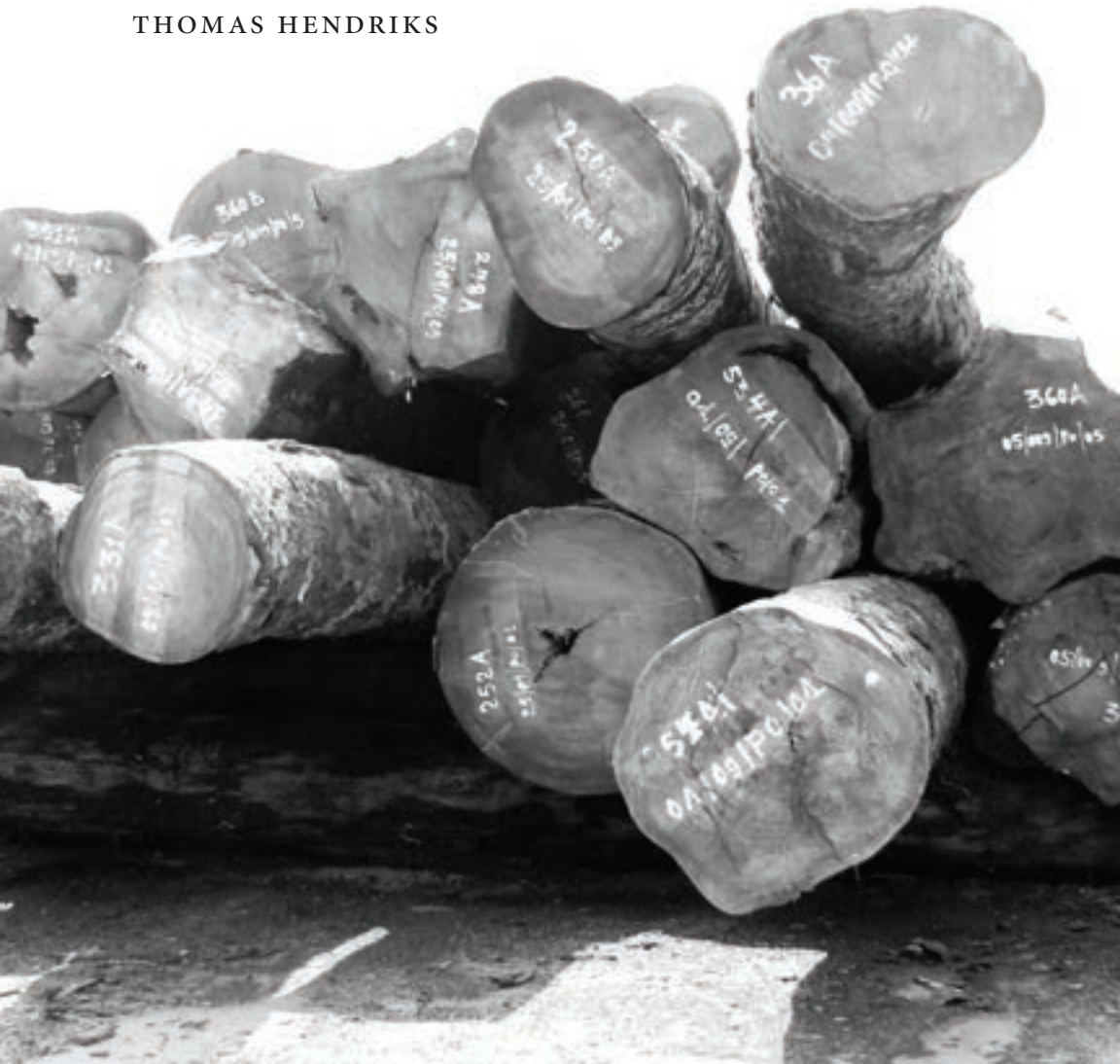
RAINFOREST CAPITALISM

Power and Masculinity in a Congolese Timber Concession

THOMAS HENDRIKS



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Duke University Press *Durham and London* 2022

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper ∞
Designed by Aimee C. Harrison
Typeset in Minion Pro and Univers LT Std by Westchester Publishing Services

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Cover art:

Frontispiece: View of the CTI labor compound's central avenue at noon

For loggers, wherever they are

CONTENTS

NOTE ON ANONYMITY

To ensure confidentiality and protect the privacy of people whose lives have provided the gist for this book's argument, I use fictive names for all the men and women appearing in these pages. I also use a pseudonym—CTI or Congolese Timber Industries—for referring to the Congolese branch of the European company that operated the logging concession where fieldwork happened. Yet, notwithstanding my use of generic names for sites that are specifically linked to CTI's presence (e.g., forest camp, river camp), I had no choice but to refer to neighboring villages and towns by their actual names. Undoubtedly, this makes the logging concession identifiable to insiders. A more watertight guarantee on anonymity would, however, make every reference to a wider context impossible and thus create an image of the concession as an isolated world artificially cut off from its specific region and history. Balancing concerns for contextualization and anonymity, the following chapters propose a particularized and concrete ethnography that nevertheless protects people's privacy and respects the trust they bestowed on me.

NOTE ON PHOTOGRAPHY

I am a reluctant photographer, but the images that separate the chapters in this book are mine. I have reproduced them here in seemingly anachronistic black-and-white, which immediately brings to mind the colonial archive and its racialized oppositions. This manipulation is deliberate. It points at the uncanny reappearance of a past in the present. And it visualizes how, for many people in this book, the present itself was felt as always almost over: as a world that could simply disappear overnight.

The aesthetic trick of black-and-white troubles linear temporalities and blurs firm separations between past and present. Not, as Johannes Fabian (1983) put it, to deny the "coevalness" between ethnography and what it makes into its object, but to foreground the messiness of history, the ephemerality of the present, and the synthetic nostalgia for a remembered colonial past that pervaded the logging concession.

Moreover, editing to black-and-white is a useful technique for evoking the subdued hues and damped tones of a rainforest world where light is often scarce, as well as for showing the sharp shadows and blinding boundaries that emerge in forest clearings. It is also a device for reproducing the texture of timber and vegetation and for suggesting the poetic force of bulldozers and chainsaws.

In contrast to some portraits of Congolese workers, there are no images of white loggers. Although a substantial part of this book is about them, their visual absence remains problematic. Yet it is the product of a different relationship to photography. Among the European managers, taking pictures was not a common practice. In the labor compounds, by contrast, pictures were everywhere. Workers paid photographers to document their achievements and dreams. And my small camera was merely taken up by what was already there.

Fuel truck on a logging road

PROLOGUE

We suddenly realize that the enormous padauk tree is about to fall down and crash into the surrounding rainforest. People shout and run in different directions. One of the loggers drops his heavy chainsaw on the ground and pushes me forward. I get stuck in thick bushes and creeping lianas. In the heat of the moment, I lose sight of the others. Looking over my shoulder, all I see is a wall of vegetation closing itself behind me. The massive tree loudly groans. I am unsure where it is coming from. A loud rattling of snapping fibers swells into a thundering roar that vibrates through the soil. Within seconds, heavy branches fall from the sky. The air is filled with bees, ants, dust, and organic matter. I cover my mouth and close my eyes. When I reopen them, diffuse sunlight permeates a thick green haze. A couple of meters before me I can just make out Freddy's silhouette as he gets back on his feet. The humid forest smells of gasoline, sweat, freshly sawn timber, and smashed vegetation.

The abrupt silence is eerie. We reassemble and check on one another. The giant tree lies on the forest floor, leaving a huge hole in the canopy. Sap flows and resins bleed from its stump. My watery eyes avert themselves from the light that violently pours in—as if illuminating a crime scene. In its downfall, the padauk has uprooted other trees, dragging along vines and snapping stems. Behind its stump, someone from the logging team has left his lunch in a plastic carrier bag. Cassava bread and tinned sardines stick out from a mulch of rotting leaves. A jerrycan sits next to an abandoned safety helmet. A broken coffee cup lies nearby. In the distance, the hollow hammering call of a great blue turaco and, further still, the faint sound of another chainsaw.

After the visceral crash, the return to routine is impressive. The assistant feller absentmindedly checks the saw blade and adds motor oil to the machine. A logging clerk measures the trunk and records its characteristics in

a small notebook. I watch him hammer a production number into the tree's reddish cut surface. Years before I was taught that these numbers form the basis of an accounting system allowing each tree to be traced back to its source. As a forestry student back in Belgium I had also learned to identify this particular tree species as an African padauk or *Pterocarpus soyauxii*—from pictures and textbooks, of course; none of us had ever seen one for real.

The chainsaw operator quietly sips from a small bottle of liquor. "That tree was trouble," he says. "I didn't think it would fall this way." As always, the team had carefully estimated its most probable falling direction. With his machete the assistant feller had opened up an escape route through the undergrowth, opposite to where they thought the padauk would fall. With great precision, the chainsaw operator had carried out the standard procedure of controlled tree felling. First he removed the buttress roots. Then he formed a deep hinge above the base. Next he made one horizontal cut. At the same time, he kept a number of securities in place: spots where the trunk was not entirely cut through. Like this, he said, the tree could remain standing for weeks, even months, without falling down.

We had also inserted thin sticks into the freshly made cut as cautionary devices that would signal any of the padauk's shifts in weight. Halfway throughout the procedure, when the massive tree suddenly came to lean toward us, the sticks immediately translated its turning and warned us to move to the other side. We all knew we had to stay coolheadedly close to the tree until it began its final downfall. But, at this moment, even the experienced chainsaw operator looked nervous. He asked his assistant to open up a second escape route—just in case. Then, another unexpected shift in weight. The tree now blocked the chainsaw in an immobilizing headlock and seemed to hesitate. Its branches were entangled with other trees, making it difficult to predict what would happen. Our team leader picked up the spare chainsaw and cut through the last security. "Run!" I heard. And run we did—in unforeseen directions.

Incidents like this were nothing unusual in the north of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Workers at the CTI logging concession often described their job as a constant fight between men and trees. They used prayers, ancestral medicines, and practical tricks to protect themselves. New apprentices sought experienced loggers as "work fathers" to help them. And chainsaw operators smoked cannabis and drank strong local liquor in the early mornings on their way to work from the labor camps. It made them see clearly in the forest, they said.

