

Rethinking Fluid, Complex and Uncertain Poverty in Amazonian Ecosystems in Bolivia and Brazil

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Introduction

The recent reformulation of poverty in social studies reflects a broader understanding of this concept as a complex set of practices and experiences, unfolding through interrelationships between local cultures, opportunities and lifestyles (Alcock, 1997; Asen, 2002; Danziger and Haveman, 2002; Levitas 2001; Room 1995). In particular, different commentators stress the need to understand socio-cultural mechanisms in the production of poverty and to develop a holistic approach to understanding disadvantage that connects material conditions of living with the lack of specific forms of cultural knowledge, skills and social contacts valued by marginalized groups (Appadurai, 2004; Lin and Harris, 2008; Robinson and Oppenheim, 1998; Sen, 1999, 2006). Despite broader changes in thinking about poverty that reflect its diversity and complexity, anti-poverty policies still tend to overemphasize structuring of opportunity in the form of employment, services, housing and income, and to prioritize responses associated with addressing these standard measures of poverty. As Rao and Walton (2004) note, implementation of anti-poverty programs has often been undermined by the perceived trade-off between poverty alleviation and preservation of cultural or socio-cultural values. As a result, environmental marginality, cultural materials and social practices creating poverty still remain on the margins of poverty-reduction strategies (World Bank, 2002) and are seen as a "minor issue", often overlooked in favor of tackling material and economic deprivation (Alkire, 2004: 207). This chapter contributes to the broader discussions in this book by unsettling the centre/margins binaries and re-examining the mechanisms producing dominant representations, priorities and frontiers in development discourse in the Amazon.

Interpretations of different poverties experienced by the disadvantaged people become even more complex when they are considered in relation to environmental change. It is widely acknowledged that degradation of ecosystem services, which are seen as the benefits that people derive from ecosystems (MEA, 2005), exacerbates poverty, mainly because the well-being of those in need tends to be dependent on the provision of these services (Shackleton and Shackleton, 2012). Literatures exploring links between environmental degradation and well-being have often focused on understanding poverty as a consequence of uneven processes of transformation of natural capital (forests, water and soils) into other forms of capital (housing, education), and 'trade-off' between economic and ecological components of well-being (Borner et al., 2007; Carpenter et al., 2009; Sjøstedt, 2012). In this context, dependence on the environment has often been conceptualized in negative terms, with both environmental change and poverty discursively constructed as a set

of problems associated with rural living (Dasgupta et al, 2005). As Suich et al. (2015) state, many of these studies concentrate mainly on material income at the expense of other aspects of well-being and do not develop a multidimensional approach to poverty. As a corollary, poor people often find themselves in a situation of double disadvantage when the loss of ecosystem services resulting from deforestation is compounded by misunderstandings of poverty within institutional structures dealing with sustainable ecosystem development and improvement of well-being (Rao and Walton, 2004). In support of the broader arguments in this book, the chapter re-imagines existing policy frontiers, ethical boundaries and explores complex relationship between the poor people and the environment at the limit of development discourse.

In the Latin American context, these discussions are echoed by a stream of literatures that are often described as 'pobretología' or 'povertology' (Booth et al., 2006). Over the last 40 years, conceptualizations of poverty have developed from earlier approaches exploring the marginality of rural people in the process of modernization to a 'new rurality' perspective stressing the importance of external factors (globalization, market liberalization, migrations and agri-industrial change) in shaping the well-being of rural households (Kay, 2006). The recent turn towards a rural livelihoods approach reflects growing interest in developing a broader understanding of poverty beyond political economic definitions, focusing attention on the agency of the poor in developing different forms of capital (including natural capital), and the historical dynamics of poverty (Bebbington, 2004; de Haan and Zoomers, 2005). While attempts to model complex deprivation formulas like indicators of multidimensional poverty, such as those carried out by Paes de Barros et al. (2006) in Brazil and Ballon and Krishnakumar (2008) in Bolivia, help in highlighting the scope and magnitude of poverty, they often overlook 'messy' cultural and social problems experienced by rural people that cannot be categorized in a measurable form. Despite acknowledging the complexity of poverty, these approaches tend to concentrate on the structural causes of rural disadvantage (such as uneven land distribution and power relations, cf. Kay, 2006) and less on the non-tangible aspects of poverty reflected in people's 'capabilities' and potentialities in dealing with deprivation (Battiston et al., 2013). As a result, poverty emanating from social and environmental marginality, which does not conform to the obvious policy-related headings or deprivation indices, tends to be overlooked and poor people with "unusual" or conflicting experiences of disadvantage can drop out of policy networks.

