

Book Reviews

Kuch, Declan. 2015. *The Rise and Fall of Carbon Emissions Trading*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

Reviewed by Lars H. Gulbrandsen
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Over the past decade, carbon emissions trading schemes have emerged at sub-national, national, and regional levels in Europe, North America, and the Asia-Pacific. In *The Rise and Fall of Carbon Emissions Trading*, Declan Kuch offers a theoretically engaging and empirically rich account of the turn to carbon emissions trading in Australia and internationally. Given that carbon trading continues to spread around the world, the notion of “rise and fall” might appear misleading, but as Kuch explains it, it refers to the failure of emissions trading to live up to expectations to “civilize markets” by cooling political conflicts, reducing dissent, and ultimately cutting emissions. According to Kuch, conventional accounts of carbon trading fail to see the political interests, power struggles, and conflicts that always loom large in the measurement and calculation of carbon emissions.

The book draws on and contributes to critical literatures on neoliberalism and governmentality, the “technopolitics” of carbon trading schemes, and sociological accounts of their operation. In particular, the book builds on what the author refers to as the performative turn in economic sociology, drawing on the concepts of experimentation, framing, and overflows to develop a theoretically informed understanding of the politics of emissions trading.

The book offers several interesting case studies that individually and collectively assess the prospects for emissions trading to civilize markets and cut emissions. A case study of acid rain regulation in Europe and the United States as an experimental “bridge” to carbon markets provides a critical account of the turn to sulphur emissions trading in the United States and a more positive assessment of the European development of the world’s first transboundary air pollution treaty—the Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution. The perceived success of sulphur emissions trading was transferred to the issue of climate change, facilitating the development of the New South Wales Greenhouse Gas Abatement Scheme in Australia—the first regulatory carbon trading scheme in the world. Kuch provides an in-depth account of the creation and operation of this scheme, situating the development of the scheme in the Australian context of electricity marketization and neoliberal political reforms, and showing how economists used carbon offsets to generate accountable numbers.

The politics of carbon accounting is further examined in a case study of land-use change accounting in Australia and internationally under the Kyoto Protocol. Kuch skillfully documents “the deeply political nature of biomass accounting” (p. 115). Far from being based on transparent and factual land-use calculations, carbon accounting relies on political decisions, bureaucratic expert judgments, imprecise numbers, post-hoc audits, and sometimes guesswork. Kuch shows that such decisions and judgments are also repeated at the international level when he investigates the construction and operation of the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) under the Kyoto Protocol. He reveals the underperformance of the CDM, mostly due to design flaws, limited scope, bureaucratic processes, and lack of “additionality” of emissions reductions achieved through approved projects. In the final analysis, the CDM has not been the site of international learning and critical reflection through collective experimentation that many hoped it would be, but has rather “created a powerful new class of bureaucratic experts” (p. 147) mediating competing demands from rich countries, civil society groups, and host countries on carbon offset rulemaking and verification, and evaluating carbon offsets in narrow economic terms.

Drawing together the findings from the case studies, Kuch argues that the cumbersome and rigid carbon markets studied in the book have not been created because of their efficiency, but rather because of their ability to garner support from business groups and government actors and the near hegemonic political authority of economists that shaped these markets. He exposes how corporate lobbying during the making and implementation of emissions trading schemes in Europe, Australia, and elsewhere resulted in significant political concessions to the fossil fuel industry. It is well known that power producers and industry have exploited carbon accounting loopholes and free allocation to gain windfall profits, but Kuch’s analysis goes one step further in demonstrating how the complexities of carbon accounting have created opportunities for powerful corporate lobbies to protect their interests and profit from emissions trading.

This is not a book of solutions, according to Kuch. Nevertheless, he offers some suggestions about how to improve the governance of climate change mitigation. These suggestions are centered on civil society activism, grassroots action, and other bottom-up measures, as well as socio-legal reforms. Examples include community food initiatives, car-sharing initiatives, and other efforts along a spectrum from activism to enterprise. These are welcome bottom-up initiatives that will not make much of a difference unless they are supplemented with effective domestic and international climate governance architectures. The book is essentially better at explaining and criticizing policies than it is at pointing to effective policy solutions. For readers not well-versed in sociological theory, parts of the book might also appear inaccessible and hard to follow. Perhaps this inaccessibility and the lack of policy solutions in the book explain why environmental economists, not critical social scientists, continue to dominate policy debates and recommendations about climate change mitigation measures, as

seen, for example, in the reports on mitigation from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

Its shortcomings aside, this book offers a comprehensive and compelling account of the politics of carbon trading, calculation, and accounting. It should be widely read, not least by environmental economists and decision-makers in government. The only fear is that those who would benefit the most from reflecting on its insights and policy implications would prefer to continue developing their models and policies without taking into account the worrying politics of carbon measurement and commodification.