But trees had their own will and character. Some made unexpected turns. Others simply spun out of control. Workers had witnessed terrible accidents. In the forest, unforeseen things happened. Dangers lurked in unexpected corners. In opposition to the village, forest space was experienced as an ambivalent realm of nightly forces. A place of witchcraft but also of healing. Where things were rarely what they seemed and could always turn into something else. To thrive in this shape-shifting world, "You had to be strong," workers told us, "and ready for surprise."

Freddy—a student from Bumba who had joined me as my research assistant—agilely embraced the risk-taking masculinity this world seemed to demand. I, on the other hand, often felt unfit for the task. Although trained as a forest engineer, I was often unprepared for the visceral violence of large-scale logging. This book is the product of our unlikely fieldwork: an ethnography of industrial timber production in the Congolese rainforest.

The anecdote above can easily be read as an allegory of the devastating force of global capitalism and its hunger for natural resources. Transnational timber firms indeed create new frontiers in "out-of-the-way" places and violently transform living creatures into tropical hardwood (Tsing 1993). Logging enterprises generate profits that flow to corporate head offices and shareholders but bypass forest residents and national societies (Ferguson 2006). One might therefore take the falling padauk tree as an apt metaphor for the destructive power of chainsaws, timber companies, logging interests, and a profoundly unjust system of extractive capitalism. A world where corporations are powerful economic actors that literally change the aspect of the earth. Where huge chainsaws destroy vulnerable forest ecologies and damage their human and nonhuman inhabitants in an age of large-scale disasters called the Anthropocene.

But the same opening vignette also tells another story, one in which tree felling is not so much a metaphor for the power of timber firms, but rather a scene of vulnerability, precarity, uncertainty, and fear. In the thick undergrowth, where it is impossible to keep an overview, one is often *too close* to see what happens. Claustrophobically near the action, all sight is partial, murky, and oblique. In the messy encounters between men and trees, chainsaws penetrate trunks but are also dropped in panic. Trees fall down but also spin out of control. The standardized procedures of so-called controlled felling are supplemented with alcohol, drugs, magic, and religion. Visceral

flashes of excitement feed a macho embrace of danger but also undermine lumberjack performances of strength. Loggers present themselves as tough risk-taking men but also emphasize the physical breakdown of their bodies in a demanding world where better options are scarce. And yet, normality and routine lubricate life on the work floor.

How to weave this second and perhaps counterintuitive story of *experienced lack of control* alongside or within better-known stories about corporate strength, discipline, and surveillance? How to write about the doubts, failures, weaknesses, excesses, and nervousness that loomed large in the industrial production of tropical timber without thereby ignoring its moments and modes of violence? How to relate to forces that were enacted in the company's name without assuming to already know what they are or what they do? And how to think the power of rainforest capitalism from the midst of its undergrowth, through its very surprises and unexpected turns?

Based on ethnographic fieldwork in and around the CTI timber concession in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, this book starts from the everyday lives, dreams, fears, and desires of different inhabitants of its logging camps—workers, expat managers, jobseekers, traders, prostitutes, farmers, smugglers. It aims to describe the affective life of power under rainforest capitalism. In order to do so, it will have to stray away from common readings of extractive capitalism. The following chapters deliberately deal with topics—such as popular memories, boredom, game-playing, troublemaking, oneiric displacements, occult realities, racial fetishism, transgressive masculinities, sexual fantasies, and queer dynamics—that might not be immediately associated with timber production. Yet this book shows how and why these aspects must be included as inherent parts of the analysis of capitalist extraction in the contemporary moment. Large-scale industrial logging indeed depends on labor but also on race, gender, affect, imagination, and desire. Hence its strength—and its precarity.

After felling a tree

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Writing these pages has been both a pain and a joy. I loved returning to fieldnotes, some of them almost ten years old, and look at them with fresh eyes. Recrafting chapters of a dissertation I had kept closed for so long. Listening again to recorded voices that made me laugh and cry. Rediscovering attachments to an ecstatic world of rainforest logging from which I had tried to distance myself. Remembering intense friendships. But also moments of anger, suffering, depression, and violence.

Writing a book on capitalism and ecstasis was itself often an ec-static process. It literally took me, once again, *outside* of who I thought I was. And outside of the dissertation I had written. Revision deployed its own logic as forces I could barely control but which I tried to redirect into new forms. I could never have done this alone. I wish to thank all friends, family, colleagues, and students who have, knowingly or unknowingly, helped bring this book to an end.

This all started as an odd doctoral project. Initially it was merely the desire of a recently graduated forestry engineer to study a professional world he felt reluctant to enter. My forestry professors at Ghent University (Belgium) had taught me a lot about forests, tropical and otherwise, and I am still grateful to them for teaching me how to "think like an engineer" without thereby overlooking the inherent poetics of science. But our training held little place for people who actually live and work in logging concessions. I therefore ventured to study anthropology at the KU Leuven University (Belgium). That decision literally changed my life.

It was in Leuven that ideas started to take some concrete form. I was extremely fortunate to have Filip De Boeck as my supervisor. Filip has been the most generous guide. As vague plans turned into a written project, he was always there to read drafts and provide helpful comments. He also

created conditions in which I could grow and gave me the freedom to trace my own paths in the forest of academia. This book is profoundly indebted to his work and support.

My gratitude extends also to my co-supervisor, Christian Lund, who, since we first met in Niamey, took an immediate interest in my research plans and helped sharpen them on the road. And to Theodore Trefon, who had initially hired me as an assistant for a research project on charcoal trade around Kinshasa and Lubumbashi. Theodore's practical advice and rare knowledge of the Congolese logging sector have been indispensable for making this project possible.

I would also like to express my gratitude to Bogumil Jewsiewicki and Steven Van Wolputte for their constructive feedback that eventually found its way into this book, and to Katrien Pype for her advice as both a colleague and a friend as well as for her criticism as an examiner.

A special place is reserved for Johannes Fabian, whose sincere engagement with my work has truly marked its future. It was from him that I first learned about *ecstasis*, and our inspiring conversations and his generous offer to proofread several chapters greatly motivated my writing. The following pages are a belated expression of my indebtedness to his thought.

It goes without saying that this project would have been impossible without CTI—the timber firm in whose logging concession fieldwork took place. Although I cannot reveal its real name, I wish to express my deepest gratitude to its directors and executives. Their courage and openness allowed this study to happen but also made them vulnerable. I am equally grateful to the five European managers who lived and worked in the logging concession. During fifteen months of electrifying fieldwork between 2009 and 2011, we shared joys and laughter but also anxiety, anger, and frustration. Affectionate dialogues, angry reactions, harsh disputes, reconciliations, and revisions slowly crafted the argument contained in these chapters. Perhaps the expat loggers will find some pages unpleasant. Or disagree with others. Yet this book is an honest account of the world of rainforest capitalism in which we came to find ourselves together. I can only hope the result will resonate with those in the sector yearning for a different future.

I am equally indebted to the workers and other inhabitants of the CTI labor camps as well as to the villagers I regularly visited. They have been generous hosts, fantastic neighbors, and some have become true friends. They taught me what it meant to live between hope and despair, as we shared the rhythms, possibilities, and sorrows of camp life. It is with them and from them that I learned to think again about what I thought I knew. And it is

because of their hospitality, friendship, and humor that, even today, I continue to dream about the colors, textures, sounds, and odors of the forest. I cannot name the individual families, men, and women to whom I would like to bring honor. But I retain their memories with great affection.

Warm and special thanks also go to Freddy Boka Gala for his invaluable work. He has been so much more than a research assistant. Not only did he prove to be a conscientious translator, language teacher, and formidable motorcycle mechanic, he also appropriated my initial research plans and turned them into a collaborative project. I am equally grateful to Marcel Akpala from Bolende and Jules-César Gbema from Bumba for our long conversations about regional history and Mbudza and Bati customs and traditions. Their experience and wisdom have been of great help to comprehend the environment in which CTI came to operate.

My appreciation also goes to Père Carlos Rommel for accommodating me during my visits to Bumba. To Frère Luc Vansina for his logistical support from Kinshasa. And to Françoise Van de Ven, the secretary-general of the Congolese Fédération des Industriels du Bois (FIB), who took an immediate interest in my project and whose outspoken opinions I greatly valued.

I also thank the Flemish Interuniversity Council (VLIR) for granting me a generous VLADOC grant. The KU Leuven for its institutional support. My colleagues at the Institute for Anthropological Research in Africa (IARA) for offering me a warm home. And Kristien Hermans and Ann Weemaes for taking special care of the practical and financial aspects of my project.

Writing about the racist, misogynist, and often violent world of rainforest logging was not easy, and in 2013 I therefore decided to leave that world behind and dedicate my research to a new topic. Only four years later, after intense submersion in the queer worlds of Kinshasa and Kisangani, did the time seem ripe for another look at the timber concession. But the prospect was frightening. So many things had changed. The world had changed—and I with it. Trump, Brexit. Three of my grandparents had passed away. I was offered a teaching position at the University of Oxford. I had divorced and found a new love. We bought a house and welcomed a cat. Then, during writing, COVID-19 happened and Black Lives Matter intensified. The existential vulnerability this book tries to show has never been so obvious—and, I hope, never so urgent.

I am therefore deeply grateful to those who encouraged me in this daunting process. Nancy Rose Hunt has been an enthusiastic and energizing

supporter. Elizabeth Ault from Duke University Press has been the most helpful and engaged editor. The anonymous reviewers have been extraordinarily generous, and their constructive comments have greatly benefited these pages.

Also, in Oxford, I found myself in a stimulating environment in which to revise chapters. I specifically thank my colleagues at the African Studies Centre and the Institute for Social and Cultural Anthropology. I am also grateful to both Oxford and Leuven for enabling me to take a one-year writing retreat. In the uncertain job market and harsh academic world, it is heartwarming to find colleagues who show trust, kindness, patience, and flexibility.

