

What is secondary about secondary forest?

There have been two long running but parallel and separate sectoral debates concerned with the 'rural' and its transitions. The longer of the two is concerned with the role of small-scale family farms and their eventual fate. While models of agrarian transition have aspired to and predicted the demise of a peasant economy it has remained remarkably persistent and in the 21st century most farms in the global south are small family-operated smallholders¹. Moreover the majority of these remain poor² and are likely to remain so given the evidence of blocked agrarian transitions³ and a growing 'surplus' landless rural population in specific parts of the world with limited futures in either the agrarian or urban economy⁴. While mainstream rural development narratives remain focused around opportunity, competition, entrepreneurship and value chains, much less visible are worries over the environment and climate change adaptation and alternative approaches to secure subsistence economies.

The second debate has addressed forests and their management. Originally a focus of concern in relation to conservation, catchment integrity and revenue (a forestry without people), policy shifts over time have given limited recognition to rural users and allowed forms of co-management and benefit sharing (e.g. community forestry). However a deep hostility to agricultural land management practice with trees (e.g. swidden agriculture) in forests has persisted. The rise of the global environmental agenda has repositioned forestry particularly in the global south around a conservation agenda and the need to secure the primary forest for the global good. This in turn has brought notions of forest transition to the fore in policy thinking to justify and legitimate forest management practices including the re-emergence of fortress forestry, albeit married to the commodification of the forests.

But forestry sciences as a knowledge system and practice in the global south has long been contested. An early marker of this can be found in the questions surrounding who decides what a forest is in the Himalayas⁵ and since then a long line of scholarship has brought into question the belief in pristine forest landscapes, the notion of foresters as experts and the limits and deficiencies of their forest management systems⁶. While there is much about forest policy now that can be seen as high-modernist and authoritarian⁷ there are strong grounds to challenge and rethink the

¹ Wiggins, S. (2006). *Agricultural and Rural Development Reconsidered: A guide to issues and debates*. IFAD.

² Boltvinik, J. and Mann, S.A. (2016). *Peasant Poverty and Persistence in the Twenty-first Century: Theories, Debates, Realities, and Policies*. Zed Books. London.

³ Bernstein, H. and Byres, T.J. (2002). From Peasant Studies to Agrarian Change. *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 1 (1), pp 1-56.

⁴ Li, T.M. (2014). *Land's end: Capitalist relations on an indigenous frontier*. London, Duke University Press.

⁵ Thompson M. and Warburton, M. (1986). Uncertainty on a Himalayan Scale. *Mountain Research and Development*, Vol. 5 (2), pp. 115-135.

⁶ see Sunseri, T. (2009). *Wielding the Ax: State Forestry and Social Conflict in Tanzania, 1820 – 2000*. Ohio University Press, Athens.; Mathews, A.S. (2011). *Instituting Nature: Authority, Expertise and Power in Mexican Forests*. MIT Press, Cambridge; Hansen C.P. and Friis Lund J. (2017). Imagined forestry: the history of the scientific management of Ghana's High Forest Zone. *Environment and History*, Vol. 23 (1), pp 3-38.

⁷ Scott, J.C (1998). *Seeing Like a State*. Yale University Press. London.

ability of normative forestry models⁸ to deal with the complexity of the ecological and social life of forests⁹ and manage them.

Underlying the long running contention between forestry and people¹⁰ are questions of land and the law and the nature of forests as territory and property. As Lund¹¹ has argued the political authority of the state is constantly challenged 'through the process of successfully defined and enforcing rights to community membership and rights of access to important resources' and struggles over the rights to land are central to this. For many in the global south while the state seeks to regulate access and exclusion to land with forests the ideological power of markets and their framing of environmental services is becoming an equally important source of authority and legitimation¹². As Thompson¹³ suggests it is around the rule of law that the future of forest and agrarian practices of the rural poor might be secured.

There are however increasing doubts as to whether the conservation of primary forest, if indeed such conservation is possible, will be enough to maintain the fundamental system functions of tropical forest landscapes¹⁴ and that in order to reach the necessary scale of vegetation cover, conserving primary forests has to be combined with forest recovery efforts by the people who live there. This means that secondary vegetation may well become the main tropical forest cover in the future as primary forest (or near-climax forests) will remain only on the steep, uncultivable and inaccessible areas in the future. This requires a wider acceptance of diversity and complexity in forest forms or types (primary, secondary, mosaic, agriculture in forests, forests in agriculture) and management systems to support this, particularly of secondary growth of re-generating forest. It also brings into question the very meanings of 'primary' and 'secondary' forest as separate categories, begging questions of complex temporal or age interactions in forest ecology along with the interaction of these with social action.