This chapter addresses this gap by drawing attention to disconnections between anti-poverty policy making and the everyday experiences of disadvantage expressed by rural people in the Amazon. It builds on the results of the ESPA-funded project (NE/I004467/1) conducted in Bolivia and Brazil in 2010-2011, which linked ecosystem services and poverty, focusing on the experiences of the forest-dependent poor at the agricultural frontier. It starts with a brief account of the changing formulations of poverty in policy making controlling equitable management of forest

ecosystems in the Amazon. It then considers the mechanisms of channeling poverty into policy discourses and discusses alternative ways that challenge categories, oppositions and frontiers of development. By engaging with the poverty experiences of people in the Amazon, it then offers critical analysis of the links between everyday poverties in Bolivia and Brazil, their articulation in policy making, and their translation into anti-poverty mechanisms.

Poverty and Policy Making in Bolivia and Brazil

Reflecting the changing interpretations of poverty in academic literatures, the meanings attached to poverty in policy making in Bolivia and Brazil have also been changing. Traditional discursive treatments of poverty within policy making, which emphasize normative translation of disadvantage, have dominated various modernization programs in the Amazon for the last 40 years (see the excellent discussion in Kay, 1989). In early development policies, poverty was couched in forms of marginality, where the poor were seen as unable or unwilling to adequately participate in the initiatives governing forest access and use (Bicalho and Hoefle, 2010). From this perspective, policy makers determined poverty and appropriated definitions of disadvantage by prescribing the norms and boundaries of "poor" identities, so that "marginality and poverty were largely reduced to certain attributes of individuals" (Kay, 2006: 460). These political constructions attempted to name a messy set of experiences of disadvantage and create what Deleuze and Parnet (2007: 96) describe as constructions of "rigid segmentarity". In this situation, mechanisms of naming disadvantage in policy making divide all senses and practices of poverty into recognizable segments of moneyed/poor, dependent/independent, un/employed, and reproduce the sameness of poverty inherent in the structuring of opportunities. As Deleuze and Parnet (2007) would suggest, such policy making deploys "the *devices of power* which code the diverse segments ... overcodes them and regulates their relationships" with the environment, while separating cultural, social and natural dimensions of disadvantage. In Brazil, conflicting modernization agendas provided by the federal and state authorities regarding land use and development further compounded definitions of poverty (Schmink and Wood, 1992). In Bolivia, contested development initiatives and the failure of formal government mechanisms to distribute resources equally diluted understandings of poverty (Redo et al., 2011). As a result, poverty has often been inadequately translated within policy making, reducing it to a set of coherent appearances (stereotypes) and linear regularities to the exclusion of diverse populations with varied experiences of disadvantage.

In response to these treatments of poverty, more recently policy makers in Bolivia and Brazil have increasingly tended to conceptualize rural disadvantage in terms of "social exclusion". These policy approaches have helped "to break with the economic and individualistic parameters of traditional concepts of poverty", focusing on the relational character of rural problems and, in particular, closer connections between society and nature in environmental decision making (Munck,

2005: 26). Reformulating poverty as social exclusion has also addressed issues of diversity in rural life, the complexity of socionatural transformations in the Amazon and the heterogeneity of problems experienced by rural people (Gomes et al., 2012). These policy mechanisms attempted to focus on "differential incorporation" of the poor into economic and political processes by tackling three dimensions of disadvantage: economic, political and cultural (Altamirano et al., 2003: 21). However, an interest in addressing the economic exclusion of disadvantaged people and their marginalization from the productive system still dominates policy discussions in Latin America (Kay, 2006). In this context, "peasants [are] depicted as being economically backward because they chose to be so, and for non-economic reasons to do with culture and the nature of peasant society itself" (Brass, 2002: 3). Unsurprisingly, social welfare and environmental policy making continue to prioritize development as a centralized mechanism of rational power distribution, so that the multiple nature of poverty processes (including non-rational emotions and affective movements) are often ignored. Inter-organizational approaches to regional development in Latin America often rely on technological structures that reduce the difference and heterogeneity of different groups of actors to orderly, predictable relationships between specific organizations, thus risking oversimplification and privileging certain forms of poverty over others (Batiston et al., 2013). As a result, in Brazil both the federal and regional governments prioritize 'traditional' poor rural groups at the expense of other disadvantaged people, while failing to consider the significance of cultural and emotional attachments to the environment in the development of rural problems often creates misunderstandings around gendered access to land and forest resources (Barsted, 2005). In Bolivia, the rural poor tend to be defined as 'landless', with environmental policies developed in the 'best interests' of landowners but not vulnerable people (Rudel, 2007).