Over the years many people have contributed to this book, as commentators on paper presentations or readers of draft chapters and articles. I particularly wish to thank Lys Alcayna-Stevens, Arjun Appadurai, Karin Barber, Hans Beeckman, Florence Bernault, Ann Cassiman, Bambi Ceuppens, Brenda Chalfin, Simukai Chigudu, Carli Coetzee, Muriel Côte, Thomas Cousins, Jeroen Cuvelier, Zana Etambala, Elizabeth Ewart, Mattia Fumanti, Kristien Geenen, David Gellner, Peter Geschiere, Juliet Gilbert, Benoît Henriet, Nancy Rose Hunt, Benedikt Korf, Peter Lambertz, Jerome Lewis, Dominique Malaquais, Hélène Neveu Kringelbach, Insa Nolte, David Pratten, Ramon Sarró, Rachel Spronk, Jonny Steinberg, Jean-François Staszak, Kristof Titeca, Joseph Tonda, and Joe Trapido.

Finally, I cannot but acknowledge my deepest gratitude to my parents, brothers, and sister, who have supported me in so many ways. To my friends for their care, patience, and understanding despite my long absences during fieldwork and secluded writing. And, of course, to my love, for the good-hearted optimism, strength, and enthusiasm that kept me going and with whom I adore building a new future.

Workers on their way back from the forest

Introduction
Thinking with Loggers

THE PROLOGUE'S OPENING VIGNETTE evokes an often-overlooked precarity at the heart of industrial rainforest logging that challenges analyses of extractive capitalism that are based on taken-for-granted assumptions of corporate strength. This book indeed shows how and why lived vulnerabilities deeply marked and affected the operations of the company I came to call Congolese Timber Industries, or CTI. The following chapters thereby trouble critiques of capitalism that remain invested in essentialized conceptions of extractive companies, as if they were always inherently strong actors able to control and dominate the spaces in which they operate. As we will see, CTI rather experienced itself as *out of control* in an environment that constantly escaped its will and undermined its objectives. The ethnographic challenge presented by this observation is to account for CTI's existential precarity and vulnerability without thereby underestimating its actual powers to exploit and extract.

To address this challenge, *Rainforest Capitalism* foregrounds and theorizes a complex dialectic between power and what it will call *ecstasis*. Fieldwork in and around the CTI timber camps indeed brought to the fore a recurring relation between ex-traction and ec-stasis—that is, resonances between processes that literally *draw out* material or energy from a certain milieu and processes that make one *stand outside* of one's self or self-control.

The following chapters slowly illustrate and unpack this link, as a pathway for thinking rainforest capitalism differently. This introductory chapter sketches the theoretical landscape and wider context in which they move.

The first three sections of this chapter introduce central tools and ideas that have been helpful to understand the lived intricacies of power in the logging concession. The first section introduces feminist critiques of capitalism that nuance and destabilize the idea of corporate phallic power and trouble scholarly desires to find a more or less coherent or rational system underneath the messy surface of capitalism. The second section builds on these feminist critiques and supplements them with a recent postcritical turn in the humanities and social sciences that promises new ways for anthropologists to *engage with* what they feel uneasy about. It specifically proposes postcritique as an ethnographic method for tracking the eruptions, experiences, echoes, traces, and effects of vulnerability in the midst of performed strength. The next section thereupon introduces the idea of ecstasis as a key concept to describe and understand existential precarity as an often-undertheorized dimension of power and control.

The last four sections situate this book in its wider context. Section four introduces the rapidly growing anthropology of natural resource extraction and sketches some important divergences between industrial logging and other industries, such as mining or oil. Section five surveys the scarce literature on timber production and argues for more ethnographic studies that take logging firms seriously as complex actors in their own right. The following section provides a brief oversight of the particular history and legal framework of timber production in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The final section introduces the timber firm in which fieldwork took place.

Feminist Critique and the Capitalist Monster

In a recent overview article that situates dominant trends and directions in anthropology, Sherry Ortner (2016) observes that, since the 1980s, a certain "dark anthropology" has dominated the otherwise diverse discipline. Many anthropologists indeed focus on exploitation, inequality, and suffering in an increasingly neoliberal world. This "dark" focus is extremely valuable for explaining and understanding the dire state of the world. Yet this dominant style of anthropology can also lead to a numbing repetition of the same ideas. *Capitalism*, for instance, can easily become an a priori concept that is parachuted into texts, seminars, and conferences as the ultimate cause of

what we are trying to grasp (and want to change). In the best critical writing, capitalism is a productive prompt for thinking ethnographically about its conditions of possibility. But it can also operate as a simplifying black box or "big leviathan" that is ritually invoked as an explanation rather than what needs to be explained (Callon and Latour 1981).

In reaction to the implicit essentialization of capitalism as a singular, homogenizing, and monolithic system, several anthropologists have started to rethink its often taken-for-granted logic. In their "Feminist Manifesto for the Study of Capitalism" (2015), for instance, Laura Bear, Karen Ho, Anna Tsing, and Sylvia Yanagisako explicitly call for strategies that "reveal the constructedness—the messiness and hard work involved in making, translating, suturing, converting, and linking diverse capitalist projects." Anna Tsing's work, in particular, has foregrounded the situatedness, openness, heterogeneity, and cultural specificity of capitalist formations—their fragility as well as their effectiveness and violence (Tsing 2005, 2015).

This new anthropology of capitalism draws on longer traditions of feminist critique. In *The End of Capitalism (As We Knew It)* (1996), for instance, J. K. Gibson-Graham—a pen name created by the feminist geographers Julie Graham and Katherine Gibson—famously noted that, in most critiques of capitalism, "the project of understanding the beast has itself produced a beast," that is, "capitalism" as a totalizing system and final cause (1). For this reason, they called for alternative strategies that study the manifold realities of capitalism*s* (plural) without automatically reconfirming or reinvigorating an "abstract capitalist essence" (15). As such, they hoped to "slay the capitalist monster" that many of its self-identified critics have helped feed (21).

The following chapters deeply resonate with this feminist invitation to rethink capitalism as a more fragile, open, and vulnerable configuration rather than as an all-powerful and all-devouring phallic system. Yet, Gibson-Graham and Tsing mainly develop their analyses from a position *outside* of capitalism—the former by thinking from noncapitalist formations, the latter by exploring "peri-capitalist" dynamics that make capitalism possible from its cracks, fissures, and zones of abandonment. This book, by contrast, is firmly situated *within* a capitalist firm. Implicated in and contaminated by industrial logging, it proposes an ethnography of capitalism from one of its contemporary nodes.

Such a position is not unique. Ethnographers increasingly produce accounts of capitalism from its inside. In her remarkable ethnography of Wall Street, for example, Karen Ho (2009) (a coauthor of the aforementioned feminist manifesto) is explicitly interested in undermining the apparent

coherence and rationality of global capitalism from within. Yet, despite our similar positions, our methods and epistemologies are quite different. Ho primarily draws from official discourses and private interviews with (former) investment bank employees in order to explain their Wall Street worldview. She thereby argues that, rather than take these employees' thoughts about the global economy at face value, we need to debunk them as products of the *ideology* of globalization if we want to find out what really happens in the world of global finance (Ho 2005, 68).

This book takes a different route. Instead of evoking the hidden forces of ideology to account for our interlocutors' *mis*conceptions and beliefs, it follows their words, thoughts, acts, and feelings in a less suspicious mode of inquiry. This deliberate approach is a consequence of the unexpected fact that, during fieldwork, the CTI loggers themselves were the first to undermine the idea of the multinational timber company as a powerful actor. Their constant complaints about a frustrating powerlessness to "get things done" directly rubbed against official company discourses in which CTI posed as a responsible and rational actor managing the rainforest in a sustainable manner and bringing development to an isolated part of the Congolese interior. As we will see, its European managers indeed portrayed themselves as relatively powerless victims of an environment over which they had barely any control, emphasizing (and almost taking perverse pleasure in) the risk of "losing their minds" in the "crazy" world of logging. Moreover, workers and villagers alike were not so much concerned about CTI's excessive power (though they sometimes happened to be its victims) as about its *in*capacity to make a difference to their lives.

Hence, while Ho deliberately avoids taking bankers and traders "at face value" in order to deconstruct the Wall Street worldview as nothing but a product of its own ideology, I merely had to take loggers *at their word* in order to follow the cracks in the timber company's image. As such, loggers became unexpected allies and guides in the project of troubling the rationality of capitalism—not only the European managers but also, as we will see, their Congolese employees, who often expressed surprisingly similar concerns about experienced powerlessness. If we aspire to understand industrial logging from the inside out, we need to take their stories seriously. Not to naively believe our interlocutors, but to fully realize what logging feels like. To think *with* them, as Isabelle Stengers (2003) would suggest, rather than to try catching them in a lie or to demystify their false consciousness by showing what the world is *really* like, if only they could see it for what it was.

Instead of writing off such feelings and perspectives as merely misguided or irrelevant to the analysis of rainforest logging, this book takes them as vibrant starting points for thinking capitalism differently. The following chapters emerge from a moving field of affective fluxes, slumbering moods, barely audible whispers, circulating rumors, and contradictory stories. "Not," to quote Kathleen Stewart (2017, 192–93), "to track the predetermined *effects* of abstractable logics and structures but, rather, to compose a register of the lived *affects* of the things that took place."

Indebted to a feminist heritage but equally committed to thinking with loggers—and their often violent, misogynist, racist, and macho world—this book therefore stretches critical imaginations. Some sections can provoke discomfort, indignation, pain, shame, anger, or resistance. Others will trouble our desire to find fault and blame the capitalist beast we love to hate. All of this was part of fieldwork. I cannot change the racism, misogyny, and bigotry I stumbled on in the CTI concession. But we *can* change the stories we tell. One might even argue we *have to* if we want to really engage the darkness of contemporary life anthropologists so rightly insist on.

