Regeneration of life in the age of capitalism. Other tracks in the native forests of central and southern Chile, by Juan Carlos Skewes, Santiago, Chile, Ocho Libros Editores, 2019, 268 pp., US$ 30, (paperback), ISBN 978-956-335-510-9

La regeneración de la vida en los tiempos del capitalismo. Otras huellas en los bosques nativos del centro y sur de Chile, by Juan Carlos Skewes, Santiago, Chile, Ocho Libros Editores, 2019, 268 pp., US$ 30, (paperback), ISBN 978-956-335-510-9

This book symposium stems from the conversations that took place following the launch in December 2019 of a new book by Juan Carlos Skewes at the Universidad Alberto Hurtado. The diverse reactions to the work during university presentations, in the feedback of results to the local territories in which the ethnography was based, and in the various academic circles through which it has passed – anthropology, science and technology studies, geography and sociology – have convinced us of the value of collecting these comments together and inviting Juan Carlos to respond. We have organized the results as follows. We begin by presenting the structure and central argument of the book before putting forward our comments. The symposium closes with Skewes’ reactions to our thoughts.

1. Tomás Undurraga: a robust multi-species ethnography of the moral communities that regenerate native forests

In La regeneración de la vida en los tiempos del capitalismo. Otras huellas en los bosques nativos del centro y sur de Chile (Regeneration of life in the age of Capitalism. Other tracks in the native forests of central and southern Chile), Juan Carlos Skewes invites us to discover the practices and knowledge of peasants and indigenous communities that live on the fringes of native forests, and their role as guarantors of the regeneration of life and biodiversity. The book explores the reproduction of life in territories devastated by capitalism; that “third nature” (Tsing 2015) that prevails in spite of capitalism. Specifically, it studies the moral community of the Andean foothill forests around Panguipulli, Villarrica, Calafquén and the Aconcagua basin.

Skewes proposes an anthropology of the forests that follows the tracks of capitalism, acknowledging the intermingling of species and the friction that exists between different historically conditioned organisms. The book’s central argument is that the coexistence of human and non-human beings in a forest context depends on a relational ontology (De Munter 2016) based on a cultural heritage that is predominantly indigenous. People “exist” within the totality of the context in which they live. However, such an ontology is historically constrained by a dominant view that tends to separate nature and culture as a structural mechanism within the territories in which it exists. In Chile, this Western view has become increasingly prevalent in recent decades with the relentless spread of neoliberalism and capitalist modernization, manifested in intensive tourism, real estate development and energy megaprojects.

For Skewes, the potential for the regeneration of life lies in recognition of those practices of indigenous and peasant communities that live on the fringes of forests and which, by resisting the pull of the market, give meaning to landscapes. It is along the footpaths trodden by the
residents of forested areas that the possibility of coexistence between people, forests and other species is born.

The book is divided into six chapters. The first is a theoretical introduction to the anthropology of forests, relational ontology and vital materialism. Drawing on Ingold (2013), it invites the reader to put themselves in the position of organisms, prioritizing processes above products, and the interface between these organisms and the world. Based on Viveiros de Castro (2004) and Kohn (2013), the author sees living beings as defined within reciprocal relationships such that each custom induces particular perspectives from which to view and experience the world. Human beings become adversary or prey depending on their relationship with other carnivores. Chapter 2 examines the historical conditions of native forests and how these were devastated by the arrival of Europeans, colonization and the foundation of the Chilean State. The tracks of capitalism can be seen in the concessions that the State has made to private companies, beginning with the plunder of Mapuche lands that has been ongoing since the nineteenth century, directing public resources towards the entrepreneurial class. Chapter 3 discusses the approach to native forest conservation maintained by the State and its experts, and how private parks and conservation tourism tend to exclude the local population, concealing real estate interests behind the guise of environmental discourse.

Chapter 4 explores the relational nature of the regeneration of life in native forests at three points – childhood, dwelling, the wilderness. Beginning with how children draw and verbalize forests, Skewes exposes the intimate connection with nature enjoyed by peasants and indigenous people who live in the vicinity of native forests. In terms of inhabiting, it demonstrates that the Mapuche house is a continuation of the forest and that residential practices are protective and inclusive of the tree species with which the people come into contact. Chapter 5 questions the strategic human-non-human alliances – with trees, bees and livestock – and how these inter-species coalitions can regenerate life. That which best defines inter-species relations (Descola 2013), suggests Skewes, is sociability based on affection and protection. Local beekeeping, livestock herding, and tender relationships with the trees are all expressions of care (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017) that foster the regeneration of life. Chapter 6 presents knowledge derived from coexistence with trees. Relational ontology is the primary piece of knowledge, where *awachar* (a word derived from *Mapudungun*, the Mapuche language, that alludes to the idea of taming or domestication through caring coexistence) of trees or animals illustrates a settling together of species which, although not free, retain degrees of autonomy that allow them to regenerate themselves through cohabitation. The book concludes with an invitation to the reader to acknowledge the political importance of the behaviors of peasant and indigenous communities – who live on the periphery of capitalist expansion – as guarantors of the regeneration of life in native forests. Affiliation between trees, people and other species demands a contract of conviviality and well-being.