Critics of the 'social exclusion' approach in development have advocated using the concept of social capital as a way of understanding rural disadvantage. One of the arguments for using this approach in the Amazonian context was the important opportunity to divert attention from economic capital to other forms of capital, particularly capital embodied in natural resources (Kay, 2006). Natural capital has been described in terms of benefits and losses of living using land and water resources and their biodiversity, in the form of food production, ensuring livable conditions and security and other means of supporting human well-being (Kareiva et al., 2011). Social capital is typically described as "resources that come from the structure of social relationships", through measures increasing civic participation, support trust and mutually-beneficial collective action (Anderson and Bell, 2004, 235). Development professionals have argued that natural capital can also be turned into financial resource, or helped to develop social links to address social ills such as poverty. "It is argued that poor people are often able to obtain some material benefits from ecosystems" (MEA, 2005: v), harnessing ecosystem services to provide specific contributions (material and cultural) to the poor. The ideas behind social-ecological systems research are used to develop analysis of the political economy of

access to ecosystem services and their use, with the anthropocentric premise defining poor people as both threatening to and excluded from using environmental resources (Fischer et al., 2014). From this perspective, ecosystem services are evaluated in terms of their usefulness as a source of either dependency or potential wealth for the poor and treated as a product (rather than a process) subject to specific mechanisms of control and exchange. Within environmental conservation strategies poverty is constructed mainly in terms of objective and measurable structures (for example, linked to the Payment for Ecosystem Services framework), ignoring experiences, histories and changeable living relations between poor people and the environment (Robertson, 2012). The logic of calculation and abstraction used in determining the utility of ecosystem services leads not only to the segregation of nature in different typologies of productivity, but also to attempts to define the value of poverty and poor people themselves.

In Brazil, development policies often determine rural poverty in relation to people's ability to demonstrate 'useful' and 'necessary' improvements to the land, so that forest-covered lands and traditional people living on them are often deemed 'unproductive' and subject to development (Araujo et al., 2009). Persistent ideology linking deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon with progress presents development as a calculative and rationalistic process, where the poor are also portrayed as coherent agents making rational choices about their engagement with the environment (Hirakuri, 2003). More recently, "new developmentalism" agenda, first defined by Brazilian economist Luiz Carlos Bresser-Pereira (2007), focused on state activism and support of domestic companies in technological innovation, investment opportunities at the global scale, while also commitment to maximizing labour resources and addressing existing inequalities (Ban, 2013). This approach, implemented with the political support by the Brazil's Workers' Party (PT), has been criticized for destruction of the environment, limiting scope for overcoming poverty and deepening social conflict (dos Santos, 2019). The task of balancing human needs, such as poverty alleviation, and supporting nature (the non-human) has been undermined by conflicting interests, divergent values and contradictory political interventions (Bratman, 2019).

Similarly, in Bolivia both land and people are expected to contribute to economic development and comply with their assumed 'socio-economic function' (Redo et al., 2011). Development initiatives in Bolivia have not only promoted forest clearing, but also destroyed the traditional relationships poor people had with the environment and discredited non-timber users of the forests, thus increasing deforestation and aggravating rural poverty (McDaniel et al., 2005). Recent retrogressive legal reforms in Bolivia undermined the earlier programs for environmental protection, which affected rural poverty (Schilling-Vacaflor, 2016). While the new Bolivian government of Movement Towards Socialism (MAS) since 2006 set to tackle political inclusion and redistribution of resources in favour of marginalized communities, these measures often presented a "repetition" of the previous development programs (Cusicanqui, 2012, 12). Overall levels of moderate