Capitalism, Ethnography, and (Post)critique

This book approaches the concrete, messy, and murky realities of rainforest capitalism without thereby assuming to already know *what* it is studying. In order to understand capitalism at work without reducing the world of industrial logging to a mere symptom of—or even allegory for—a larger whole, the following pages complement the still necessary posture of critique with what literary scholar Rita Felski (2015) has called a more "post-critical" ethos that troubles the always already suspicious attitude of the critic as well as the distance toward her object. Rather than repeat the standardized routines of critique that would, yet again, expose ideology or denaturalize truth, postcritique looks for alternative possibilities of reading and writing that are based on intimacy, engagement, trust, love, belief, attachment, possibility, surprise, hope, and restoration.[1]

One might obviously question whether the contemporary moment is really such an opportune time to call for a turn away from critique (Foster 2012). Its defenders nevertheless emphasize that postcritique is part of ongoing progressive commitments (Anker and Felski 2017). Postcritical politics can, for instance, be a way of mattering beyond the walls of academia or of allowing for hope in bleak times. Of course, postcritical experiments

can always be accused of naivety or wishful thinking, especially when new humanistic modes of reading and writing are smuggled into the social sciences, which are often very proud of *their* critical credibility (Hage 2012). But, at least in anthropology, the implication, vulnerability, and risky entanglement of the writer/reader in what she engages with is nothing new. The ethnographic method is effectively based on attachment and intimacy—and requires a hermeneutics of trust rather than suspicion (Ricoeur 1965).

Yet the intimate implication of the ethnographer in her object of attention does not prevent or exclude critical moments both during and after fieldwork. Indeed, even a deliberately *post*critical ethnography does not, as Diana Fuss (2017, 354) puts it, "have an easy time keeping its hands clean (of ideology, of prescription, or of just bad temper)." In the following chapters postcritique is not, therefore, the absence of critique. It comes only *after* critique—literally—as this book comes after the earlier work from which it has been transformed. When confronted with multinational corporations, the question is not, therefore, whether "to critique or not to critique" (Appel 2019b), but to find a way of *dealing with* structures of power. This book figures many stories of violence, racism, and misogyny that do not need my critical capacities to make their shocking nature apparent. Critique was already there: in thoughts, actions, and everyday experiences of expat managers, workers, and villagers who did not wait for outside critics to dissect their situation. For this reason, postcritical ethnography does not avoid politics altogether or "endorse normativity" simply because of its commitment to people whose lives one has shared (Gilbert and Sklair 2018, 10).[2] It rather tries to carefully attend to what happened and to use one's inevitable complicity in a way that "adds reality rather than taking it away" (Love 2017, 66).

For these reasons, this book slows down the habitual fervor of critique to unveil the underlying structures of reality and jump to final causes. Instead of assuming, for instance, that the global timber economy is a powerful "system," or that the logging company is a dominant "agent," it starts from the concrete ways in which people, things, feelings, and ideas come into being with each other; coagulate into moments and lingering moods; make and undo worlds; resonate with and through bodies; produce traces, memories, and lines of flight; and take on the form of seemingly overwhelming forces and desires in always vulnerable processes of assemblage.[3] While it describes the violence and injustice that come with large-scale logging, it does not provide a disembodied critique of its object. Replaying feelings, sentiments, moods, and atmospheres, its criticism is situated *within* its subject

matter rather than hovering above it as a transcendent "view from nowhere" (Haraway 1988).

My project is thus a postcritical and stubbornly hopeful attempt to remain open to possibilities in places where one might otherwise forget to look. Places like logging concessions, for instance, where transnational companies and the system they embody are often supposed to show themselves *at their strongest* but where sustained ethnographic attention actually reveals dimensions of weakness that often remain undertheorized. Relaying the anxiety, vulnerability, precarity, and nervousness behind masculinist displays of power and control, the following chapters thereby hope to trouble the "textbook economics view of the corporation" as a strong and rational actor that would be "jacked up with superpowers" (Welker 2016b, 420, 398).

In this book, *capitalism* thus needs to be taken as an invitation for thinking rather than a solution: a dynamic question that emerges from the field rather than a standard answer to our analytical problems. Not a closed system that always already explains the power of a transnational firm, but an open field of forces where agencies depend on their capacity to deal with and bend each other and where any position of power is situational, ephemeral, and sometimes self-destructive. As we will see, this conceptualization is primarily indebted to Central African cultural repertoires about wealth accumulation as the outcome of so-called occult practices in which people eat each other's life forces. While capitalism thereby acquires systemic qualities as a generalized ecology of eating and being eaten, this system—so it will turn out—remains fundamentally ambiguous, contradictory, versatile, and opaque.

Making Concessions to Ecstasis

In order to think capitalism differently, we need to make *concessions* to what this section calls ecstasis. To concede is both to *give away* and to *give in*—to renounce and to yield. As the word indicates, a concession implies both a granted right and a grudging acknowledgment. In its strict sense, a logging concession is a delimited area over which the state has conceded timber rights to a private actor. But in order to understand the affective life of rainforest capitalism, we need to keep the double meaning of concessions in sight. As we will see in the following chapters, the actual and concrete making of the CTI logging concession indeed obliged CTI to *concede to* material, discursive, and affective forces beyond its control: to villagers and roadblocks; to state agents and policemen; to the weight of history, memories

of violent extraction, and nostalgia about colonial paternalism; to daydreaming, foot-dragging, and troublemaking employees; to smugglers, mud, rain, and fuel shortages; to racism, boredom, liquor, sex, fetishism, and desire.

This book not only describes the actual power of the timber firm to make its concession—by negotiating, surveying, and prospecting; moving people, money, and machinery; mapping, building, constructing, and maintaining roads; and turning trees into corporate raw material to log, evacuate, and sell. It also tracks how CTI had to *make concessions* whenever it had to acknowledge that its actions were entangled in dynamics not of its own making. The following chapters therefore approach the logging company as a fragile, permeable, vulnerable, anxious, nervous, and insecure assemblage caught in "networks which [were] only ever partly in its control" (Thrift 2005, 3). By doing so, ecstasis will become the name for what we need to concede to—but also for the act of conceding as such.

Etymologically speaking, ecstasis denotes situations in which one *stands* or *steps outside* of oneself. In Western philosophy, reflections on ecstasis go back to the ancient Greeks. Plotinus described ecstasis as a becoming-possessed by a transcendent Oneness by way of an undoing of the self that gave access to total plenitude (Hadot 1993). For Christian mystics, ecstasis was a process through which believers reached beyond their individual bodies in order to participate directly in God. In the twentieth century, French philosophers such as Henri Bergson and Georges Bataille drew on this mystic tradition to write beyond the limits of rationalism.[4] Existentialists also came to mobilize ecstasis for approaching the fundamental openness of human consciousness.[5] And phenomenologists have understood ecstasis as the mutual implication of the Other and the Self, so as to think beyond subject/object distinctions in Western metaphysics.[6]

In anthropology, ecstasis usually describes overpowering moments of rapture and trance-like emotional states that carry one beyond rational thought or self-control. At the same time, Ioan Lewis's (1989) comparative study of shamanism and spirit possession also defines ecstasis as a technique for "mastery" over exacting pressures.[7] Either way, ecstasis seems inherently linked to spirituality, mysticism, ritual, and religion, as it denotes the dissolution of the self and its communion with a greater whole. For Émile Durkheim (1912), the ecstatic transcendence of individuality was indeed central to the "collective effervescence" of ritual.[8]

And yet, ecstasis is more than that. In *Out of Our Minds* (2000), a detailed anthropological account of colonial expeditions in the Congo Basin, Johannes Fabian explicitly mobilizes ecstasis beyond its religious dimension. He describes

how and why late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century European explorers were "more often than not . . . 'out of their minds' with extreme fatigue, fear, delusions of grandeur, and feelings ranging from anger to contempt" (3). Through subtle readings of little-known travelogues, Fabian particularly tracks "the effects of alcohol, drugs, illness, sex, brutality, and terror, as well as the role of conviviality, friendship, play and performance" in the project of imperial exploration (9). More than a religious concept, Fabian takes ecstasis first and foremost as an epistemological notion. As we will see in chapter 1, his striking originality thereby lies in a radical understanding of ecstasis as a *condition of possibility* of, rather than an obstacle to, the generation of knowledge.

The following chapters further broaden the notion of ecstasis beyond its usual focus on spectacular acts of rapture, altered states of consciousness, moments of frenzy, erotic bliss, or overwhelming euphoria. As we follow its manifestations in the CTI logging concession, ecstasis will also come to incorporate more mundane atmospheres, affective waves, and lingering moods that resonate with a broader existential conundrum of *being-out of control*. As such, the following pages connect with philosophical reflections on the human condition as an ethnographic exploration of what Judith Butler (2004, 137) calls the "ek-static involvement" of all selves in others. Illustrating dependency and precariousness where we can—and should—also see "power," ecstasis will thereby become a placeholder for *a set of complex feelings of vulnerability, penetrability, and even impotence in the face of larger forces, structures, and histories—as well as for the frustration, anger, and resistance these feelings generate*.

While this book thus directly draws from Fabian's idea of ecstasis as being out of one's mind, it nonetheless develops his primarily epistemological concept into a more existential direction by illustrating how and why conceding to ecstasis is not just a fundamental condition for knowledge production, but also a fundamental reality of (and challenge for) human life. Moreover, as an ethnographic—rather than historical—account, it fleshes out the idea of ecstasis in lived detail and describes its dialectical relationship to power *as the affective and experiential dynamic that is generated whenever people are confronted with the limits of their own actions, realize their capture, and try to take back control.*

To some extent, this take on ecstasis approaches fundamental insights from so-called existential anthropology. Yet, while it flirts with Michael Jackson's (1998, 21) understanding of power and control as first and foremost "issues of existential mastery," it also insists on tracking the *political* effects

of this existential dimension in a particularly unjust world of racialized inequalities and skewed life chances. Moreover, while the following chapters effectively illustrate human life as an attempt to overcome existential aporias, they ultimately remain agnostic about the universality of the human condition they thereby imply. Rather than tell "the same story over and over," this book is about the *specific* salience of ecstasis in the particular context of rainforest logging (Lambek 2015, 73). Furthermore, Jackson's anthropology often seeks to reaffirm human agency in an otherwise overwhelming world and understands ecstasis mainly as a way for people to step "outside of the circle of normative . . . life in order to recapture and reconstitute it" (Jackson 1998, 27). The following pages, on the other hand, mainly show the *limits* of ecstasis as a way to successfully take back control.