Skewes conducts his research on the three overarching structural forces present in forest landscapes: the devastation unleashed by extractivist capitalism, the utilitarian approach exercised by the State, and private conservationism that enforces the separation between pristine nature and local communities.

Against the backdrop of the capitalist devastation to which forests are subjected – expressed nowadays through intensive tourism, real estate development and energy mega-projects – Skewes highlights the rational management inherent to the wild existence of peasants and indigenous people, and how their modes of life reproduce biological heritage. Subsidies made available to the timber industry, such as through Decree Law 701 of 1974, transferred public resources into private hands to promote forestry activities. Privatization of the former *Complejo Maderero Panguipulli*, now the Huilo-Huilo Reserve, was perhaps the best example of this policy. Real estate developments situated on the edges of native reserves
offer the luxury of a life close to nature, but indigenous communities are driven out of the forest as a result. In light of the threats posed by capitalism, Skewes calls attention to how peasants and other communities live in harmony with their neighboring forests, forming interspecies alliances.

By contrast to the simplistic and rationalist views held by State environmental experts (Scott 2008) tasked with finding ways of controlling and exploiting forests, Skewes shows that the knowledge of residents plays a central role in forest management. The research finds that the scientific knowledge of State experts is not as solid as is generally claimed and that the knowledge held by people from forest communities does not receive the attention that it should from the State. It suggests that local, scientific and religious knowledge should be fed back in such a way as to promote the protection of local landscapes. Rather than pushing environmental education programs, Skewes proposes that agents of the Chilean State should establish a dialogue between bodies of knowledge in order to exchange technical interventions for conversations – resources for relationships.

Skewes then addresses the issue of the biological conservationist ideology that creates a division between the native and the exotic, the human and the natural, proposing prioritization of the regeneration of life over conservation. The notion of conservation is not neutral. Conservation of forests is a means of protecting that which currently exists. However, the regeneration of forests represents an opportunity to infinitely recreate life – to reinstate biodiversity and the rights of the trees. The book invites us to reconsider conservation, favoring dialogue between specialists, communities and experts. The greater the number of species involved, the greater the potential for the perpetuation of life. Skewes also shows that conservationist ideology has found a comfortable niche in neoliberalism, as the distant and unreachable acquires special commercial value. A fortress-like conservation model involving armed surveillance implies the dispossession and exclusion of local inhabitants. The Huilo-Huilo reserve and the Futangue park are examples of this type of profit-oriented conservation that uproots species and communities.

The book has many virtues. Firstly, it conducts a robust, multi-sited ethnography that reveals the tracks of capitalism in forests, exposing diverse hybrids, frictions, resistances and adaptations in human-non-human relations. The book speaks of forests, inhabiting, animals, insects, homes, childhood, trees, beekeeping, rodeo, nguillatun (a sacred Mapuche ceremony), tourism, chickens, dogs, bees, politics, State programs, knowledge, and many other things. Methodologically speaking, Skewes offers a multiplicity of ethnographic research resources, such as community workshops, children’s drawings, sensory exercises, literature, history, poetry, interviews and popular expressions. It is this combination of perspectives that enables the ethnography to apprehend forms of connection between species and identify those best placed to speak for the forests.

Secondly, Skewes offers a meaningful theoretical contribution to an anthropology of forests by highlighting relational ontology as a condition for the regeneration of life between species and as a form of learning about modes of inter-species connection. The book shows us, for example, that from the interstitial lives of bees, trees, animals and people emerge a geography in which native, introduced, awachado, tamed and feral species interact, complicating the dichotomy between the native and the exotic. These are mestizo landscapes in which an introduced pollinator, such as the bee, stimulates the regeneration of the native forest.

Thirdly, the book superimposes itself onto the traditional ways in which academia and experts have tended to study and conceive forests. In particular, Skewes emphasizes the political importance of recognizing the knowledge and practices of forest-dwelling indigenous and peasant communities. Humanly and humbly, and with a dedicated research program
that seeks to bring about justice through the practices of mountain communities, the research emphasizes the protector role of peasants and comuneros on the life of the forest.

Alongside these positives are two aspects of the book with which I struggled somewhat. Skewes’ view of capitalism is of an entity that devours, devastates and destroys everything that it touches. It is a dystopian image that echoes the satanic mills described by Karl Polanyi (1985) in *The Great Transformation*. In the recent history of the native forests of southern Chile, capitalism has been a destructive force that felled, razed and devastated the forest, wreaking havoc upon both human and non-human ways of life. Replacement of native forest with pine or eucalyptus plantations and livestock pasture, or its enclosure to create private reserves, are new forms of capitalism that exclude local populations. But capitalism comes in many guises. There are different varieties of capitalism (Hall and Soskice 2001), of regulations, of environmental rules. Although contemporary Chilean history has been built on a notion of capitalist modernity which perceives the natural world as subservient and has had a disastrous effect on the survival of native forests, this fact should not rule out contemplation of other types of capitalism.