Cramb, Rob A., and John F. McCarthy, eds. 2016. *The Oil Palm Complex: Smallholders, Agribusiness and the State in Indonesia and Malaysia*. Singapore: NUS Press.

Reviewed by Philip Schleifer
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The Oil Palm Complex offers a fascinating and detailed analysis of the oil palm boom in Indonesia and Malaysia, one of the largest agricultural expansions in recent history. Since 1975 the amount of land under oil palm in the two countries has grown from about 500,000 hectares to over 14 million hectares. The book traces the drivers and socio-economic outcomes of this process, as part of a multiyear research project. The central questions asked by Cramb and McCarthy, using a political-economy approach, are: Who benefits and who loses from the oil palm boom? And can oil palm development provide a basis for inclusive and sustainable rural development?

The authors find the answer to these questions in analyzing what they refer to as the “complexation” of the industry, which “skews the allocation of resources and distribution of benefits in favor of a powerful cross-country coalition of political, bureaucratic, and agribusiness interests” (p. 443). The conclusion they draw is that the oil palm boom has not contributed to inclusive and sustainable development in the two countries. On the contrary, this boom has been driven by an intraregional state-industrial complex that puts corporate profits before people and the environment. At the same time, however, the authors contend that oil palm is not an “evil crop.” Its cultivation supports the livelihoods of a growing number of smallholders, and Cramb and McCarthy argue that giving these people access to technology, resources, and inputs is important to make this a developmental success story.

In much detail, the contributors to this volume—including scholars, government officials, and activists—trace the politics and evolution of the oil palm complex. Following the introductory chapter and a conceptual chapter, the first part of the book examines the different modes of oil palm production in Indonesia and Malaysia. The chapters describe a “capitalist convergence” toward large, privately owned oil palm estates. A central argument is that the estate

mode is not per se more productive or efficient than smallholder farming. However, it delivers the highest returns on corporate investments. The chapters show how national and local governments played a leading role in driving this process by freeing up native land to attract big agribusiness corporations.

The second part of the book examines the various conflicts surrounding the industry. An important insight is that local farmers typically do not oppose capitalist oil palm expansion as such. Instead, most conflicts are distributional in nature, involving struggles over land use and profits between corporations, local communities, and migrant workers.

The final part of the book offers a detailed analysis of the political economy of labor that underpins the oil palm complex. It describes the strategy of agribusinesses and state actors to create a situation of labor oversupply through actively and passively supporting transmigration. This has the dual effect of undermining the power of local communities and creating a highly dependent and cheap labor force for the oil palm estates.

The Oil Palm Complex offers a rich analysis of these regional and local processes and how they interact in producing political settlements and socio-economic outcomes. This is the key strength of the book, but also one of its limitations. Adopting a regional lens means that important global developments remain somewhat under the radar. Some of these issues are addressed in a chapter on the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil, a transnational private regulatory initiative. However, key trends such as the booming demand for palm oil from China and India and the emerging hybrid regulatory regime in the European Union, another major importer of palm oil, are only mentioned at the margins. These developments in the global political economy of palm oil have important implications for producer countries—for example, as external drivers of social and environmental conditions in the industry. Addressing these issues more fully would have made the analysis more complete.

A second limitation of the book is that it largely neglects the environmental dimension of the oil palm boom. While the authors recognize the importance of the issue, a more thorough analysis is missing. The rapid expansion of oil palm plantations in Southeast Asia has gone hand in hand with the large-scale transformation and destruction of the natural environment. Processes like tropical deforestation and the draining of peatlands are closely intertwined with other factors analyzed in this volume. Environmentally degraded landscapes undermine the traditional livelihood strategies of local communities and become the source of conflicts, with important regional and global repercussions, as witnessed during the 2015 Southeast Asian haze. The environment is a key factor in the political economy of palm oil—shaping the interests and interactions of agribusiness corporations, domestic and foreign governments, native communities, and international and local NGOs. Unfortunately, this aspect of the oil palm complex and its politics remains mostly unaddressed.

These shortcomings do not diminish the value of this empirically rich and well-written volume. Cramb, McCarthy, and their contributors provide a

compelling analysis of the oil palm boom in Southeast Asia. This book is a must read for scholars and practitioners interested in the development of the region or the political economy of agricultural commodities.

Death, Carl. 2016. *The Green State in Africa*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Reviewed by Larry Swatuk
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The Green State in Africa is a finely wrought study of the social, political, economic, and environmental effects of the green-state discourse and practice on the constitution of African states and societies. In Death's words: "The green state in Africa is the effect of an assemblage of environmental rationalities, discourses, and technologies of government through which territories, populations, economies, and international relations have been brought within the scope of sedimented power relations" (pp. 15–16). This is a marvelous book, a must-read for anyone interested in global environmental governance, African political economy, state theory, and the intersections of the three. It is densely theoretical yet elegant in delivery and eminently readable. It is broad in scope but fine in detail. Its text is complemented by a series of photographs, each of which perfectly captures the mood of the particular chapters in which it appears. Trenchant epigrams set the tone for ensuing chapter-specific arguments. It has an extensive bibliography and, importantly, a detailed index, which seems to be something of a lost art these days.

