

Nancy Lee Peluso. *Rich Forests, Poor People: Resource Control and Resistance in Java*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford: University of California Press, 1992.

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In *Rich Forests, Poor People*, Nancy Peluso explains that the contours of contemporary forest land use in Java are the product of a longstanding contest for control of forest resources between state forest bureaucracies, on the one hand, and rural Javanese peasants in forest-adjacent communities, on the other. Beginning in the period of Dutch colonial rule, forest bureaucracies sought to maintain privileged state exploitation of the riches of Java's forests (principally teak) by restricting peasant access to forest resources. Peasants dependent on these resources for their livelihoods have opposed access controls vigorously, sometimes through organized, militant protest, but more often through acts of passive, and often unorganized resistance. The latter form of opposition is viewed as powerful in spite of being less overtly confrontational than organized action, in that it helps to place limits on state prerogative in forest management.

Peluso has made a significant scholarly contribution in two areas. First, she has demonstrated that forest resource control is an important and sorely neglected dimension in historical and sociological analyses of Java. Not the least of her accomplishments has been to assemble a wealth of information on colonial forest management from Dutch and Indonesian sources, to supply a rich account of the role of forests in the rural insurgency of the 1950s and early 1960s, and to trace the relationship between contemporary, "top-down" forest management in Java and New Order rule. Second, Peluso has developed a sophisticated, heterogeneous approach to the study of natural resource issues by drawing on three frames of reference: analysis of state power, legitimation, and ideology; the politics of rural resistance (exemplified by such scholars as Scott, Kerkvliet, Tilly, Thompson, and Guha); and analysis of the political economy of the environment (in the tradition of Blaikie). Peluso demonstrates that her subject matter is not reducible to any one level of analysis, and that power relations in the Java forest sector can only be investigated cogently with due appreciation for their complexity.

There are several noteworthy errors in the concluding chapter of the book. In this chapter, Peluso addresses a crucial question: Can social forestry function as a means to improve the access of the rural poor to forest resources? In addressing the question, Peluso assumes wrongly that the intent of improving the life of the poor has been forgotten in the implementation of the Java Social Forestry Program (JSFP) and that this inattention is ironic and inefficient on the part of the State Forestry Corporation, given that attention to the poor might yield some benefits to the corporation. In fact, there has been attention to the interests of the poor through the JSFP. The problem is that the benefits tend to be limited and selectively applied; the needs of the poor tend to be addressed in the relatively few areas where rural resistance produces unacceptably high levels of damage to the financial and territorial interests of the state forest bureaucracy. Neglect of the interests of the poor does not reflect bureaucratic irrationality, but rather reflects the fact that the forest bureaucracy can adequately safeguard its interests by making relatively minor, tactical concessions to the interests of the poor. Peluso would have done well to build on a key insight at the beginning of her book: "By 'surrendering' incrementally or periodically the state can maintain its power, continuing to control people, resources, and land" (p. 10).

Peluso also errs in assuming that relatively well-off peasants will be disproportionately represented as farmers on social forestry land. This does happen in areas where forest

farmland is of relatively high quality in comparison to village land and is therefore in high demand. However, on teak lands, where soil quality is sometimes quite poor for agriculture, it is no surprise that the poor tend to be well-represented in social forestry.

These problems aside, *Rich Forests, Poor People* is a splendid book, replete with historical information and theoretical insights in a new area of inquiry. It should be indispensable reading for those seeking to enrich their understanding of the rural political economy of Java. It is also highly recommended as a model for research on the history, politics, and sociology of natural resource control in less-developed countries.