At times it seems that, in his eagerness to stress his point, Skewes paints an exaggerated picture, emphasizing the destructive nature of “capitalists” and the chance of redemption that lies in marginalized “indigenous practices,” uncontaminated by the logics of capital. Capitalism and native forests seem incompatible. Given the diversity of capitalisms that exist, one avenue that remains unexplored in the book is that of the potential hybridisms and balance that Mapuche and peasant communities could find in a better-regulated form of capitalism, one that defends environmental heritage and in which the relationship between forests and people is more harmonious. Mapuche enterprises, lonkos (chieftains) who fell timber in sustainable quantities, and indigenous tourism initiatives are just a few of the hybridisms that could have been further explored.

I have a similar concern about the discussion regarding private conservation. The figures presented are overwhelming. In 2013 there were 300 private conservation initiatives in Chile, 70% of which were owned by five families, including that of then President, Sebastián Piñera. Conservation led by the Chilean business class – typically extractivist and oriented toward short-term business (Undurraga 2014) – certainly has more in common with green investment than relational ontology with the wild. However, conservation is not limited to the bad practices of the Chilean business class, an example being Tompkins Conservation (www.tompkinsconservation.org). When Douglas Tompkins purchased and restored estates in Chilean Patagonia and created the Pumalín park, he was treated with suspicion and accused of harboring dark intentions: to expel settlers, to establish a Jewish State, to threaten national autonomy, and to harm local development (Azócar Zamudio 2016; Ceberio 2007). Tompkins’ primary aim, however, was to protect native forests: to recover timber estates, to re-green the forests and open them up to the community. Ultimately, Tompkins aimed to return these native forests to the State, which would in theory have the resources and the institutional clout to care for this natural heritage. The financing of Tompkins Conservation is rooted in another form of capitalism; one of green philanthropy that looks beyond short-term returns. Given the important contributions made by this book regarding the problems of exclusionary biological conservation which reduces access by local communities to the wild, I missed a sharper reflection upon other hybridisms or mixed methods of conservation – an exploration of experiences that differ from the instrumental mentality of private parks in Chile. In sum, other capitalisms and forms of conservation exist that go beyond the devastating experiences of Chilean capitalism and local entrepreneurs.

However, the book’s positives far outweigh these observations. I come away with the invitation that Juan Carlos Skewes makes to his readers to adopt a relational ontology that
emphasizes the value of mixed modes of forest life and pays attention to an accommodation between species: to taming and running wild. This is a profoundly human book that invites us to discover inter-species relationships of care and protection, which abandons the jargon of beneficiaries and natural resources, and which acknowledges forms of living that go beyond mere utility.

2. Wladimir Riquelme Maulén: an invitation to take a walk through the forest

This anthropology is an invitation to take a walk through the forest, understood by the author as wilderness (and indeed as cleared, deforested land), mawiza (wooded area) and wingkul (mountains) in mapuzungun (Mapuche language). The research was conducted between 2014 and 2018, and addressed Chile, a country divided up and portioned out between real estate developers, mining operations, agricultural export activities, and electricity generation (Skewes 2004, 12). Sclerophyll and temperate forests are territories characterized by stress (Tsing 2015) and which allow contemplation of nature (Lévi-Strauss 1992).

The book’s dialogue with poetry and literature is central to understanding the arguments it contains. The “congenital paganism” (fraternal relations with other living species) of Gabriela Mistral inspired the author to refer to these life-regenerative processes. Quotations from Julio Cortázar, Adriana Paredes Pinda, Pablo Neruda, Elicura Chihualilaf, Leonel Lienlaf, and Jorge Tellier accompany each chapter.

I propose an analysis of the book from four directions: political economy; biocultural practices; conservation and/or regeneration of life; future projections. The four dimensions should be viewed together in the context of the notion of an anthropology of the forest. This approach exposes the human practices that are rooted in the life that flows through the forest. They are practices found on the edge of the regulated world, where modernity was imposed at the expense of dispossession and murder: where rural life resists the urban. That which contemporary anthropology, in its context of interdisciplinary dialogue, no longer observes. It is precisely within these liminal spaces that the author invites us to reconsider the definitions used in the field of conservation (environmental and cultural) and to assemble the everyday experiences of those who contribute to the regeneration of forests in Chile. Instead of active conservation, it is only truly necessary to follow the processes of mutual transformation between human and non-human beings and acknowledge the value of the contribution made by the diversity of one or the other in terms of mutual support (Skewes 2004, 232). It is to give appropriate recognition to those whose contribution to forest regeneration has been inadequately appreciated (Skewes 2004, 15).

The political economy perspective enables us to understand the commodification of sclerophyll and temperate landscapes, a process which subjects human practices among peasant and indigenous communities to capitalist pressures. The book provides context for the age of capitalism – a time in which Chile finds itself split up into plots and privatized, and where the trees offer an illustration of this change. The author describes the Futangue park (Ranco Lake) in 2014, where he observed how this private enterprise was expropriating lands from its inhabitants. Those were times during which its owner, Gabriel Ruiz-Tagle, was enjoying popularity as ex-president of a successful football club and as a rising conservation philanthropist. The park’s “nature” represented nothing more than conservation by dispossession, and it is amid this dispossession that trees and forests find themselves placed.

