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REVIEW OF "CONTESTED FRONTIERS IN AMAZONIA" BY MARIANNE SCHMINK
AND CHARLES H. WOOD (Columbia University Press, New York).

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CONTESTED FRONTIERS IN AMAZONIA

By Marianne Schmink and Charles H. Wood

Columbia University Press, New York, 1992. xxxi + 387 pp., maps, diags., index, and biblio., \$35.00 (cloth)

Contested Frontiers in Amazonia, by Marianne Schmink and Charles H. Wood, is a valuable addition to the growing literature on Amazonia. It presents a wealth of information on southern Pará, a part of Amazonia to which neither researchers nor the media have devoted the attention that its importance merits. Rondônia and Acre, where small farmers predominate, have captured the attention of the world. Perhaps the intense international interest in Rondônia stems in part from the understandable fascination of First World television viewers who have seen their tax dollars at work speeding rainforest destruction through the World Bank's POLONOROESTE Project, whereas most of the events in southern Pará (with the important exception of the Carajás Railway) are not World Bank financed. By my calculations from 1991 LANDSAT data, Rondônia and Acre represented only 10.1% and 3.4% respectively of the $11.1 \times 10^3 \text{ km}^2$ annual deforestation rate at that time (for forests in the originally forested portion of the region -- i.e. not counting clearing in cerrado savanna or in secondary forest). In contrast, Pará--especially southern Pará--represented 34.3% of the total. Mato Grosso, which adjoins southern Pará, was in second place among the region's nine states, with 25.7% of the annual deforestation. Within Pará, researchers (including myself) have devoted a disproportionate amount of attention to the more orderly settlement of small farmers on the Transamazon Highway in central Pará, rather than the conflicts among ranchers, squatters, loggers, gold miners and other actors in the southern of the state. By any index of knowledge, such as research publications per square kilometer of deforestation, southern Pará and northern Mato Grosso would top the list as priorities for study. Much more than Rondônia and Acre, it is southern Pará and northern Mato Grosso that represent both the dominant present and the likely future land use change patterns in Brazilian Amazonia as a whole. It is an example of what in Brazil is jokingly known as the "Orloff effect," after a brand of vodka that advertises itself with the slogan "I am you tomorrow."

Schmink and Wood's book is really three books in one. The first section offers a chronological account of development policies in Brazilian Amazonia as a whole. The account starts with European contact, with most detail devoted to the rapid changes occurring since the authors' fieldwork began in 1976. Most of the information goes through 1989, with a small amount extending up to 1991. The second part of the book recounts the development of the PA-279 Highway and the towns, settlement areas and mining sites that sprang up along it. The last part of the book reports the results of a series of formal questionnaires applied at intervals over a period of six years (1978-1984) in São

Felix do Xingú -- a traditional Amazonian riverside town that was rapidly transformed when it was opened to the rest of Brazil by the PA-270 Highway during this period. The pace of change in Amazonia is something that really has to be seen to be appreciated: a six year period at the frontier can transform an area as much as many decades or even centuries in many parts of the world.

As the book's title suggests, conflict among the different groups of actors is the dominant theme. Several thousand people have been killed over the past few years as the region's land, mineral and timber wealth has been disputed by ranchers, squatters, private colonization firms, gold miners (garimpeiros), and large and small mining and logging operations, along with military units, guerrillas, politicians, church and union leaders, indigenous tribes, traditional caboclos, small town residents, and holdovers from the rubber boom elites, plus bureaucrats from an alphabet soup of federal and state agencies.

The book contrasts with the over half a dozen popular titles that have appeared in the last few years reporting the impressions of journalists or others who spend a few months traveling in Amazonia. Schmink and Wood are card-carrying social scientists, and have been amassing the information for the book over a 15-year period, mostly during their annual three months of freedom from teaching (about Amazonia) at the University of Florida. In addition to secondary sources, the principal basis of the book is over 1000 formal interviews -- 400 of which are part of the São Felix do Xingú survey. The authors have been masterful at packing in a large amount of detailed information without hindering the book's readability.

Schmink and Wood are admirably evenhanded in presenting the viewpoints of the different groups. Rather than the usual portrayal of Indians and landless farmers as "good guys" suffering at the hands of everyone else, the book is also careful to report violence and exploitation by all, including these usual protagonists. For example, several government decisions giving in to settlement demands of landless migrants have worsened the situation by attracting more people. Along with extensive accounts by the victims of government and military actions, Schmink and Wood give the thinking of bureaucrats and even military thinking that equates with high treason almost any concern with social and environmental problems in the region.

The events in southern Pará are of themselves of sufficient scale to affect global environmental changes such as greenhouse gas emissions, biodiversity, and the regional hydrological cycle. When parallel events elsewhere in Amazonia are considered, these changes are of even greater importance. An accurate understanding of the social context of deforestation is essential to anyone who would offer suggestions on how to reduce these impacts, especially

if this is to be done without bringing on even more suffering to the region's human population than the current sequence of destruction already has.

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