and extreme poverty in Bolivia between 2007 and 2015 have been reduced due to the economic boom and extractivist-based (oil, gas, monocrop agribusiness) growth (Beverinotti, 2018). However, over-reliance on large-scale projects in strategic sectors and limited sustainability of social policies relegated the environment to an inferior position compared to the “productive” public economy (Wanderley, 2018). Unsurprisingly, the translation of nature and social relations into capital forming part of enumerated models have tended to overlook complex relations between society and nature, reduced different experiences of poverty to ‘unproductive’ stereotypes and assumed pre-determined identities for the poor. To address these issues, this chapter attempts to go beyond the language of investment, exchange and measurement (such as those used in PES approach) in describing rural people’s experiences of poverty in the Brazilian and Bolivian Amazon. Unlike existing approaches to rural poverty, it highlights the role of spatio-temporal uncertainties in relationships between needy people and the environment in producing disadvantage. Building on poststructuralist ideas about different understandings of space and time, it offers alternative ways of thinking about poverty in the Amazon.

Rethinking Rural Poverty in the Amazon

First, the chapter argues for a *fluid* articulation of rural poverty. It builds on an understanding of time and space as always developing and becoming, reflecting the “unpredictability and precariousness of lives” (Horschelmann, 2011: 379). In this context, poverty should no longer be seen as an entity or a product but rather a process co-constructed by different actors (human and non-human) and expressing a sense of lack in both material and non-material forms. On the one hand, lack here relates to both incompleteness of the ‘poor’ subject, who is always situated with others in the world and is always incomplete without recognition from others, unstable and internally fractured (Shubin et al., 2015). This approach to poverty challenges the separation of the poor from the environment and takes into account ‘unpredictable connections among materials and processes, forces and events’ creating socio-natural disadvantage in the Amazon (Lee and Motzkau, 2011). On the other hand, this lack relates to the impossibility of spatio-temporal completion of the subject in the system, which is not complete and closed, but continuously evolving. Relationships between the poor and the environment are not limited to rational systems of exchange, but rather create excessive energies and affective connections irreducible to calculation or totalization. This approach undermines assumptions about ownership and mastery of the environment and challenges utilitarian logic and binaries of poor/non-poor, productive/unproductive, useful/not-useful evident in existing development policies. In expressing fluid poverty and attending to its dynamism, the chapter addresses the call by Skeggs (2004) for ‘thinking beyond exchange-value’ and challenging the restricted economy of meaning (negative/positive) in determining both poverty and the environment.

Second, the chapter expresses *complex* poverty assembled through the often unexpected contributions of multiple (human and non-human) actors. It draws on the conceptualization of “assemblage” by Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 88) referring to the arrangements of “bodies, actions and passions” that combine and recombine (assemble) to create new connections and ranges of flows. This approach attempts to articulate the multiplicity of relations between always emerging elements of poverty, including feelings, artefacts and symbols, which tend to fall into the “grey” area in traditional development policies¹. Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari’s ideas, the analysis of “socionatural assemblages” of meanings, materials, social orders has already been successfully used to explore the production of vulnerabilities in the Global South (McFarlane, 2009; Doshi, 2013; Ranganathan and Balazs, 2015). Although not applied specifically to the poverty studies, assemblage-thinking is particularly fitting for the analysis of deprivation as it develops alternative formulations of injustice and helps “to recover the agency of non-humans” in capital-nature relations (Ranganathan, 2015, 1305). In this context, difference-producing poverty should not be seen as a given (in the form of indices and monetary values), but instead perceived as continuously recreated, blurring the established boundaries and frontiers of disadvantage. Deleuze (1986: 67) challenges the power of negation (as a “difference from”) and advocates affirmation (as ‘difference in itself’), which helps to re-articulate poverty. Instead of reducing poverty to binary oppositions and difference from accepted measurements such as the poverty line, this can help to focus on the creation of complex poverty, the process of becoming different, the very dynamism of change. Poverty in this context develops as neither subject nor object and can be best described in terms of determinations of magnitude. In this context, an assemblage of poverty can be said to emerge as “a new means of expression, a new territorial/spatial organisation... a new reality, by making numerous, often unexpected, connections” (Parr, 2010: 19). The chapter opens space for the interrelation of forces producing different poverties to be expressed, rather than subordinating them to representational logic as a matter of opposition or analogy. It works in and through complex poverty by means of recreating combinations of its elements (both material and non-material) and re-articulating the links between them.

