

LI, TANIA MURRAY and PUJO SEMEDI. *Plantation Life: Corporate Occupation in Indonesia's Oil Palm Zone*. Durham: Duke University Press. 2021. xiii + 243 pp. ISBN: 978-1-4780-1495-9 (softcover); 978-1-4780-1399-0 (hardcover); 978-14780-2223-7 (E-book)

What are the relations formed between residents and corporations, and what forms of life does the corporate presence generate? *Plantation Life* is the outcome of several years of rigorous ethnographic fieldwork, extensive discussions, and collaborative engagement focused on these questions. In the preface, Li and Semedi share their initial perceptions of a plantation corporation, viewing it as a 'lazy giant', 'greedy and careless', or a machine controlling human lives (2021: vii). However, as the book demonstrates, the relations formed with a plantation are more complex and involve multiple actors, contrasting points of view, and silent protests.

The role of plantation corporations in shaping environments, bodies, and societal relations has been addressed through the concept of 'plantationocene' (Haraway 2015; Mitman 2019; Murphy and Schroering 2020). Viewed as an alternate name for the Anthropocene epoch, 'plantationocene' draws attention to colonialism, capitalism, and racial hierarchies from which environmental problems cannot be detached (Moore et al. 2019). Li and Semedi's book focuses on two plantations situated in the Tanjung region in West Kalimantan, Indonesia. One of them, Natco, is a state-owned corporation, while the second, Priva, is a private company, although its presence is largely enabled by the state. The research is based on two threads of analysis: Marx's political economy focusing on the

unequal profit distribution of capital production, and Foucault's political technology centring on governmentality and producing subjects. Bridging these two threads, the authors propose the term 'corporate occupation' as the volume's central concept. Li and Semedi stretch the term 'occupation', which commonly refers to a foreign military presence on a certain territory and use it to theorise the corporation's relations with residents in Tanjung. The term's usage, as the authors explain, allows them to focus on the forceful nature of the corporation's control over territory, as well as the reorganisation of rule over the land and its population. It would be interesting, however, to read in more detail why the term 'occupation' was chosen, perhaps through engagement with its definition in international law. The discussion of the profound role of 'state allies' (2021: 8) in shaping corporate occupation regimes could also be potentially expanded when theorising the concept.

The book is clearly structured and divided into five chapters, each focused on a specific research question. In the first chapter, the authors ask, 'How did the Natco and Priva plantations become established and what sets of relations did their presence generate?' As Li and Semedi discuss, corporate presence was enabled by the legal regime that granted large territories for establishing plantations. Natco's establishment was backed by coercive forces, such as the presence of government officials,

and thus did not require local assistance. Priva's establishment, on the contrary, relied on the assistance of 'land release teams' comprised of village heads, local officials, customary leaders, and the police. Although Priva's establishment may seem milder, the authors view both strategies as occupation processes, since they both resulted in land-grabbing and the deprivation of rights.

The second chapter focuses on the question, 'Who worked on the two plantations and why?' The authors raise the following question: If local workers are not physically confined to the plantations, why do they stay? Early after their establishment, both Natco and Priva relied on workers from Java or other parts of Indonesia. By 2010, many locals who lost their rubber-tapping income needed plantation work and were hired, although both companies still preferred recruiting migrant workers. Due to the oversupply of labour forces, workers had to tolerate plantation work even though many of them were not happy with the changing policies, given reduced work security and the unfair attitudes of plantation managers.

For the third chapter, the central question is 'What did it mean for farmers to be bound to a corporation?' Until 2010–2015, small-scale Dayak farmers in Tanjung had a certain degree of autonomy and self-sufficiency, retaining significant control over their land. At the same time, palm oil out-grower farmers attached to the Priva plantation suffered from their fragile status as their work depended solely on the corporation's credit schemes and material infrastructures such as roads and mills. This fragility clashed with the image of independent and modern farmers against the bright future promoted by the corporation. This chapter highlights the differences between farmers bound to a corporation and independent farmers enjoying much greater autonomy.

The fourth chapter centres on the forms of life emerging in the plantation zone. Given that the presence of corporations was backed by references to their public good, their operations were supported by land and labour laws and smoothed by government officials. In their daily processes, both corporations used references to family loyalty, care, or mutual help to secure workers' allegiance and support. However, the workers experienced their relations with employers as situated far from these family-related idioms. Corporations relied on hierarchies manifested in the organisation of space and time, workers' bodies, and the materials with which they engaged. Due to these hierarchies, the villagers viewed corporate managers not as neighbours, but as an alien force.

The final chapter weaves together the previously discussed themes and poses a question: 'Why are corporate palm oil plantations still expanding across Indonesia?' Li and Semedi demonstrate that plantation corporations receive concessions to carry out beneficial functions instead of the state assuming such activities. They are expected to bring employment, income, and prosperity to remote areas, and, therefore, a certain level of harm is seen as unavoidable. Thus, the presence of the corporations is rarely questioned, and, instead, their specific practices are addressed. With the assumption that there are 'good' and 'bad' corporations, the ultimate question about the necessity of the corporate presence is set aside. Another factor enabling the corporate presence is the dismissal of smallholder alternatives. Independent smallholders, however, could prevent the further expansion of plantations by taking control of the land and offering alternative employment options. Nevertheless, plantation corporations in Indonesia are politically favoured and protected.

The appendix, where the authors reflect on collaborative data collection and the writing process as well as on the differences in their approaches to field research, brings additional value to this book. Since the appendix clarifies to a large extent how the material was collected and analysed, it could perhaps be even more valuable for readers if placed at the very beginning of the book as part of the preface. As a reader, I felt at times that such an explanation was missing from the narrative.

The volume is richly illustrated with photos from the field, maps, and graphic images (e.g., screenshots from a company's website promoting 'sustainable palm oil' on page 170). The photos, some of them deeply symbolic (such as the cover photo with dead palm trees impending upon a passerby), enhance the clarity of the authors' argumentation and bring additional layers to the overall story.

Through an unfolding of the 'corporate occupation' concept, the volume draws attention to an array of dispersed practices employed by corporations—with the assistance of governmental bodies—to establish control over the territory and its population. This is a solid contribution to 'plantationocene' studies, which could be used as study material in graduate-level courses engaging with notions of governmentality and power distribution. The book's appendix could be especially interesting

for anthropology students as an example of collaborative data collection. Due to its focus on corporations suppressing local interests and voices, the book could also certainly be used by activists as background material for awareness-raising campaigns.

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