The perspective of biocultural practices yields the ethnographic material, encompassing the people, trees, bushes, insects, animals, and all of the other beings that live in the wilds and forests. Here, the author explores the subjective recreation of the forest found during
childhood and in community tourism proposals. Habitation and residential practices lie at the heart of the book’s argument. It proposes that, in the Mapuche context, the house or *ruka* is an extension of the forest, illustrating direct observation of materialities, visiting practices, the role of dogs outside the house and chickens inside, nesting, and agents of pollination. The home opens into the “outside,” while the surrounding natural world gives way to “inside,” writes the author (Skewes 2004, 138).

The dimension of conservation and/or regeneration of life discusses the concept of conservation as it serves private purposes and dispossesses local communities of their territory. Concepts of *native*, *exotic*, *restoration*, and *protection* are no more than a hindrance to those who implement regenerative processes for their own purposes. The book tells the story of the *árbol bonito* or “beautiful tree,” a eucalyptus specimen that grows in the Los Perales locality in Quilpué. The author invites us to abandon these conceptions and move to a semantic framework of “hybrid,” “*mestizo*,” “feral,” “tamed,” “*awachado*” and other notions of increasing relevance within regenerative processes (Skewes 2004, 188). In this sense, protected areas were historically inhabited by people whose footpaths are all that is left of these connections. The National Forest Corporation (CONAF) positions them within the human medium, categorizing them as cultural or part of the local economy. The tracks of the Villarrica National Park, or, as it is known by the Mapuche, *Peweñantu*, are a perfect example of the notion that if an answer is needed, it must lie somewhere in the earth. More than the earth, perhaps in the tracks that these micro-traditions leave behind them in the form of footpaths, trails, waymarkers and signs.

In terms of future projections, the book indicates that it is through action that issues unresolved by capitalist modernization may be dealt with (Skewes 2004, 231). To what degree and under what conditions can processes of peasant and indigenous autonomy and sovereignty be directed towards regenerative processes? The book addresses the local, and it is at the local level that we must begin to nuance technical and conservationist language; we must shift the focus to the everyday. It is here, linked to the regional and global, where we must strengthen relations, convivialities and processes of life regeneration in the wilds, forests and *mawiza* (a Mapuche word applied to wild places that combines the concept of wilderness with a complex vegetational component). In such a dialogue, land concessions should not continue to be territorial transfers. It is where landscape, as something lived, claims sovereignty for those within it (Skewes 2004, 234). It is recognition of the sovereignty of those who, through their actions, make possible the life of what is to come. It is a call to abandon the tedious jargon by which people, organisms and materials are categorized as beneficiaries and natural resources. And it is an invitation to recognize ways of living and of practicing life that do not revolve around the usefulness or otherwise of things. Rather, it is a call to coexist alongside them (Skewes 2004, 234).

The language of trees tells the stories of people and human groups alongside which territories have coexisted. It is a wounded, somber language, but in some cases, it is a source of hope, and it is these cases with which Skewes is concerned. The book is the result of the author’s growing wisdom and is a call for humanity to listen to the language of the forest and to protect the local autonomy and sovereignty of territories.

3. Rodolfo Quiroz: recognize the value of other hidden practical knowledge

As I immersed myself in *La regeneración de la vida en los tiempos del capitalismo*, one question came and went continually in my mind: At what point did I begin to respect the lives of insects, spiders and bugs? The question seems naïve but is perhaps connected with the pedagogical
meaning which is implicitly explained throughout the work: how everyday life becomes a metabolically regenerative practice. Or rather, under what set of material conditions and subjective circumstances is the political consciousness of living nature formed? There are effectively no unambiguous or unidimensional answers to such broad and tricky questions, but an understanding of the everyday as a source of multiple geographies could perhaps open up certain new possibilities.

Since the 1960s, Henri Lefebvre (1971) maintained that the everyday was a place of transit: the breakpoint or the moment that distinguishes one society from another. However, and as a result of underestimation of the philosophy, the everyday was understood as the irrelevant flip side of modernity: the “humble,” “what is taken for granted” (24); that routine which, through repetition and owing to its solid nature, tends to obstruct creativity. On the other hand, insists Lefebvre, an in-depth study of the everyday would imply understanding the duality of life, its light and dark sides, its contradictions and alternatives. Furthermore, sustained reflection upon the everyday in its entirety would permit an epistemology capable of transcending fragmented modern wisdom. In the words of Lefebvre (23): “The study of everyday life affords a meeting place for specialized sciences,” as in the everyday lies the possibility of re-establishing the rights of appropriation; that is, the right to recover the works of human beings, the social product.1

I refer to these ideas of Lefebvre’s not only because they help us to consider the insurgent radicality implied by recognition of everyday subjects as forms that are socially integral to the process of life regeneration, but because the anthropology of the forest practiced by Skewes is also a testimony of a work that goes beyond any fragmentary disciplinary approach focused on the systematization of isolated or discontinuous cases. On the contrary, we are within an intense amalgamation of categories and issues united by an ongoing search for totality and breakup, continually alert to the contradiction and threat inherent to the capitalist process, but which is also a promoter of dialogue and a weaver of multiple unconventional realities and knowledge. As such, the book constitutes a dialogue between the social sciences that instruct us by means of a complex web of unequal geographical and historical connections between communities and territorial processes on different scales (regional and local). This enables us to gain a spatial understanding of the phenomenon at hand: the integration of communities and forests, according to Skewes, within a single living coalition (12).