The study is anchored by the interweaving of six key themes. First, the state is not a thing, but rather, following Foucault, a social form that "should be studied as an assemblage of practices, technologies and discourses" (p. 56). Second, the "green state" is not a particular "stage" of development, but rather a "changing assemblage of practices, technologies and discourses" (p. 63). Third, environmental politics constitutes the state in Africa in quite a different way than in the rest of the world. Fourth, there is a great deal of agency amid persistent structure, and this agency plays out unevenly across African states and societies. Fifth, there are winners and losers in African environmental politics, so change on behalf of those (people and the natural environment) that are most vulnerable is part of a (social/political/economic/ecological) struggle, not a deliberate outcome of techniques of management. Sixth, there is a great deal to be learned about the state in general, and the "green state" in particular, from African places and cases.

At the heart of the study is a normative agenda: in exploding a number of myths—among them, the unproblematic homogeneity of global environmental governance, green states, the African state, African unity, and the causes of African underdevelopment—Death aims to reveal the winners and losers in African environmental politics, highlighting the limited but very real ways in which the most vulnerable are able to exercise agency (by challenging,

joining, and/or reframing dominant green discourses) to survivalist—never mind “sustainable”—ends. In Death’s words, “If nothing else, this book aims to convince that there are sites of resistance everywhere and that resistance is fertile” (p. 18).

In support of his argument, the book proceeds in two distinct parts—one theoretical, one empirical—with the earlier informing and shaping our understanding of the latter. In terms of theory, Death engages theories of the state, green states, African states, and the green state in Africa. His preference is for a critical approach arranged around a governmentality framework, where “governmentality” is defined as “diverse micropractices of power which exist broadly throughout society, not just in state institutions” (p. 57). This theoretical perspective allows Death to explore the balance between agency and structure in the context of the African state. This is key to his analysis, since his goal is not to dismiss the state but to show its relevance as well as its capacity for meaningful change, dependent upon the interplay of the constellation of social forces within the state, across the continent, and in the wider world. Reframing Tilly’s famous phrase, Death states: “Transnational environmental governance and monitoring makes African states” (p. 68). But, one must add, not necessarily as these actors, forces, and factors intend.

Death’s empirical chapters examine the effects of green-state discourses on the constitution of Africa’s states and societies, through four lenses: territories, populations, economies, and international relations. Each of these chapters is richly detailed, and so beyond the scope of this short review. An important common theme is that the “green state” in Africa is not of recent origin. Rather, it is “the effect of long-standing deep rooted endeavours to govern environmental resources” (p. 59). For Death, the place and history of Africa in the global political economy, as well as the specific historical constitution of African states and societies, reflects the overwhelming centrality of resource governance in state formation. Put differently, the “green state” is a new variation on an old theme. Indeed, he suggests that the “the future transnational green state [in Africa] might, in some respects, have some family resemblances to the colonial or authoritarian state” (p. 68).

Each chapter is informed by a similar primary question for investigation: How do African states govern land and territory (chapter 3), people and population (chapter 4), and economies and markets (chapter 5), and what are the international relations of African states (chapter 6), as seen through the lens of green discourses and practices? Death walks us across space and time to explicate his answers. From Ethiopia to Senegal and Nigeria, from South Africa to Kenya and Botswana, and in many places between, Death illustrates how differently empowered actors have employed evolving discourses concerning the governance of land, water, and related resources, sometimes to their advantage. Unsurprisingly, as he himself points out, what this analysis reveals is that those best placed to take advantage of changing narratives regarding “green-state” perspectives and practices—including transfrontier conservation

areas, green consumers, educated farmers, carbon sequestration proponents, and biofuel markets—are those already empowered. In relation to transcontinental action in support of “green economies,” Death recognizes that the “solidarity of African heads of state...is deeply problematic” (p. 278). Nevertheless, he argues that there remains space for positive change at a variety of scales.

This is a deeply reflexive project, encouraging the reader to question received ideas at every turn, ultimately in the service of what Death calls critical solidarities. In his words, caught between “homogenizing dynamics” and “exemplary logics,” the most vulnerable must compete for visibility (p. 231). Death helps us see these groups and individuals by setting them in their local contexts and showing us how they are impacted by green-state discourses and practices. Importantly, he shows us that they are not simply disempowered victims, but agents and subjects of their own future. For those interested in environmental justice, the task is to take this knowledge forward in theory and practice.