Ecstasis is not, however, merely one thing. In the course of this book, we will encounter ecstatic modes, moments, and possibilities at different occasions and in different guises: in village roadblocks, rumors about an imminent company closure, frustrations about being blocked and getting nowhere, fears of losing it all, heavy drinking, occasional fighting, feelings of nervousness and boredom, abrupt accelerations in time, and sudden panics about missing the moment. But we will also see ecstasis at work in church services, stories about zombie workers, suspicions about white cannibals, or the losing fight against fuel smugglers and illicit squatters. And in paranoia, choleric outbursts, transgressive masculinities, colonial nostalgia, racist phantasmagoria, and whirlpools of desire.

Moreover, ecstasis was obviously not always and everywhere present in the CTI logging concession. Despite the ephemerality and instability of life, people *did* find a sense of security in multiple attachments, and many could attain certain levels of control. Yet, at the same time, all security was relative, all balance was threatened by crisis, and all power was destabilized by excess and delirium. People seemed to move in and out of ecstatic waves—at different times and for different reasons. And, under some conditions, ecstasis became a more "ordinary affect" than others (Stewart 2007).

The question is therefore: What is this peculiar structure of feeling that might explain why, notwithstanding the unequal distribution of vulnerabilities between individuals—expat managers, Congolese workers, and surrounding villagers—and despite the highly segregated worlds in which they lived, many still experienced concession life in such surprisingly similar ways (Williams 1977)? How to understand that, although people obviously felt very different things, individually and collectively (about the company for instance), their feelings were nonetheless affected by an infectious *Stimmung*

that attuned us all to the world (Heidegger 1995)? How to approach the impression that, though expressed, experienced, and conceptualized differently by different individuals, there seemed to be something troublingly *alike* for all? And how to give an ethnographic account of this particular "atmosphere" that pushed people together while also driving them apart (Anderson 2009)?

It is crucial to emphasize that foregrounding ecstasis in no way implies underestimating the all-too-real effects of racialized capitalism on the ground. This book does not deny CTI's actual powers to log trees, make money, impose violent measures, or reproduce broader structures of inequality. It merely enables a different relationship to power, one of "implication and entanglement, rather than purity and transcendence" (Stewart 1991, 400). Instead of repeating well-rehearsed critiques of corporate capitalism and its destructive practices of extraction and exploitation that take a bird's-eye view of messy happenings on the ground, the following chapters deliberately "stay with the trouble" (Haraway 2016). They complement the critic's view from *without* with more humble stories from *within*—tales of investment, profit, violence, and desire but also of failure, excess, hubris, impotence, and retreat.[9]

In the conclusion, we will have the opportunity to take stock of the possibilities and limitations of ecstasis for anthropology and to reflect on its usefulness as a tool for understanding corporate power in the context of extractive capitalism. But how far can we *concede to* ecstasis as a device for thinking with loggers and their multiple avowals of powerlessness? What concessions are we, as critical readers and observers, prepared to make? And how vulnerable to, contaminated by, and complicit in the proliferation of ecstasis can any *post*critical anthropology become? These questions will accompany the following chapters. This book does not however propose any final answers. Only a queer experiment that inherits, repeats, and mimics ecstatic processes—rather than withdraw from them, as if they were not also about us (Pandian and McLean 2017).[10]

The Anthropology of Extraction

As an ethnography of industrial logging-in-action, the following chapters can build on a growing anthropology of capitalist extraction. If ecstasis is therefore the first pole around which they tell the story of rainforest capitalism, *extraction* is the second. At its most general level, ex-traction can be defined as the process whereby living beings draw out, pull out, or remove

material or immaterial elements from a milieu, which is more or less resistant and requires the application of force. As we will see, in the case of CTI, the company not only extracted trees and timber from the forest but also surplus-value and life force from its workers.

Extraction is, obviously, not limited to capitalism. As a basic condition of existence, it is an inevitable aspect of the ek-static dependencies of life. Yet extraction takes on particular forms under specific historical conditions. The *capitalist* extraction of natural resources, for instance, has been increasingly industrialized and invasive. And extraction plays a continuing and crucial role in what David Harvey (2003) calls "accumulation by dispossession" as an ongoing response to crisis. Extraction thus points at capital's inherent relations "with its multiple outsides"—whether literally as "the forced removal of raw materials and life forms from the earth's surface, depths and biosphere" or, more broadly, as processes that "draw upon forms and practices of human cooperation and sociality" (Mezzadra and Neilson 2017, 185, 188).

Extraction therefore always implies a degree of violence. It sits at the center of the destructive power of transnational corporations as they appropriate and expropriate nature, turn over the earth, and sell natural resources as commodities on the world market. Yet extraction also requires the fulfillment of an entire set of preconditions. Natural resources are not simply there; they have to be *made* extractable (Tsing 2003). In practice, extraction implies a long list of activities: exploration, identification, mapping, negotiation over access and control, investment, technical and logistical procedures, and the monopolization of knowledge. Such practices, processes, and procedures are not only vulnerable and fragile in and of themselves. The structural dependency of extractive practices on multiple outsides equally implies their *entanglement* in the very milieu from where they strive to extract value—entanglements that, as we will see, have their own ecstatic effects.

This book brings to the fore how, as a capitalist practice, industrial rainforest logging extracted from and thus depended on an environment it could barely control. As such, this work adds to an expanding literature that paints increasingly complex pictures of the agencies at work in extractive industries. While anthropologists have often foregrounded the agency of subaltern communities (beyond their reductive depiction as victims of extractive companies), recent ethnographic work also focuses on the agency of supposedly powerful corporate or state actors. These nuanced inquiries reembed extractive practices in social relations—such as kinship ties or moral economies of patronage—and situate contemporary extraction in historical

trajectories, cultural registers, and broader relations of power (Gilberthorpe and Rajak 2017, 190).

Rather than simply "displac[ing] agency (and indeed causation) onto 'capital' itself," this monograph thus tries to foreground the multiple agencies that made (and unmade) a logging concession (Gilberthorpe and Rajak 2017, 200). As such, it directly follows in the footsteps of other analyses of extractive capitalism. Marina Welker and Alex Golub, for instance, show how big transnational mining corporations need to be "enacted" by different actors and come into being as profoundly *relational* entities (Welker 2014; Golub 2014). Hannah Appel (2019a) also presents offshore oil rigs and oil companies in Equatorial Guinea as *situational* achievements that must be constantly performed and maintained in the face of their material connections with the outside world. And in her ethnography of corporate social responsibility, Dinah Rajak (2011) explores the ongoing dependencies of current extractive processes on lingering continuities with racialized frontiers of colonial empires.

Yet, as David Kneas (2018, 755) observes, most of this scholarship centers on giant companies and big investments, such as massive oil rigs or large mineral deposits. Marginal production sites and smaller firms, on the other hand, are seldomly taken as starting points for thinking extractive capitalism. It is nonetheless especially here that the unsteady making of corporate power can be studied. Hence, when shifting attention from mining or oil to timber production, where the size of companies and their investments is usually of a different scale, new opportunities for researching extractive capitalism present themselves. Very much like junior mining companies, CTI—though a relatively large player in the Congolese logging sector—was a rather "precarious entity" whose presence was threatened, unstable, and sometimes plainly *un*successful (Kneas 2016, 70).

So, although mining and oil continue to receive the lion's share of ethnographic interest and often dominate theorizations about extraction, logging presents particular affordances for the anthropologist of capitalism (Gilberthorpe and Rajak 2017, 186, 188). The divergences in size and scale between logging operations and most mining and oil extraction sites is only one of the differences that need to be kept in mind when reflecting on—let alone generalizing about—extractive industries. While mining, oil production, and logging obviously share many characteristics in the contemporary moment, a clear understanding of their divergences is needed to grasp the theoretical opportunities and ethnographic possibilities logging concessions offer.

Different sectors and industries differ first of all because of their resource-specific materialities (Richardson and Weszkalnys 2014). The qualities and properties of timber are indeed quite unlike those of minerals, oil, or gas. As material substances, they allow for different affordances, potentialities, and agencies that affect the ways in which they can be engaged (Rogers 2012). For example, because timber is not considered toxic, pollution is of a completely different nature and scale than in many mining and oil operations. And because timber is seen as a renewable resource, it can theoretically be managed in such a way that avoids depletion. Unlike minerals or oil, trees are living, growing, and reproducing beings. Forestry is therefore deeply and historically invested in projects and dreams of sustainability that, though rarely achieved in practice, inform most management models of timber production, which are based on rotation cycles that allow forest areas to regrow in between logging activities.

But resource materialities cannot be reduced to issues of substance alone. At least in the initial stages of its commodity chain, the materiality of timber should also be seen in relation to forest ecologies, landscapes, climate, and geography. These broader material networks indeed constitute the milieu in which extraction has to operate and affect what labor practices, levels of technology, surveillance tools, infrastructures, spatial organization, risk management procedures, and health and safety standards are possible and deemed necessary.