The theoretical junction that gives way to the anthropology of the forest rests upon the landscape category, understood as a process of the continuous transformations of living spaces in which a variety of beings are positioned and which shape it through their reciprocal articulation (26). These are landscapes in a permanent state of emergency and the site of a simultaneity of human and non-human stories in which the focus, according to Skewes, is on the restoration of the metabolism between human beings and the earth, provoking the abandonment of dichotomies between anthropocentrism and ecocentrism to think in terms of the coevolution of species (28). Thus, throughout the work, diverse landscapes are reconstructed, concomitant with collective creation, open to the social assemblage that regenerates the life of sclerophyll and temperate rainforests. However, it does not disregard the complex inherent logics of capital and the contradictions that riddle the State and the principal private agents of conservation, such as tourism and park management.

The book is comprised of six chapters that offer a comparison of regenerative practices and an evaluation of other practical knowledge concealed by institutional conservation. This is

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1“Let everyday life become a work of art! Let every technical means be employed for the transformation of everyday life! From an intellectual point of view, the word ‘creation’ will no longer be restricted to works of art but will signify a self-conscious activity, self-conceiving, reproducing its own terms, adapting these terms and its own reality (body, desire, time, space), being its own creation” (Lefebvre 1971, 204).
interspersed with theoretical reflections which help to put into perspective the complex dynamics of hybrid approaches and other possibilities. It brings together diverse experiences from Mapuche communities, small farmers, livestock herders, animals or non-human beings which gradually, with the advancing occupation of forests, come to the fore through successive metabolic processes that produce differentiated political geographies and signs of conservation. The first two chapters put forward the relational ontology proposal and a synthetic political ecology of territorial displacements organized in terms of dehumanizing logics of the capitalist process. They also highlight the internal green shoots and resistance according to the geographies of the central valley and south of the country. The third chapter demonstrates the theoretical and practical limits of hegemonic conservation policies, while chapter four covers the social dynamics of the regenerative ecosystems studied. Particular attention is paid to childhood and inhabiting as stimulating sources of cognitive logics and spatial forms of regeneration. The fifth chapter contains an analysis of the role of certain species in regeneration processes, highlighting reciprocal relationships and their origins, including trees, people, animals, insects and spiritual beings (157). Finally, chapter six and the conclusions offer a summary of the journey, tied in particular to the open possibilities of a relational ontology and modes of inter-species coexistence.

I would like to highlight a few central ideas concerning the strategic alliance between species and regeneration processes, as it seems to me a substantial issue for future environmental policy and perhaps one of the most significant aspects of the work. According to Skewes’ research, strategic integration between species intensifies in the presence of mutual protection that recreates a socially regenerative landscape. However – and herein lies the problem – environmental policy projects a form of conservation that is separate from the social and focused on principles such as “native” and “exotic,” when in reality, strategically regenerative conservation requires the hybrid, mestizo, feral, tamed, and awachado (188). Therefore, an anthropology of the forest should stimulate recognition and identification of hybrid and mestizo landscapes as a political and open form of regenerative circulation that goes beyond the norms of conservation, with mutual protection and support between species and their surroundings as the basis of repurposing the social and economic fabric. Furthermore, it should dismantle the contradictions and limitations of certain conservation devices which tend to fragment and divide regenerative processes through logics that inhibit encounters and co-production between humans and non-humans.

In light of the possibilities of regenerative interchange, and according to Skewes’ genealogy, the concept of awachar illustrates a relationship that is not openly declared as domestication, but which has more to do with the coexistence of a diversity of species (157). In Mapudungun, the language of the Mapuche, awachar is connected with the notion of taming which, according to Skewes, has to do with the act of giving affection and protection to individuals who, being free, allow themselves to be cared for by those who accept them and live nearby, in stark contrast to animals defined as ferocious or difficult (157). In other words, in order to awachar, there must be a libertarian ecological affinity of exchange which, at the point where a reciprocity of interests is guaranteed, a recognition is made possible of autonomous agentic power where the specific knowledge of animals is incorporated or in some way recognized within human decisions. In other words, it is an exchange through a libertarian relationship of interests that is based on neither control nor mutual dependence between the agents involved. The case of the vacas lobas (literally, wolf cows) studied by the anthropologist Emilia Catalán may shed some light on this idea. For livestock herders, vacas lobas are animals which are difficult to manage in terms of their mobility, unpredictability, reproductive independence and aggression towards humans (204). While they constitute a subset of livestock which resists domestication, they also play a key role in the work of the herders, helping with the movement
of livestock across wild, mountainous ecosystems. The herders follow the example of the *vacas lobas* without exerting additional control, nevertheless applying their own knowledge to the operative decision-making process. These and other reflections indicate that the coexistence between a reciprocity of interests and a type of autonomous agency may be a fundamental condition for the invention of other forms of regeneration between animals and people. Of course, we cannot go further without remembering the now legendary figure of *Matapacos* ("Cop Killer," a black dog who rose to fame during the 2011 university protests), perhaps the most distinguished and libertarian representation of the strengthening of human-non-human relations during heightened political and dispute situations, in this case, in support of a decent standard of living (Quiroz and Skewes 2020).

