

Review: La Frontera: Forests and Ecological Conflict in Chile's Frontier Territory
By Thomas Miller Klubock

Reviewed by Jan Kunas
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Klubock, Thomas Miller. *La Frontera: Forests and Ecological Conflict in Chile's Frontier Territory*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014. 385 pp. ISBN: 9780822356035 Paper, US\$ 270.95; Acid-free paper, photographs and maps; includes Notes, bibliography and index. Also available in a cloth binding, ISBN: 9780822355984, US\$ 99.95. **Note:** This book is part of the *Radical Perspectives* series.

In *La Frontera*, Thomas Miller Klubock offers a well-studied and overwhelming social and environmental history of southern Chile, exposing the origins of today's forestry "miracle" in Chile, and its environmental and humanitarian costs.

Wood is in theory a renewable resource, and thus the use of wood and wood derived products like board and paper could be compatible with sustainable development. Similarly the establishment of timber plantations on degraded soils could both combat erosion and relieve the pressure from natural forests. Unfortunately these nice theories do not necessarily hold in reality, which is clearly shown by Thomas Miller Klubock. While much is written about the detrimental effects of eucalyptus plantations, *La Frontera* shows that pine wood plantations can cause similar ecological and humanitarian problems. Calling them "forests" at all is questionable, as they contain none of the intermingling of tree and plant species that characterizes forest ecosystems; even the local population is fenced out.

The story told here is all too familiar and has happened or is ongoing in most forested areas of the world. Native forests are cleared for agricultural land or replaced by timber plantations, in both cases the indigenous or other disadvantaged population groups are pushed onto marginal soils, which inevitably leads to further soil degradation, which is again used as an excuse for further displacement. What makes Klubock's story stand out from this all too familiar stories is the long time-perspective, from the late 19th century to the present, and especially the amount of detail his well-studied tour de force provides.

Through this long time perspective he is able to explain the explosive conflict between the indigenous Mapuche communities and forestry companies that evolved during the democratization process after the Pinochet dictatorship. According to my reading of the book the development in Chile's frontier territory in the south during the dictatorship did not much differ from the general long run development. On contrary, the short period of agricultural and forestry reform in the 1960s and 70s, that at least to some degree managed to take into account the needs of the subalterns, ended by the military coup of Pinochet in 1973, seems more of an anomaly in the long time-perspective presented by Klubock. Thus, I was a little surprised by the focus on the destruction during the Pinochet dictatorship in the

conclusions. Nevertheless, Klubock shows how Chile's forestry boom, which is often attributed to the free-market policies of the Pinochet dictatorship, was largely based on plantations established during the period preceding Pinochet rule. The Pinochet regime managed, however, to make sure that once more, this boom provided little or no benefits for the local population.

Klubock expresses his hope that this book will manage to establish a bridge between the concerns of social and environmental history. This book is a solid bridge indeed, providing a good textbook in both subjects. More importantly every forester should read it, especially those involved in plantations. Furthermore, I would recommend this book to everyone who wants to get a multifaceted picture of Chile's forestry "miracle." As an environmental historian myself, I still want to believe that we can learn from history. If this book would provide any lessons to other frontier societies so that this story is not repeated once more, it is well worth all the trees felled to produce its paper.

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