The material-ecological specificity of *tropical rainforests* (alongside their historical, political, and cultural particularity) effectively shapes what industrial timber production looks like. For instance, in contrast to forests in temperate or boreal climates, lowland tropical rainforests contain a huge variety of tree species. But due to wood-technical reasons and marketing limitations, merely a dozen or so fetch high enough prices on the world market to make their harvesting profitable. Furthermore, because each of these commercial species is represented by only a handful of fully grown individual trees per hectare, timber companies have no interest in clear-cutting their concessions. Companies therefore only raze tropical forests when they need *land* rather than trees—for palm oil plantations, soybean fields, or cattle grazing grounds. Timber companies, by contrast, generally skim off the most valuable trees and leave the others standing, operating as *selective* harvesters of specific species. Hence, contrary to what mediated images of large-scale clear-cutting often suggest, tropical timber production does not radically transform the landscape in such spectacular ways.[11]

The particular ecology of rainforests has far-reaching effects on the temporality and spatiality of tropical timber production. Because of its selective nature, rainforest logging requires vast areas and work teams that are constantly on the move. In comparison to large mining sites, logging is therefore an inherently mobile and relatively ephemeral activity.[12] Moreover, because of their size, logging concessions are unlikely to be closed off from their surroundings. Whereas it is often impossible to walk into active mining sites or oil rigs without passing checkpoints and other forms of control, logging concessions generally remain highly *penetrable* spaces. Of course, as several studies have shown, seemingly secluded mines are also surprisingly permeable despite company attempts to police their boundaries (Rajak 2011; Welker 2014). And even the idea of the offshore oil rig as a friction-free point cut off from national societies requires enormous work to produce and maintain (Appel 2012a, 2019a). But logging concessions are *physically* impossible to seclude as tightly controlled enclaves, and, for this reason, most tropical timber production has to occur alongside—and in partial competition with—other forest residents.[13]

In short, rainforest logging is a form of capitalist extraction that is specific to the rainforest as its material, imaginary, and symbolic milieu.[14] As we will see, it was often the structural mobility and permeability of tropical timber production that created the particular affective circuits in which CTI was confronted with its inability to control what it was supposed to manage. The logging concession was indeed a particularly *ecstato-genic* place where corporate power and its rationalities quickly showed their limits. Foregrounding the precarity and vulnerability of logging, as well as its failures, slippages, and excesses, this book perhaps illustrates affective realities that might very well mark, albeit to different degrees, most if not all extractive practices under neoliberal capitalism. But tropical logging concessions show more *openly* what mines and oil rigs often succeed in hiding (at least until they get dissembled by their critical ethnographers): the ecstasis of extraction.

Timber Firms—An Ethnographic Blind Spot

Because of their particular affordances, logging concessions thus seem interesting places from where to study extractive capitalism in the contemporary moment. Yet, while industrial timber production increasingly affects the lives and worlds of people and forests on our planet, logging continues to

remain surprisingly marginal in the quickly expanding literature on natural resource extraction. *Ethnographic* research in particular is remarkably scarce, and concrete insights into the quotidian life of timber industries remain very much limited to studies of lumberjack cultures in North America or Australia.[15] In the global south, anthropologists have mainly focused on artisanal logging rather than industrial timber production.[16] Or they have added to the extensive literature on "community forestry" or "participatory forest management," contributing to debates on land rights from the perspective of forest users and indigenous communities rather than timber firms.[17]

There is considerable scholarly interest in forestry as a science and in forest departments as sites of governmentality. Historians, for instance, have studied the intimate links between forestry, empire, and colonialism.[18] And social scientists have analyzed the role of forestry in contemporary state politics, illustrating the injustice it produces and the popular resistance it often generates.[19] But, also in this literature, logging companies remain below the radar. Even political scientists who look into concrete political economies of timber trade usually have little to say about what goes on inside logging firms.[20]

As long as anthropologists remain reluctant to study logging companies, we risk—as Christian Lund (2006, 679) puts it—excluding "the 'bad boys' from our analytical lens" and developing "tunnel vision" and losing "perspective.". While difficulties of access and ethical considerations might explain this reluctance, I also suspect that—particularly in the Congo Basin—a long-standing anthropological fascination for rainforest communities and so-called forest people continues to prevent ethnographers from depicting timber firms as anything more than actors we already think we know. However, in order to understand ongoing social and ecological transformations in rainforest areas, logging companies need to be studied as complex, contradictory, and multiple actors in their own right rather than as black-boxed monoliths on which to screen images from the outside.

A rare ethnographic insight into industrial rainforest logging can be drawn, for instance, from Rebecca Hardin's (2002, 2011) work on the Dzanga Sangha Special Reserve in the Central African Republic. Although Hardin focuses on a *conservation* rather than a logging concession, she approaches timber firms as important actors in the field who, alongside state administrations, NGO's, businesses, and village communities, reinvent old logics of patronage and reproduce what she calls "concessionary politics" (Hardin 2011, S116). Hardin's work aptly illustrates how and why concessions are not

just formal acts or legal arrangements, but also social processes in which different actors interact and compete.

This book builds on Hardin's analysis of the conflictual politics of making and maintaining concessions and especially on her understanding of timber companies as new "big men" who are "engaged in a form of social contest that was central to their identities, as well as to their territorial control" (S121). But whereas Hardin's ethnography still largely deals with timber companies from the outside, as one of several actors in the field of environmental conservation, the following chapters study one particular company—from within and from its core business of logging.

Industrial Logging in the Congo

As the first sustained ethnographic description of an individual timber firm, this book should be read within its context. The Democratic Republic of the Congo—a huge country at the center of the African continent that was violently created as the Congo Free State, then called the Belgian Congo, later renamed Zaire, and now often referred to as Congo-Kinshasa—is indeed a particular case when it comes to logging. In the following paragraphs, we will therefore have a brief look at the specific history, changing legal framework, and current status of industrial timber production in the country.

Because of its rich mineral deposits, the DRC is frequently called a *geological scandal*—a term coined by a nineteenth-century Belgian geographer that quickly became a colonial cliché. Continuing to today, Congolese and non-Congolese alike effectively refer to its staggering contrast between "scandalously rich" soils and "extremely poor" people to denounce both colonial exploitation and contemporary extraction in a so-called failed state. In the CTI concession, European managers and Congolese workers indeed asked with similar desperation "why potentially so rich a country could be so poor." Policy makers too consider the presence of copper, cobalt, gold, diamond, and coltan a prime factor of instability and war. And academics continue to debate the complex relationship between armed conflicts and natural resources in the region.

Yet beyond its mineral wealth, Congo is equally known for its vast forests. Ever since Europeans became fascinated with its interior, the Congolese rainforest has sparked fantasies of wild beasts and exotic tribes living in either harmony or mortal strife with their natural environment. For many, Congo's forests also form the backdrop of the red rubber scandals and the extreme violence of concessionary companies, both in King Leopold's

Congo Free State and the later Belgian Congo (Hochschild 1998). From Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, to V. S. Naipaul's *A Bend in the River*, and Tim Butcher's *Blood River: The Terrifying Journey through the World's Most Dangerous Country*, the supposedly inaccessible Congo Basin has left its visitors spellbound. Indeed, as a phantasmagoric setting, little seems more generative of ecstasis than the "life, wealth and mystery" of the Congolese rainforest (Trefon 2016, 17).

But, perhaps surprisingly, current Congolese timber production remains rather low in comparison to that of other Central African countries.[21] Its profitability is significantly hampered by high transport and operation costs as well as poor infrastructure (Trefon 2006, 104). The vast majority of timber concessions are effectively situated far from the ocean and remain inaccessible by road. Most logs therefore have to be shipped over long distances to Kinshasa and then driven to the port of Matadi before they can be exported to Europe or China. Moreover, because trees of the right species and dimension are often far between, rainforest logging requires careful planning, good logistic organization, and a relatively large labor force to prospect, mark, and map individual trees as well as to create an extensive road grid before trees can be logged, hauled out of the forest, and put on ships. Yet because many companies can only profitably harvest between 0.5 and 3 trees per hectare, most investments produce relatively little return.

For this reason, the macro-economic importance of the Congolese timber industry remains limited. At the time of fieldwork, industrial timber production accounted for only about 1 percent of GDP, though it represented a vast total area of more than 120,000 square kilometers or 11 percent of the national forest. Whereas in Gabon, for instance, forestry is said to be the second formal job producer in the country, the entire sector in the DRC employed only about fifteen thousand people. Moreover, although logging companies were supposed to pay taxes—such as area fees, annual cutting permits, logging taxes, export taxes, and income taxes—their actual contribution to the public treasury was modest and arbitrary. And while state services were legally required to retrocede 40 percent of paid area fees to lower administrative entities, tax money rarely trickled down to the area from where it was generated.

To understand this particularity of a country whose extensive forests are omnipresent in global imaginations but whose actual timber industry remains surprisingly limited, we need some history. Timber companies penetrated the Congo Basin comparatively late, and large-scale logging had a relatively slow start in the Belgian Congo. While some colonial timber exploitation

already occurred in the Lower Congo region at the end of the nineteenth century—mainly to produce sleepers for the railway between Leopoldville and Matadi—forestry only really took off in the 1930s. It nevertheless remained largely limited to the Mayombe forests in the west of the country, where limba trees (*Terminalia superba*) could be easily exported because of their proximity to the Atlantic Ocean. In the 1950s, some logging firms also began moving eastward to the Kasai River and Lake Mai-Ndombe. But it was only in the 1970s, more than a decade after independence, that the richest limba stands in the Lower Congo were depleted and companies had to move into the central basin to look for other commercial tree species.

In the Congolese interior, most large-scale logging therefore dates from the postcolonial period. Yet, in the mid-1970s, industrial logging already started to slow down considerably after president Mobutu's Zaireanization campaign had nationalized most foreign companies. In the course of the 1980s, after most of these nationalization policies were revoked, timber production recovered somewhat but, in the 1990s, many companies suffered from a quickly worsening political and economic crisis. In 1997 rebel leader Laurent-Désiré Kabila overthrew Mobutu's 32-year autocratic reign, and the subsequent Second Congo War from 1998 to 2003 forced timber companies to close down most concessions in rebel-controlled areas. Transport over the Congo River had become impossible, and yearly national production figures dropped to below 50,000 cubic meters—whereas at independence in 1960, the country had produced 575,000 cubic meters.

During this war, several companies nonetheless managed to illegally acquire new and extensive timber concessions at very low prices and speculated on their future value. Concerned about the ecological consequences of a possibly unchecked postwar logging boom, the international donor community therefore urged the Congolese government to establish new forest laws to replace the outdated colonial regulations from 1949. In 2002 a new forest code was published that aimed to put into practice principles of sustainable forest management. All new concession contracts now had to be accompanied by management plans (*plans d'aménagement*) in conformity with the standards required by the code. In theory, all concessions had to be managed according to a rotation cycle that would allow for sufficient regrowth so that, after twenty-five years, harvesting could be resumed in logged-over forest blocks. Due to economic and political uncertainties, however, timber companies were often unable to plan for the future, and most therefore preferred to make all the money they could in a single exploitation round and then move elsewhere.