Third, the chapter attends to *relational* and *uncertain* poverty, which is not defined solely from an anthropocentric position. Traditionally, poverty is described as a lassitude or weakness to be overcome, a failed condition calling for restorative action, or resulting from withdrawal from the world (Harrison, 2008). In this context, poverty is constructed in relation to the “outside” world, which is unified, orderly and “simply an experience of our perceived environment” (Linglis, 1996: 13). Drawing on the work of Blanchot (1995), this chapter questions the existence of the “outside” world that is made known through the application of reason and reduced to the

¹ Thrift (2004) describes these emergent sensations, active outcomes of encounters and unactualized knowledge as affective thinking – a different kind of intelligence which makes sense of transient and metamorphic things even though they cannot always be named.

conceptually structured experience incorporated into human knowledge. On the one hand, it argues that the complex and heterogeneous conceptualizations of poverty advocated for earlier cannot simply be brought into knowledge. Poverty involves non-intentional and confusing relations with others (people and things), interruptions and uncertainties that cannot be simply incorporated into rational discourse (Shubin and Sowgat, 2019). In its openness to the unforeseen it exceeds the ability of knowledge to contain and make it reasonable – it involves what Bataille (1988: 51) calls “non-knowledge”. On the other hand, poverty in the form of intuition, openness and susceptibility is not something that can be owned by the (anthropocentric) actor: “it is vulnerability, enjoyment, suffering, whose status is not reducible to the fact of being put before a spectator subject” (Levinas, 1991: 63). This approach undermines assumptions about mastery of the relationship between the poor and the environment and challenges the development logic of self-enclosed agents making autonomous, rational and reasonable choices in relation to nature. Drawing on these theoretical assumptions, the chapter explores relationships of poverty that develop in relation to exposure to others, uncertain connections and practices that create possibilities for different ways of knowing at the limits of reason.

Context and Methods

This analysis of poverty draws on the findings from the international project conducted in 2010-2011 in the Brazilian and Bolivian Amazon, which focused on understanding the links between ecosystems and change and poverty. In Brazil, research activities focused on rural areas around the city of Santarém in the State of Pará, an area exposed to different development initiatives with devastating environmental consequences, particularly in the form of large-scale deforestation (Stone, 2006). This area has been the focus of several policies aiming to rebuild forest-based ecosystem services and increase environmental benefits for poverty alleviation (Börner et al., 2007). In particular, subsidized credits for production services to enhance ecosystem services as part of the federal *Proambiente* program, combined with compensatory cash transfer mechanisms, contributed to a reduction in recorded levels of poverty (Soares et al., 2006). On the state level, until recently, expanding soybean production was the main development objective, while environmental programs (such as the Tropical Forests Pilot Program) tended to focus on decentralization of forest management and attempts to involve the poor in decision making (Stone, 2006). However, lack of co-coordination of environmental and anti-poverty efforts, rural violence and conflicts over land distribution often meant that small farmers received limited benefits from the development programs. Despite expectations that economic growth would contribute to a reduction in poverty in the area, Pará’s forest-based populations have been negatively affected by expanding agricultural production, mining, logging and rapid urban development. As a result, in rural Pará poverty measured as the proportion of the population living

below the poverty line was reported as 55% in 2014 (IPEADATA), only a slight reduction from the level of 58.6% reported in 2000 (Verner, 2004).

In Bolivia, research focused on rural areas around the city of Cobija in the Pando Department, where a poverty line defining household consumption at a level of US\$ 2 per day was used to classify 72.4% of people as poor in 2001 (O'Hare and Rivas, 2007). Since 1996, important changes in the country's forest regime involving the decentralization of forestry management (using Forest Management Plans), accompanied by extensive land tenure reform, have significantly affected rural poverty. These changes resulted in increased support for local co-operatives, wider opportunities for non-timber extraction and support for sustainable forms of subsistence agriculture that positively affected the forest-dependent poor (Zenteno et al., 2013). In particular, poverty indices using income-expenditure data suggest that extreme rural poverty (defined in terms of minimal nutritional requirements for adults and local eating habits in relation to income distribution) in Pando dropped from 59% in 1994 to around 37% in 2002 (Spatz, 2006), and then remained largely unchanged until 2010 (Vargas and Garriga, 2015). Gains in service provisions (such as education and health facilities) have been significant, but they did not always affect smaller towns and villages, putting the forest-dependent poor at a relative disadvantage. Furthermore, development initiatives in Pando have been accompanied by significant in-migration of poor peasants from the Bolivian mountains, leading to increased pressure on available resources, forest clearances and exacerbation of poverty for traditional residents of this region. Due to the persistence of structural inequalities, poor people in rural Pando, particularly in remote municipalities like Cobija, continue to experience extreme poverty and there has been little progress in terms of the numbers of people whose basic needs are not being met (O'Hare and Rivas, 2007).

