is just as well a myth as the unitary nation.

The strategies they employ to approach this challenge are different. Peluso proposes to change policy so that it becomes more responsive to the needs and demands of the peasants. More than just designing new, improved policies, her proposal implies a re-education of the foresters, a re-organisation of the Forestry Service and above all the integration of the peasants in the policy-making process. Her argument is directed towards policy-makers: these changes will not only create higher well-being for the peasants, but moreover increase their capacity to successfully manage forests.

Tsing on the other hand, addresses not policy-makers but activists. She discusses the activist achievement in Manggur and distils the factors that have made it successful. Crucial was the collaboration across local, national and global scales that enabled the accumulation of resources and legitimacy. On the one hand, this is a more fragile strategy, as it depends on the convergence of favourable conditions. On the other hand, if we take seriously Swyngedouw's comment that every policy intervention is of necessity a violent act (see section I), we will recognize the need for such activism, in its capacity as the resistance to policy measures that exposes the violence and thereby politicizes the issue.

At the same time, we should also support Peluso's approach, which one might see as the other moment of the dialectic between governance and resistance. Even though policy is violent, it is hard to imagine how forestry today could function without governance. Peluso assumes the position of expert scientist who analyses existing policy and outlines an alternative policy plan to overcome the problems she identified. She tries to change existing systems *from within*, by pointing out the inherent contradictions. Such critical reflexions provide valuable feedback and guidelines for policy makers, who need all the help they can get!

This approach will not always succeed in structurally changing things for the better, because the measures that are implemented to resolve the contradictions often still contain these contradictions[11]. Such an approach moreover risks continuing a form of trusteeship, since it criticizes *in the name of* peasants, instead of letting *them* speak. Activism, grassroots movements and awkward collaborations remain necessary to point out such contradictions and find solutions that work.

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[11] Li's (2007) critique of development projects in Sulawesi illustrates how contradictions can accumulate and aggravate themselves in the course of being addressed by policies and analysed by policy-oriented scholars (not 'critics' but 'programmers' – NB: both are valuable in their own way). She discusses multiple decades of development projects, showing how the later projects fail to solve the problems caused by the former.

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