Ultimately, this work by Juan Carlos Skewes is the result of dialogues and knowledge which, in general, are barely connected, but gathered together with a socialist talent which seeks to share what has been learned as a product of both humans and non-humans. As such, it is an ornate literary artifact, open to consideration and for the development of improved regenerative conditions, moving between erudition and poetry, between critical theory and contact with diverse communities, but above all, founded on the commitment of one who feels that his research object is a creative and ontological part of his own existence: an anthropology of the forest, of life, and of those invisible social practices which nonetheless invite us little by little to reconnect and spread popular and cosmological energies to new political and everyday positions, this time to where living nature strategically unfolds as co-production. Let us therefore not forget that life regeneration depends on those micro connections of conviviality between human and non-human beings who are called to deploy a new political ontology that is open and creatively available to overcome the capitalist mode of accumulation. And finally, let us not forget, as the author says, to assume with greater modesty that not even the words have been well formulated, and that a whole new language must be learned (235).

4. Francisca Márquez: take responsibility for disorder rather than seeking a new order

At a time of climate change on a global scale, this book seizes us by the lapels and brings us up to speed on the possible routes available to us for the regeneration of nature. Using clear, pleasant, and profound language, the author leads us by the hand through our native forests. From there, he teaches us to interpret in anthropological terms the impact that indiscriminate capitalist expansion has had on these forests. According to the author, forests are suffering from a riot of investment that provokes fear for their sustainability. Each century formed its own landscape, and each century has done so at the expense of cultural wealth and biodiversity. A forest is not simply a mass of greenery, he points out; it is a mass of interlinking interests. Conservation policies seem to be overwhelmed not only by disruptive human practices but also by the general disorder that governs the phenomena of this planet. New ecologies, therefore, invite us to take responsibility for the disorder rather than seeking some new order. Buffeted by this turbulence, paradigms are lost, reappear, and disappear. Disorder, a bringer of inexhaustible fecundity (Balandier 2003), leads us to scrutinize representations of the world; it drives a multiplication of questions rather than answers, and identification of what is possible rather than the capacity to formulate a true explanation. Confrontation of the chaos is a way of identifying the partial orders that lie within it. Thus, knowledge is examined differently and converted into an object of science. If scientific knowledge gives way to uncertainty, it is because it has achieved a greater appreciation of complexity; simplicity and stability have become the exception rather than the rule, asserts Edgard Morin (2004). As in this book, stable situations and continuity are no longer what matters, but rather processes, instabilities,
that which transforms, geological and climatic alterations, the evolution of species, the genesis and mutation of the standards which act upon social behaviors, social crises. And in these turbulent times, the simple becomes complex, the multiple prevails over the singular, the random over the planned, and disorder over order (Prigogine and Stengers 1980). In moments of social and ecological crisis, the disorder that invades and disrupts the apparent order of the field of social life cannot be reduced. On the contrary, the challenge to which the ethnographer points to is to heed disorder and have no fear of losing ourselves, if indeed we truly wish to find answers.

Far from limiting himself to an assessment of the role of capital and extractivism in our native forests, the anthropologist Juan Carlos Skewes concerns himself within these 250 pages with proposing lessons learned regarding the regeneration of the life of these native forests. Through a careful and fascinating work of ethnographic observation, he teaches us to recognize and value how populations, communities and families that exist close to forests act and establish ties of coexistence with non-human beings. These links are described by Gabriela Mistral (1949) as being of a “congenital paganism” in which living and fraternal behavior between species rules.

The book proposes that what is at stake is not only how we understand the relationship between living beings, but the shape that we wish to give it. In the context of forests, the coexistence of human and non-human beings has depended upon a relational ontology based on a cultural heritage that is predominantly indigenous. But such an ontology has been constrained historically by a dominant view that positions separation from nature as a structural mechanism of territories.

There can be no doubt that the coexistence of people, communities and trees has been considered irrelevant to the standards of development and business interests that have been established in this country. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that initiatives, such as biodiversity conservation, have tended to follow an economic path rather than one of social justice; the route of business rather than that of indigenous peoples and their environmental rights. However, Skewes points out that by ignoring the living practices of the inhabitants of forest landscapes we are also ignoring history, biodiversity, and local sovereignty.