To understand the poverty experiences of rural people in Pando and Pará, this analysis builds on 119 semi-structured interviews developed in several rural locations to encourage in-situ reflections on disadvantage in 'small-scale, isolated, rural communities' (Jackson, 1983: 40). Rural people were interviewed in their native languages (Spanish and Portuguese), with the help of interpreters, in their villages (including remote communities of the extractive reserve, RESEX near Santarém, where subsistence and extractive practices are allowed and encouraged). Conversations were conducted in respondents' homes to maintain confidentiality and avoid any stigmatization that might have resulted from being poor. Criteria for selecting 'poor' people were based on social disengagement from the village (defined by respondents themselves), closeness of relationships with the environment and other members of the community (see Shubin, 2010) and qualitative information about earnings and expenses shared by rural people. Interviews focused on themes identified through preliminary policy analysis and included discussions about life trajectory, understandings of poverty, relationships with the forest, impacts of government and anti-poverty programs, political activism and coping strategies. The project also worked closely with NGOs, policy-makers and

activist groups in the areas to continuously question definitions of poverty emerging from the fieldwork and develop a broader understanding of the ramifications of poverty. Findings from the interviews were complemented by participant observation to reflect on complex poverty, the emergent nature of disadvantage and relationships that respondents developed with the environment. All interviews were fully transcribed, translated into English, and then analyzed using NVivo 10 software. All names used are pseudonyms.

Fluid and Dynamic Poverty

Rejecting common descriptions of rural disadvantage in Bolivia and Brazil as a product, this chapter offers a fluid definition of poverty as a process, often shaped in relation to lack. As the earlier literature review showed, dominant visions of poverty in development discourse tend to be individualistic, blaming the 'poor' for their problems and separating them from the world they live in. On the one hand, this happens through the construction of the 'poor' person as a more or less stable entity, who is allocated a particular place as the object of development:

"The authorities want us to organize a group of people to write a plan, and then take this plan to the government, [...] so that the government can see our needs and say: "They really do need help there, they are poor, they need this". In a group ... everyone has a number so their need can be evaluated and a price put on it". (Matilde Castelo, Curí village, Brazil, 35 years old)

Naming ('they are poor') in this case creates poverty as a product, it fixes the order by defining the poor person as someone who needs help. From the outset, the poor person is seen as a universalizable subject, a problem that requires resolution. As Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 16) would suggest, language is deployed to stabilize a developing poor person within the "system that pre-exists the individual, who is integrated into it at an allotted place". Importantly, to place the individual within the linguistic system of coding the state uses 'units of measurement' that regulate individuals' relationships with the development apparatus. In the above quote, it is the evaluation of one's needs that creates the object of development, which is expected to transform itself into a subject of lack. The number attached to poverty (the "price put on it") is used as "a universal concept measuring elements according to their emplacement in a given dimension" (p. 8), where individual progression is expected along the scale of assets or resources that form part of deprivation indices.

However, poverty is not stable and it creates changeable relationships due to its different temporalities (seasonality of income, portfolio of activities) and the developing nature of coping arrangements. Many poor people in the Amazon experience insecurity due to changing government regulations (such as definitions of what constitutes 'illegal' logging), and ebbs and flows of 'extreme' poverty due to

changes in the accessibility of support (Stone, 2006). Similarly, two of our respondents expressed poverty as a changeable process:

"This family benefit, education benefit and so on. We tried to get that. But no-one got anything so we gave up, we left it. Because we were spending more money than we would have received. So this means we are no longer poor?" (Guilherme Carneiro, Curí, Brazil, 40)

"I think that poverty comes in different forms. If someone doesn't work, he'll cause problems for himself because if he is on the land and doesn't work, he won't progress, he's not doing anything worthwhile". (José López, Prainha, Brazil, 45)

As these examples illustrate, there are continuous changes in poverty trajectories. They challenge illusions about consistent constructions of the poor subject – instead this subject is presented as evolving, incomplete (not/progressing) and potentially no longer poor or not worthy of support. A poor person in this case is not seen as a self-enclosed and enduring subject, but rather as internally fractured, exposed and open to self-destruction. In Bataille's (1988: 23) terms, "a being that isn't cracked isn't possible"; poor people challenge the powers of totalization in the linguistic order and always exceed the bounds of representation as the "poor". Furthermore, poverty creates multiple subjectivities that do not fit within existing policy definitions, are unclear and unidentified. As one respondent noted, "We, river dwellers, are forgotten by the government, because ... we have no resources, no structure, no support. We are different" (Carlos Acosta, Mentai, Brazil, 30). A fluid understanding of poverty challenges the dominant language establishing the boundaries drawn around poor identities.