Indeed the empirical evidence suggests that secondary forests regeneration is exactly what may be happening in practice. Hecht¹⁵ talks of a re-wooding of some parts of the Amazonian landscape leading, she suggests, to a recovery of forest area. As Hecht points out this in turn brings into question whether the agrarian can be so clearly demarcated from the forested and of the need to broaden the lens of understanding of agrarian change. Similar observations of the spread of trees into the agrarian landscape of the mid-hills of Nepal has also been observed¹⁶. Forest can regrow therefore in many ways and there is no reason to think that the variation in these forms of regrowth are any less socio-economically complex or independent of land use policies than are other

⁸ Friis Lund J. (2018). Rethinking forestry SLU Global seminar 20180209.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QVUkcXwuc0c>

⁹ Hecht S.; Morrison, K.D. and Padoch, C. (2014). *The social lives of forest: Past Present and Future of Woodland Resources*. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

¹⁰ see Thompson, E.P. (1975). *Whigs and Hunters: The origins of the Black Act*. Pantheon Books on the violent conflicts over forests in the UK in the 18th century, New York.

¹¹ Lund, C. (2016). Rule and Rupture: State Formation through the production of property and citizenship. *Development and Change*, 47 (6), pp 1199-1228.

¹² Hall, D.; P. Hirsch and Li, T.M. (2013). *Powers of Exclusion: land dilemmas in Southeast Asia*. National University of Singapore Press, Singapore.

¹³ Thompson (1975) op.cit.

¹⁴ Chazdon, R.L. (2014). *Second growth. The promise of tropical forest regeneration in an age of deforestation*. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

¹⁵ Hecht S; Morrison, K.D. and Padoch, C. (2014) op.cit.

¹⁶ Marquardt, K.; Khatri, D. and Pain, A. (2016). REDD in the light of forest transition, agrarian change and ecosystem service in the Mid-Hills and Terai of Nepal. *Human Ecology*, Vol 44, pp 229-244.

agricultural and forestry land uses. Set against this are broader drivers of deforestation associated with agro-capital and the expansionist tendencies of industrialised flex crops¹⁷.

Nevertheless, in spite of secondary successions importance as a central feature in many tropical landscapes, it is almost invisible in research as well as of a low priority in policy agendas in global climate, forestry and agriculture. Secondary forests are primarily approached as the by-product of deforestation rather than intrinsic to forest ecology, as degraded and non-forests rather than land management practices with relevance to the poverty agenda and potential for livelihoods and forest ecologies. The common discourse on forest land research is driven by specific expert knowledge systems in forestry that we see as problematic, top down management, ideologies of poor farming practices and views of small holders as the major drivers of deforestation. The deforestation debates rarely see smallholders' practices as based on credible knowledge systems or engage with the messy empirical reality of development as an immanent process of social change, where forest change outcomes reflect other complex dynamics that have their own logic. As Hecht (2104) has suggested it is often policy changes outside the forest that have the greatest effects on forest dynamics.

Yet there is a demonstrated potential in smallholders' forest land use systems to both support forest landscapes and provide livelihood security. Such uses, given the constraints of family labour supply, lack the expansionist tendencies of large scale market driven land uses. Moreover their practices have temporal and spatial variability based on deep contextual knowledge that offers possibilities to both reforest and produce¹⁸.

In this workshop we want to explore the ideas of forest regeneration as an essential smallholder land use category and agricultural practice, of 'secondary' forest as intrinsic to forest ecology and examine the conditions under which both might be supported. We want to review what we know about smallholders' active forest regeneration management practices and investments in the landscape, drawing on and developing the notion of landesque capital¹⁹. This will necessarily require a rethinking of what forests are and the role of smallholders in contributing to re-foresting landscapes through critical engagement with concepts of forest transition and forms of land control.

A series of questions will structure the discussions of the workshop

- What is the evidence of the extent of secondary forest regeneration in tropical forests and to what extent is it complementing and providing additive benefits to primary forest conservation?
- What has been the contribution of small holder practices to this regeneration and what benefits do they derive from it?

¹⁷ Borras, S.M.; Franco J.C.; Isakson S.R.; Levidow L. and Viervest, P. (2016). The rise of flex crops and commodities: implications for research. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 43:1, pp 93-115.

¹⁸ Pokorny, B. (2013). *Smallholders, Forest Management and Rural Development in the Amazon*. Routledge, New York.

¹⁹ see Blaikie, P. and Brookfield, H.C. (1987). *Land Degradation and Society*. Methuen, London and NewYork; Håkansson T. and Widgren M. (Eds) (2014). *Landesque Capital: The Historical Ecology of Enduring Landscape Modifications*. Taylor and Francis, New York.

- In what sense are secondary forests 'secondary' and how do forestry knowledge systems engage with secondary regeneration and the role of smallholders within it and in what ways to they block or support them?
- What are the legal obstacles to small holder engagement in secondary forest regeneration?
- What are the necessary conditions to support secondary forest regeneration and secure the rights and livelihood benefits of those active in managing it and how could these be implemented in practice?
- What might be a future research agenda in relation to supporting secondary forest regeneration for forest futures and smallholder livelihoods?

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