But what knowledge is hidden in the practices and rituals of the indigenous peoples of those forests subjected to extractivist, accumulation-oriented economics? Certainly, the practices and knowledge found there are collective, but they are not necessarily easy to translate, meaning that they may remain enigmatic and indecipherable. The ethnographer offers a meticulous narration, demonstrating that the political implications of these gestures in terms of embodied knowledge – living, intangible and heterotopic – speak of other knowledges, of other cosmogonies. These are the subaltern voices (Taylor 2017) that disrupt scientific and commercial categories and order, subverting the social frameworks of memory, scientific knowledge, and the morals of capitalist extractivism. It is therefore in these worlds of indigenous cultures that the author presumes lies the key to this profound transformation of the principles of coexistence between nature and people.

Inspired by this indigenous ontology and as a counterpoint to conservation, the book proposes that we should follow the path of regeneration, calling for the infinite recreation of life. Regeneration of the landscape for a socially inclusive form of conservation requires, therefore, that we comprehend the relationships between human beings and animals as a mutually comfortable position whose terms are defined procedurally. The transition from a predatory economy towards approaches that protect trees and other species requires a close study of the processes lived by those who have succeeded in cultivating other means of connecting with the medium. The possible ways of integrating human beings, trees and other species necessitate a contract within a prospective framework of conviviality and well-being. We
must, therefore, recognize the plural and diverse nature of life, but also the political importance of these practices. The moral community of the forest is neither exclusive nor exclusionary; it is open and changing and flows from the joint responsibility of multiple agents. But this story, which is none other than that of capitalism, cannot be considered without some transformation of those conditions which destroyed the forests and which plundered communities of their means of life: the forest and its tangle of constituent beings call for the existence that was taken away from it. A relational ontology demands a move from a residual condition to one of protagonism, and without spaces of sovereignty, the path is impassable. According to Rivera Cusicanqui (2013), we can say that this book warns us not to contribute to the perpetuation of forms of domination and the covering up of practices of colonization and subalternization. The proposal to listen and return to another world and other knowledge has today gained a more radical urgency embodied by real-world experiences (Segato 2007, 17).

The invitation is therefore to rethink nature as our ally and to consider the relevance of the creativity of local actors. This invitation, in a country which looks on as its rivers dry up and its forests are devastated by fire and human activity, is now more urgent than ever.

5. Reply

5.1. Juan Carlos Skewes. Dwellings of hope: community experiences in the regeneration of life in the native forest

Writing in the aftermath of a major social uprising in Chile, and amid the coronavirus crisis, is a bitter advantage for replying to my generous commentators. Such a context places capitalism at the center of a debate about our future and confirms its incapacity to deal with critical issues relating to our species’ survival.

As the comments concur, the book raises the relationship between the human and non-human as a central issue in the regeneration of life under capitalist pressure. This regeneration comes under threat in the face of what Marquez defines here as “indiscriminate capitalist expansion.” The strained relationship emerges in a context where, according to Riquelme, “modernity was imposed at the expense of dispossession.” However, the central argument of the book is hopeful insofar as it recognizes that alternative accommodations, although fragile, are possible, as shown in the ethnographic cases.

Residents around the borders of the native forest find in conviviality the means for sustaining themselves while protecting the other species upon which they depend. Their daily life echoes Gabriela Mistral’s notion of “congenital paganism” (Mistral 1949; Scarpa and Mistral 1979). Their practices recognize the autonomy of living beings – “autonomous agentic power,” as stated here by Quiroz. Thus, in their everyday life, Mapuche and peasant communities contribute to increasing biocultural diversity in the otherwise threatened forests. Dwelling and residential practices lie at the center of this contribution, as highlighted by Riquelme. The model provided by the Mapuche ruka [house] in the book represents – contrary to the colonialist model – a native forest outpost; a nest for diverse species to intermingle in daily life. The very notion of nest provides an intriguing model as acknowledged in contemporary physics. “If defined as a random packing of elastic filaments, the bird nest is an unusual material: it is cohesive without attractive interactions; it is plastic although its elements are elastic; it is soft even if its filaments are hard” (Weiner et al. 2020). As with the ruka, “it combines long flexible elements, impermanent frictional contacts, and boundary effects” in unique ways. Dwelling, in this sense, is labile, allowing adaptation to extremely adverse conditions.

Marquez contributes to this discussion by bringing to the fore the contradiction between order and disorder. State-sponsored modernization, based on a rational, orderly, and
organized worldview, results in disruption of everyday community life (see also Skewes 2004). Meanwhile, life explodes in the context of the disorder that community life represents to authorities and developers. In the community, disorder beats order. Thus, life regains that which through commodification is lost.

Local communities are small; in a sense, they are a self-contained laboratory. When faced with the bigger picture, is their experience replicable on a larger scale? And, in a more general sense, are there any alternatives to a capitalist formation? As the book asks, is the utopia of human and non-human coalescence, securing their mutual sustainability, just a residual by-product of extinguished capitalist ventures?

Undurraga poses a critical question for discussion: Are there any other more friendly forms of capitalism that may contribute to community well-being and the preservation of the native forest? A straightforward answer would blind us to the more nuanced processes that take place on the margins of capitalism. Let us examine those dimensions that need clarification in search of possible solutions to Undurraga’s question.