On the other hand, a fluid approach to poverty undermines the separation of the poor from the world and the dominant utilitarian logic applied to their interactions with the environment. As one of our respondents stressed, "the forest brings everything; unfortunately it can be destroyed by money. Nature offers everything to you without asking for a money bag". (Javier Garcia, Trinchera, Bolivia, 52). Although poor people inevitably frame their engagement with the environment in terms of available and useable entities (suggesting a variety of uses for wood and fruits produced by the forest), they are also involved in broader process of being with the world that exceed the use of ecosystems as resources within frameworks of technical calculation and manipulation. When elements of ecosystems are ordered into networks of use, these arrangements undermine the importance of relations of nearness (expressed in terms of care) and distance familiar to rural dwellers and which contribute to poverty (Joronen, 2013). A rubber tapper from Bolivia explains:

"State policy to me is what comes to destroy and destroy, because it has major impacts on our way of life. The state could define a policy for proper use of a

good forest, with the powers that are not just economic, not production". (Marcelo Martínez, Trinchera, Bolivia, 52)

The economic drive for ecosystems to fulfil 'socio-economic function' and productivity denigrates non-timber uses of the forest (Redo et al., 2011). As this quote suggests, the economics-driven policies destroy traditional ways of life and transform ecosystems into calculable reserves. As a result, elements of the forest and people's relations with them are subjugated to efficient ordering within a closed system of exchange. This creates a sense of loss and alienation that aggravates poverty:

"People were talking about selling oxygen produced by the forest. They were saying that Europeans were going to pay for that, but it was just a fantasy. We are getting poorer, and they do not pay us". (Geraldo Flores, Bioceánica, Bolivia, 46)

Utilitarian logic applied to ecosystems produces a sense of lack that is seen as a problem, which needs to be addressed. This lack refers to elements that have not yet been ordered and turned into calculable reserves, such as oxygen. However, the introduction of new techniques of use (such as the Payment for Ecosystem Services mentioned by the respondent) intrinsic to economic rationalities can further contribute to poverty. Many rural dwellers from our study value their relationships with the forest precisely because it offers them something beyond useable and tradeable resources, and creates possibilities for not feeling poor:

"We feel for the forests. It is a part of us. When these big companies come into the forest we feel that, it may not be causing problems now, but we already feel that it could do later on [...] We have that kind of evolving relationship". (Manoel Guardado, Coipiranga, Brazil, 26)

"Even in these challenging conditions that we live in, the forest gives us lots of things. A lot of the riches that are there we can use. [...] We suffer, but not because of the forest, more because of our health, education, which we need here. We are not poor, we just have a low income". (Isabel Villanova, São Pedro, Bolivia, 42)

As these quotes suggest, poor people's involvement with the forest always exceeds the calculative picture of poverty and accounts for the inexhaustible emergence of people-ecosystem links that go beyond the isolated selves. A fluid approach to poverty highlights the openness of people's relationships with the forest and reveals 'a lot of the riches' that can emerge from such a connection. By highlighting the excess that exists beyond a system built on exchange, deconstruction of economic logic reconfigures poverty as dynamically changing and

irreducible to “low income”. Feelings of hope, joy and suffering along with the forest challenge boundaries between inside and outside, and express openness to the world in all its strangeness and irreducible alterity. This acceptance of co-existence with the forest when the latter is not characterized as an entity or as occupying a certain role challenge expectation about the mastery of ecosystems. The fusion between an individual and the ecosystem, where the poor person is no longer seen as an isolated entity, undermines the binary logic of human versus environmental knowledge and productive versus unproductive definitions of forest-related poverty. It offers the opportunity to unravel more-than-human aspects of poverty and the unexpected connections that produce rural disadvantage, which the next section explores.

