

# The Carbon Calculation: Global Climate Policy, Forests, and Transnational Governance in Brazil and Mozambique

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In the last decade, an expanding literature in anthropology and allied disciplines has interrogated reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (or REDD) as a technology of governance that is rearticulating the geopolitical, financial, and environmental lives of tropical rainforests around the world. As a transnational policy promoted by a vast array of multilateral institutions, foreign aid agencies, and private investors, REDD mechanisms advance a technocratic promise to significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the Global South while, at the same time, providing funds to conservation initiatives and ensuring benefits for local populations and developing nations alike. And yet, decisively, REDD relies on the calculation of carbon stocks associated not with existing peatlands or trees but with the estimated rates of deforestation that are to be prevented by certified conservation projects vis-à-vis a hypothetical baseline scenario. Such ethereal and speculative nature has put into question the effectiveness of REDD as a climate-change-mitigation mechanism. And about a decade after its official creation, conversations about REDD remain largely unsettled, with answers to even basic questions such as what *is* REDD still to be fully clarified.

Raquel Rodrigues Machaqueiro's *The Carbon Calculation* introduces us to the various worlds opened by the unsettled transnational dynamics of REDD as they manifest today. Drawing on comparative ethnographic and historical material from both the Brazilian state of Acre and Mozambique, Rodrigues Machaqueiro shows us that despite REDD's typical depiction as an international policy failure, the implementation of REDD projects in different parts of the Global South has unleashed distinctive processes of subjectification, geopolitical tensions, and dilemmas of development. In particular, she argues that REDD embodies a neoliberal approach to climate change governance that reinforces market logics via increasingly penetrating modes of transnational governance. Ultimately, she suggests, such a market-centered perspective on tropical rainforests makes the Global South increasingly responsible for solving the climate crisis without addressing demands for large-scale social transformation in the Global North. Decisively, Rodrigues Machaqueiro traces the expression of such large-scale models of climate change governance in the lives of their interlocutors in Acre and Mozambique, which include state officers, international consultants, peasants, rubber tappers, Indigenous peoples, and NGO representatives. In this context, she skillfully examines how penetrating modes of transnational governance materialize in apparently mundane gestures, including the reproduction of particular tropes, myths, narratives, and templates that permeate how people envision tropical rainforest conservation and development.

By tracing how such transnational processes are mobilized in local contexts, Rodrigues Machaqueiro rejects an understanding of REDD as a stable policy framework whose meanings and procedures move consistently from centers to peripheries. Instead, she invites us to understand REDD as a contentious and inventive space of policy interventions. From this perspective, REDD is revealed as a multilocal, complex, creative, unpredictable, and multiple process whose liveliness and productivity derive not from its clarity and efficiency, but from its capacity to bring together vast constellations of actors that come to dispute what counts (or could count) as REDD in various contexts. REDD is, therefore, not the same thing in Acre and in Mozambique. Rather, it has been creatively claimed in each of these locations as different actors have associated it with long-standing visions of development, war legacies, transnational supply chains, and demands for justice. By showing us the contours of these unexpected claims, Rodrigues Machaqueiro argues that the vagueness and confusion associated with REDD do not diminish, but rather expand, transnational governance in the Global South.

In this sense, the notion of calculation advanced by *The Carbon Calculation* refers simultaneously to two different, albeit intimately related, aspects of contemporary climate change governance. The most obvious sense of calculation alludes to the technoscientific process by which "carbon" has historically emerged from the international science-policy interface as a commensurable commodity amenable to being quantified, traded, and verified. But calculation is also political calculation, as "carbon" has become a rather loose signifier for mobilizing very different (and

sometimes contradictory) agendas that cut across local, national, and international scales. A significant merit of Rodrigues Machaqueiro's work is to show us that these two senses of calculation (its technoscientific and political dimensions, one could say) are inextricably linked to each other, as both emerge from the shifting landscape of omissions and priorities that inform emerging regimes of transnational governance. *The Carbon Calculation*, therefore, illustrates how calculation constitutes a relevant political space for thinking about (and intervening upon) the global environmental crisis today.

To conclude, I would like to emphasize the timeliness of *The Carbon Calculation* with regards to two contemporary developments in climate change politics. First, I believe the book documents a distinctively neoliberal moment of climate governance that can be productively counterposed to more recent developments in green industrial policy and international environmental regulation that apparently transcend traditional principles of neoliberal governance. What will the (after)lives of REDD be amid trends of international climate governance that have more nuanced relations to the "neoliberal"? And what new roles will the Global South play in such rising (and perhaps even postneoliberal) geopolitical configurations? Second, I believe the comparative dimension of the book offers important insights to think about South-to-South horizons of cooperation in global environmental politics. At a time when tropical countries are increasingly looking to better position themselves in international climate change negotiations—most clearly articulated in Lula da Silva's recent call to create an "OPEC of tropical rainforests"—what new forms of tropical rainforest governance could we imagine from the South for a post-REDD (or even a post-"carbon") future? And what can the histories of tropical countries in Latin America, Africa, and Asia offer to each other in order to imagine and nurture such conjoined futures?

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