The book addresses the living landscape as a critical issue: as stated here, it results from interaction among its physical components and its constituent living beings. That which demands protection is a dynamic and open reality, subject to change but not to dissociation. Stress is a permanent condition in the existence of a landscape. However, how much pressure can it bear? I cannot answer this question in general terms. Each reality is unique, and its lability is situationally defined. Since the annexation of indigenous territories, trade, evangelization, State-sponsored development, money, politics, and the media have all been part of a metabolism that has transformed but not entirely disrupted these residual landscapes.

In this context, a discussion of alternative forms of capitalism might be more fruitful. In general, Polanyi’s (1985) grim view of capitalist expansion strongly influences my perspective. However, based on field experiences, I am able to identify conditions under which the co-existence of a capitalist and non-capitalist economy might not be as corrosive as it appears to be in most cases. A commitment to protect the common good is essential to maintaining the basis for the survival of local landscapes, communities and native forests included. As stressed by Riquelme, “it is at the local level that we must begin to nuance technical and conservationist language.”

The prevalence of the common good implies, on the one hand, duties concerning mutual community-landscape imbrication and, on the other, recognition of its internal, collective organization. One should keep in mind that green capitalism and communal life experiences pertain to different realities. As Marquez suggests, “it should come as no surprise [...] that initiatives such as biodiversity conservation have tended to follow an economic path rather than one of social justice.” In this sense, experiences such as Tompkins’ recovery of large estates for conservation are commendable. Nevertheless, insofar as they are informed by strict conservationist ideology, such endeavors are alien to the vocation of the local community. However, this difference should by no means impede forging alliances around the shared goal of the protection of life, as when Tompkins’s Pumalín park joins ranks with fishing communities threatened by the expansion of salmon farming around the coasts of southern Chile (Araos 2018).

Anthropological fieldwork illuminates the overlapping of diverse realities, stressing the flux of ideas and experiences that are genuinely relevant from a local perspective, insofar as they are conducive to the simultaneous regeneration of human and non-human beings as the structuring components of a vibrant landscape. When dealing with issues of sustainability, it is this intersection between living realities that requires attention. What is being sustained: the market, the community, other species, or the vibrant landscape to which all belong? I say the latter. From this perspective, the quest relates to a critical component of the
relationship: the practices of interpretation and translation performed in any given interaction between these worlds. Drawing from Sahlins (1985) and Ortner (1984), I define a practice of translation not as the task of finding the meaning of a given element in another system, but as how someone uses an alien resource for a specific purpose in his or her milieu, provoking particular consequences.

Allow me to use the example of knowledge. As rightly highlighted by Undurraga, it plays a critical role in broadening opportunities for life regeneration on the margins, even under the pressure of modernization and commodification. However, a common mistake has been to establish equivalences between two entirely different paradigmatic orientations that coexist in Western science and non-Western societies: the Levi-Straussian distinction between domesticated and wild or savage knowledge (Lévi-Strauss 1992). Scientific knowledge is rational, subject to verification, and based on an analytical approach. Its scope concerns a dimension of reality that represents a world other than that of indigenous and local knowledge.

As pointed out by Viveiros de Castro (2004), these paradigms deal with different realities, and the challenge lies in understanding the translation’s impact on local practices. Local knowledge is embodied in everyday life practices and is affective and intuitive. As posed by Marquez, it is an “embodied knowledge – living, intangible and heterotopic.” It speaks of “other cosmogonies. These are the subaltern voices that disrupt the scientific and commercial categories and order […]”. However, if verbalized, it loses its environmental entanglement and is transformed into ideology. Notions such as Mother Earth say little about the community’s engagement in its landscape: the idea has moved from one realm – practice – to another: its conceptual formalization.

Likewise, if scientific knowledge does not find connections in local constructions, it might well serve purposes other than those of the community, as in the case of pesticides. Practices that reciprocally adjust human and non-human behavior, such as beekeeping or turning an animal into a collaborative agent, contribute to the regeneration of local life. The same is true of a market-oriented agency that avoids forcing individuals to comply with alien standards of work and production. Community members take advantage of opportunities provided by the State or the market, and, in so doing, they reinvigorate their households. They may also, and indeed do, take advantage of market opportunities by turning against their neighbors, dismantling local arrangements. Thus, the condition of local does not on its own guarantee sustainability, an aspect rightly pointed out by Undurraga and which merits further attention.

Autonomy and reciprocal respect are necessary ingredients of socially inclusive conservation, but so is the political recognition of those practices that make them possible, as suggested by Marquez. In the absence of such recognition, communities remain fragile when faced with capitalist expansion, no matter how friendly this capitalism may be. They become sites of tension that often demand systems of arbitration. Under current conditions, this arbitration is absent: the mantra touted in Chile by the public authorities is that these conflicts are “between private entities” and it is therefore not the task of the State to deal with them. According to such a definition, capitalism reveals itself as the unrestrained monster portrayed by Polanyi.

Let me finish by sharing the request that Quiroz draws from his reading of the book: a plea for libertarian ecological affinity among living beings – a relationship which, as among Mapuche communities, recognizes a fundamental principle of reciprocity between species: never take without giving. As Riquelme suggests, conversations among different species are spoken in a somber, wounded language, but in some cases, as in those examined here, one of hope.
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