The new forest code also resonated with a broader post–Cold War push to democratization and decentralization on the African continent. It particularly enforced the formal recognition of so-called local populations as stakeholders in forest management. Although logging companies had always tried to realize customary access to forests via informal gift arrangements with village chiefs, the new forest code formalized these compensations, which significantly gained in financial and political weight. Concretely, the code obliged timber firms to negotiate so-called *cahiers des charges* or social responsibility contracts with forest communities and to realize the promises made therein, such as building schools, dispensaries, roads, and other community infrastructure. Yet, as we will see, rather than solutions, such projects quickly turned into sources of more disagreement, conflict, and disillusion. In many regions, relations between village communities and timber firms became particularly tense.

Furthermore, forests remained the formal property of the state and could only be acquired *as concessions* from the ministry in the form of contracts that granted companies the exploitation rights over geographically delimited areas for a period of twenty-five years. To a large extent, the 2002 forest code thus retained the old and notorious concession system that colonial authorities had previously used to grant private companies access to huge tracts of land in return for taxes or a share in their profits.[22] As concession contracts remained the only form of legal access to natural resources, they continued to clash with popular and customary property regimes. Moreover, while concession residents retained the right to hunt, fish, and collect nontimber forest products, agriculture was not allowed in these areas—though, in practice, the legal ban on farming was often impossible to enforce.

The 2002 forest code is often seen as an essential step to regulate what the World Bank had predicted would become an important "post-conflict growth sector" (Roda and Erdlenbruch 2003). After the Second Congo War, industrial timber production indeed increased and reached about 350,000 cubic meters in 2008. But the code's capacity to halt illegal logging, enable the equal sharing of benefits among all parties, and fight corruption in the sector remains deeply contested (Global Witness 2015; Trefon 2006, 2008).

Moreover, in the last trimester of 2008, when the bankruptcy of an American investment bank accelerated what became a global financial crisis, tropical timber prices abruptly dropped by 15 to 30 percent in only a couple of weeks. Between 2008 and 2009, log exports decreased by half. Many Congolese timber firms therefore started to accumulate deficits and had no choice but to close down concessions, laying off thousands of employees. In late 2009,

however, the sector was again in full postcrisis reconstruction. The first signs of an economic recovery had emerged on the horizon, and several timber firms were rehiring workers to make up for lost time. It was in this excitable context that fieldwork began.

The Company and Its Concession

When Freddy and I arrived at the concession operated by CTI, the DRC officially counted more than sixty timber firms and around eighty logging concessions. Yet only a dozen or so were operational. Some were smaller firms owned by Congolese businessmen or Lebanese or Portuguese families. Others were subsidiaries of multinational corporations. All in all, four major companies dominated the sector.

CTI was one of the older logging firms in the country. Created in the early 1970s as the Congolese branch of a European timber corporation, it ran a sawmill near Kinshasa and operated several concessions in the interior. In the late 1980s it had for instance acquired an area of more than five thousand square kilometers north of the confluence of the Itimbiri and Congo rivers. When logging started there in the early 1990s, the concession quickly became the unique provider of formal salaries in the area between the commercial center of Bumba to the west and the old railway town of Aketi to the east. While, as we will see, the Itimbiri region had a long history of foreign companies extracting ivory, rubber, cotton, and palm oil, industrial logging was entirely new. Before independence, timber production had indeed been limited to some small eucalypt plantations that produced firewood for steamboats and a handful of non-timber companies felling trees as building material.

The first mechanical sawmill in the area, for instance, was built by Premonstratensian missionaries for their own construction works. Nonetheless, in 1933 the Flemish priest Father E. Van den Bergh from the mission post of Lolo already seemed to possess detailed knowledge of the Itimbiri timber resources. In an early (and highly fictionalized) ethnography of the Mbudza people who inhabited the area, he wrote:

> The trees from which the Budja [*sic*] make their canoes usually produce very fine timber. Do you see that giant tree, with its bronze trunk and its fine-teethed leaves? It is the *mbangi*, the Congolese oak. The *liboyo* is a colossus of strength and leafage, which I would call, although it is not so dark and black, the Congolese walnut. Quite similar to the *liboyo* are the

less rare and brown-flamed *litutu* and *esukumboyo*. Nice furniture timber is produced with *lilongo* and wonderful paneling comes from the *bosanga*. The brown *boliki* and the yellow *boleko* are solid and strong. For hard work, you have the iron *libenge*. The copal tree, the *paka* (*Nacrolobium ceruloides*), is tough and resistant. Rather heavy orange-yellow timber can be obtained from the *boseke*. The *lugudu* is suitable for thick wood. But also the *mokono*, the *mosange* and the *mokawi* are by no means to be ignored. For handles, joints and steels for tools, there is nothing better than *goyave* and orange wood. And you don't need to wonder if there are tall trees in the Congo when I tell you that three hundred boards were sawn from one tree and another giant promises a hundred rafters. (Van den Bergh 1933, 99–100; my translation)

At the time of our fieldwork, the CTI concession was one of the most productive in the country and mainly produced timber such as sipo (*Entandophragma utile*), sapeli (*Entandophragma cylindricum*), padouk (*Pterocarpus soyauxii*), and iroko (*Milicia excelsa*). Every month, between eight and ten thousand cubic meters of logs were shipped to Kinshasa over the Congo River—a journey of fourteen hundred kilometers that could easily take up to three weeks.

In the early 1990s, CTI had built a private port at the Itimbiri River and constructed a road to reach the concession farther north. It had also built offices, a garage, a labor compound for its Congolese workers, and bungalows for its European managers. In 1994 it erected a second labor camp in the middle of the concession as well as extra offices, another garage, a repair workshop, and two more expat bungalows. These two sites had attracted people from the wider region and had rapidly grown into multiethnic communities of, respectively, three and six thousand people.

Both camps comprised official workers' quarters but also unofficial squatter neighborhoods and newly created adjacent villages. In these agglomerations, contract employees, day laborers, jobseekers, traders, farmers, hunters, smugglers, bar keepers, and so-called free women all lived on the rhythm of the monthly arrival of salaries that were flown in from Kinshasa. The European expats, on the other hand, lived in colonial-style bungalows that were physically separated from the labor camps. At the start of our fieldwork, CTI had just hired a Danish forester in his early seventies as the new site manager. Together with three Frenchmen in their late fifties and early sixties and a Spanish forest engineer in his early thirties, they formed an isolated expat community.

The number of Congolese employees fluctuated between 230 and 490 over the time of our fieldwork. Together with their families, these men were housed in company-built wooden barracks in one of the labor compounds. About half of them originated from surrounding villages and were mainly hired as prospectors or company guards. The other half came from farther away and occupied more coveted positions—such as truck driver, chainsaw or bulldozer operator, cartographer, or statistician. CTI had transferred many of these so-called skilled laborers from other concessions in the country. Others had grown up in or around old plantation companies in the region. Although people spoke several languages with family and friends, on the work floor workers mainly communicated in the common vernacular, Lingala.

The CTI concession was fairly densely populated in comparison to other concessions. With about ninety thousand people living within its borders, it was home to village communities that subsisted primarily on slash-and-burn farming supplemented by trapping, hunting, fishing, and collecting. Every two or three years, men opened up new fields in the forest where, together with their wives and children, they cultivated such crops as cassava, maize, rice, groundnuts, beans, plantains, and sweet banana. Hunters and trappers provided their families with game, such as small antelopes, wild boar, monkey, pangolin, and porcupine. Women and children collected mushrooms, caterpillars, termites, snails, wild roots, and leaf vegetables. Most families raised chickens and ducks, and some also owned goats or pigs. Although the larger villages hosted daily or weekly markets, most people preferred to go to town, where they garnered higher prices for their rice, groundnuts, and bushmeat.

While the nearest commercial center of Bumba hosted the usual set of development agencies and offices of international and local NGOs, the concession area was largely devoid of their presence. Notwithstanding the occasional billboard along the road signaling some sleeping agroforestry or aquaculture projects or the logos of UNICEF or the Red Cross on the walls of dispensaries and schools, forest residents said they were largely ignored. They often blamed their marginal location along the border between the Equateur and Orientale Province that ran right through the concession.[23] Moreover, for conservationists, the region was simply too populated to be of real interest. For human rights activists, the area lacked armed conflicts. And for indigenous rights organizations, the absence of so-called pygmy villages seemed to exclude the region from their maps. While, as we will see, international activist groups such as Greenpeace did sometimes engage with (and campaign against) the company, their actions rarely trickled down to the concession itself.

Ethnically and linguistically, the majority of concession residents identified as either Mbudza or Bati. This differentiation was supposed to overlap with the provincial border, but realities were more complex. Many villages harbored mixed populations and maintained oral histories that told of long patterns of migration. Moreover, while most farmers and hunters had a vague idea about the forest area that belonged to their village, clan, or lineage, actual boundaries were quite fluid. Hence, because CTI negotiated all agreements at the level of what were called *groupements* (genealogically related villages), its arrival sparked new border tensions between neighboring communities as well as between "autochthons" and "migrants" (Geschiere 2009).

Yet, although the concession was often a tense social environment, people from far and near nonetheless considered the CTI logging camps as highly attractive sites. Although hunters often complained about chainsaws scaring away prey animals and women deplored the increasing difficulties of collecting species of edible caterpillars that preferred big sapelli trees as their hosts, most villagers felt as if CTI's presence created more opportunities than obstacles to their livelihoods. Some of them found temporary jobs as day laborers. Others participated in trading, smuggling, and prostitution. New company roads rendered the area accessible (again) for trucks and regional traders, and logging itself opened up new farming grounds as well as markets for locally produced food.

At the same time, negotiations about the cahiers des charges often broke down, and CTI's inability or unwillingness to keep its promises led to increasingly open conflicts. During our fieldwork, discontented villagers regularly erected roadblocks, several of which resulted in violence. Such tensions added substantially to an already nervous atmosphere. After the 2008 financial crisis, global timber prices were indeed rising again, and CTI managers frantically tried to follow production orders from Europe. But because of the long distance to Kinshasa, the concession's profitability was structurally vulnerable to the slightest perturbation. As we will see, roadblocks, together with exceptionally long periods of rainfall and fuel shortages, caused frustrating slowdowns. As a result, the air was often thick with rumors about a possible concession closure.

In 2012, a year after Freddy and I had left the concession, these rumors suddenly realized. The European mother company sold CTI to a new investor, who decided to close the site. The expat managers insisted that the new regulations had made it impossible for law-abiding companies to follow the

rules and still remain profitable. Civil society people maintained that escalating conflicts with village communities had pushed CTI to withdraw. Some villagers were glad the company was gone, but others deplored its departure. For many, it felt as if another period of isolation had begun.

The European loggers had moved to other concessions, within the country or without. Some workers followed. Others dispersed. Farmers continued for a while to cultivate their fields. As I write, the rainforest is once again reclaiming old logging roads. CTI buildings are slowly joining the other ruins of foreign capital. And people maintain they are, yet again, "enclaved" (*enclavé*). Maybe, they say, another company will arrive someday and reconnect their forest to the outside world. But only if God wills it (*soki Nzambe alingi*).

Structure of This Book

Rainforest Capitalism describes how and why, for many of its inhabitants, life in and around the CTI timber camps so often felt like it was out of control. In order to grasp the affective realities and intricacies of power under rainforest capitalism, it slowly tracks and illustrates the *ecstasis* that industrial logging generated in so many striking and captivating ways.

The following pages are broadly structured as a general move from labor, history, and political economy toward race, gender, and desire. The first chapter presents the methodological, epistemological, and ethical challenges of doing ethnographic fieldwork across racialized boundaries in the CTI logging concession. Chapter 2 offers a detailed analysis of the concrete realities of labor for different work teams in the concession. Chapter 3 shows how CTI operated in a region that was deeply affected by histories and memories of colonial extraction. Chapter 4 describes the tense relations between the logging company and neighboring communities. Chapter 5 turns toward the labor compounds and specifically unpacks the characteristically outward orientation of camp space and time. Chapter 6 evokes everyday expat life and analyses the European managers' deliberate construction of their own so-called dark selves. Chapter 7 revisits the expat quarters from the perspective of Congolese workers and villagers to map some of the occult realities that were said to underly timber production. Chapter 8 presents the competitive and often transgressive dynamics of masculinity in the labor camps. Chapter 9 looks into the slippery issue of expat sexuality in a highly racialized and fetishized economy of desire. The conclusion takes stock of the accumulated ethnographic material and proposes a theoretical reflection

on the dialectics of power and ecstasis in extractive capitalism. The epilogue ends the book on a more hopeful note.

As such, *Rainforest Capitalism* gradually unpacks multiple ecstatic dynamics as they manifested in different forms and situations. Yet, while it thus ties these chapters together, ecstasis is not a strong concept that remains the same as it accumulates examples. Neither does it fully explain rainforest capitalism. It is a device that only obliquely approaches what often remained beyond words. But I believe it allows for a story on industrial logging that is as different as it is necessary.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1. Over the past few decades, critique has come under significant pressure. Bruno Latour (2004) notoriously argued that it has "run out of steam." In anthropology, such scholars as Talal Asad and Saba Mahmood have investigated alternatives to the Eurocentric bias of critique as a modern genre and disposition (Asad et al. 2013). In queer studies, Eve Sedgwick's (2003) search for "reparative reading" has continued to inspire postcritical experiments. And, in the humanities, the broader turn toward *affect* partially overlaps with the turn away from critique.

2. In their analysis of an apparent postcritical turn in recent ethnographic studies of elites, Paul Gilbert and Jessica Sklair (2018, 2) question the ways in which some anthropologists have come to see "critique as an anti-ethnographic move that *curtails* one's ability to . . . produce sensitive, rich ethnographic work." They rightfully reject the view that critique automatically implies a distance from one's participants or that ethnographic intimacy forecloses the possibility of critique. Yet Gilbert and Sklair all too easily deny the progressive potential of postcritical experiments that do not seem to fit into their idea of class analysis and political economy as "good" politics. If anything, this book shows how Marxist and postcritical dispositions *can* go together.

3. In her superb ethnography of offshore oil production in Equatorial Guinea, Hannah Appel (2019a) makes a similar argument but stops short of calling for a postcritical ethos in the anthropology of capitalism. Indeed, rather than try to deconstruct capitalist fictions and show the real-life contingency and complexity they try to cover up, Appel takes the as ifs of capitalism as her ethnographic objects and tracks the ways in which they become real. As such, she admirably shows how and why the oil industry became "robust and durable, *despite* the contingencies of their making processes" (29; emphasis added).

4. For Georges Bataille (1943, 1957), erotic and mystic ecstasy was about (re) encountering a lost continuity in and through *transgression*: a movement that was not aimed toward God, but was itself a sacred, never-ending dynamic of limit-experiences and dissolution in which true sovereignty could be found.

5. Martin Heidegger (1995), for instance, uses ecstasis to point at how *Dasein* is always "thrown" out of the past and projected into the future.

6. Drew Leder (1990), for instance, gives a phenomenological account of the lived body as always already ecstatic in nature, away from itself, and beneath the reach of personal control.

7. See also Carlo Ginzburg's (1991) historical evocation of a Eurasian substratum of shamanism to explain the ecstatic features of popular imaginations about the witches' sabbath in Renaissance Europe.

8. Yet see Mazzarella (2017) for a Durkheimian rereading of ecstatic vital energy *beyond* extraordinary moments and circumstances.

9. For a fascinating study of another example of a foreign company's relative lack of agency and power in relation to its political environment, see Miriam Driessen's (2019) recent ethnography of Chinese roadbuilding companies in Ethiopia.

10. For a description of the queer dimension of this experiment beyond its sporadic attention to the nonheterosexual, see the conclusion.

11. Yet although the ecological impacts of selective rainforest logging are far less drastic than those of large-scale clear-cutting, selective practices are not, therefore, inherently sustainable or ecologically sound. Road construction, soil compaction by heavy machinery, and the selective pressure on certain tree species do affect forest ecologies. And although secondary growth usually fills in forest gaps and abandoned logging roads rather quickly, selective logging leaves behind skimmed-off forests that, because of their diminished economic value, are more vulnerable to being converted into ranches or plantations.

12. Oil production also requires its own forms of mobility. Onshore drillers, for instance, move from frack site to frack site, and even offshore rigs are surprisingly mobile for their massive size. As Appel (2019a, 47) notes, they are indeed frequently moved to different seas, thereby producing "fitful and unpredictable temporalities" that can make them "seem fleeting and spectral."

13. Note that *onshore* oil and gas rigs or wells also use the same land as subsistence farmers or large-scale ranchers.

14. At least in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, logging also differentiates itself from most mining and oil because of its shorter commodity chains, less complex corporate structures, little to no subcontracting, less state involvement, and, above all, its lower macroeconomic importance and political weight.

15. The anthropologist Ade Peace (1996, 1999), for instance, writes about the practices and discourses of Australian timber workers, Brendan Sweeney and John Holmes (2008) give a thick description of work cultures in Canadian tree-planting camps, and Kirk Dombrowski (2002) provides an interesting account of the everyday lives of Native American workers in the Alaskan timber industry. From a more historical perspective, Robert Ficken (1983) looks into the organization of American lumbermen along the Pacific Northwest coast, Adam Tomczik (2008) deals with lumberjack work cultures in Maine and Minnesota,

and Charles Menzies and Caroline Butler (2001) focus on Native American labor in the history of commercial forestry in British Columbia.

16. See, for instance, Van Klinken (2008) or Wadley and Eilenberg (2005). A recent article by Morten Nielsen and Mikkel Bunkenborg (2020) offers interesting insights into the collaborations between Chinese loggers and local tree scouts in Northern Mozambique.

17. For a useful review article, see Charnley and Poe (2007).

18. For historical studies on state, politics, and forestry, see, for instance, Barton (2002), Gray and Ngolet (2012), Rajan (2006), Sivaramakrishnan (1999) and Vandergeest and Peluso (2006).

19. For studies on peasant resistance against commercial forestry, see Guha (2000), Peluso (1992) and Tsing (1993, 2005). For the link between forestry police and poverty, see Larson and Ribot (2007). For an inspiring study on environmentalism, green neoliberalism, and forest labor, see Sodikoff (2012).

20. See, for instance, Christopher Barr's (1998) description of oligopoly in the Indonesian timber commodity chain or Patrick Johnston's (2004) account of the political economy of timber in Liberia.

21. The information presented in this and the following paragraphs is based primarily on information and statistics that circulate within the gray literature on logging in the DRC: Debroux et al. (2007), De Wasseige et al. (2009), De Wasseige et al. (2012), and Partenariat pour les Forêts du Bassin du Congo (2006).

22. For historical studies on concessions in French Equatorial Africa—focusing on both their systemic violence and pragmatic improvisations—see Coquery-Vidrovitch (1972) and Cantournet (1991).

23. Today this is the border between the Mongala and Bas-Uele provinces, as they were created as part of the 2015 decentralization campaign that raised the number of Congolese provinces from eleven to twenty-six.

CHAPTER ONE. AWKWARD BEGINNINGS

1. When CTI managers traveled from Kinshasa to the logging concession, they often referred to their trip as *descendre sur le terrain* (descending to the field). The fiction of fieldwork is thus as fundamental for foresters as it is for anthropologists. For a critique of its assumptions, see Gupta and Ferguson (1997).

2. See Pratt (1986) for a critique of arrival stories and their fictional authorization of ethnography.

3. The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) is a well-known certification scheme that carries out inspections and audits of logging companies desiring to obtain a green label to certify the ecologically, socially, and economically sustainable provenance of their timber.

4. The agreement defined "confidential matters and circumstances" formulaically as: (a) operating and business secrets relating to the company, to the associated companies, or the shareholders, business partners or customers of the company; (b) objects and other documents produced by the company containing