Complex Poverty

An approach focusing on complex rural poverty helps us to understand its emergence through a combination of different elements and transformations. It further rejects negativity (lack) in expressing poverty and instead focuses on internal differentiation. From an assemblage perspective, poverty can be considered as an evolving combination of objects, actions, bodies and expressions that create new ways of functioning (Parr, 2010). Poverty includes memories of failure, distrust and dependency on development programs:

“I live on the road, go from one community to another. I know CIPCA, they are promoting reforestation [...] I don’t have confidence in these programs because when land restructuring happened, land distribution created poverty and restricted rural communities. They have not fulfilled many things they promised”. (Ernesto Moreno, Cobija, Bolivia, 35)

Poverty here emerges as an assemblage of perceptions of reforestation, attitudes to development programs and disappointments about “things promised”. It is not limited to calculative positioning on the poverty measurement grid, but expresses a variety of unexpected connections. The itinerant lifestyle of the poor person (“I live on the road”) demonstrates the nomadic composition of poverty as an assemblage, which is not pre-given (distributed according to an economic law of distance or labor market access), but developing and opening new differences and paths, desires and relations. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) stress that assemblages are created through the interplay of active and reactive forces that coalesce together. They view active forces as affirmative, life-enhancing and able to transmute into (become) something else in a creative manner, while reactive forces restrict, capture and decompose. Deleuze (1986) focuses on the dynamism of change through the interplay of active and reactive forces, which affirms difference as productive (as a “difference in itself”) at the expense of difference as negation (as a “difference from”).

The emphasis here is not on replicating the same and comparing it with the existing model ('indexed' poverty), but on processes with the greatest potential for creating difference and metamorphosis. A fragment from the interview with a Brazilian small farmer illustrates this point:

"For me, poverty, well there is poor and there is hard up. Today we are hard up, but we are not poor. [...] I might not have anything today, but I will have tomorrow. Here at home I might have nothing in the morning, but by mid-day I'll have it. If I don't have what I need in the afternoon, I'll find a way get it by the evening. So we are not poor, the poor are those who don't have warm clothes, who don't have a source of income, who go around begging. People look at me and say: "that poor rich man". (Tiago Teixeira, Arapiuns, Brazil, 48)

The respondent speaks about poverty as a developing process, changing from morning to evening, and about continuously emergent difference. This difference moves beyond economics-based definitions of poverty ('source of income') or dominant stereotypes ('begging'). Instead, this quote highlights the existence of a difference in kind, which is described as a mutation into an in-between creation of a 'poor rich man'. The process of becoming poor here does not refer to a position within the grid of poverty and wealth (an identity), but rather marks degrees and levels of intensity (being very hungry, not having anything). This approach challenges the logic of negation, which is often used to define poverty as a polar opposite to wealth within the dualistic framework underpinning development discourse.

Instead of belittling poor lives, a complex and transformative vision of poverty expresses them as a play of difference creating metamorphous arrangements of people and things (the forest). In this respect, Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 237) point towards "the existence of a very special *becoming-animal* traversing human beings and sweeping them away". This reflects a movement from major (the identity, the constant) to minor (the variable), from unity to complexity that escapes identity (expressed through the category 'the poor') and determination (its goal is unclear). Quotes from Brazilian and Bolivian peasants speak to this point:

"In poverty we become like animals and depend on the forest so we are nothing without it" (Ana Guarin, Los Mandarinos, Bolivia, 22)

"If you dedicate yourself to work in the forest you will definitely change and gain some kind of freedom. [...] I had nothing, I ate and drank depending on my father. After having lived in the forest, I decided that I wouldn't work for an employer because I wanted to work on something that was my own. You kind of leave something within the forest" (Cristiano Soares, Arapiuns, Brazil, 34)

In the process of 'becoming-animal' familiar forms of poverty become undone; they are situated on the borderline between the person and the forest. As

López-Rivera (2013) claims, sensitivity to the materiality of nature, in particular the fusion of biophysical and social forms of being and their valorizations, directly affects the reproduction of inequalities. Freedom of being with the forest, to which one respondent refers, implies that poverty changes and passes into a different state that reflects a different degree of intensity. This kind of poverty escapes “human classifications” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 244) and is beyond the possibility of naming due to its complexity and foreignness. A river dweller explains:

“A while ago, when I was younger, I wasn't thinking of planting anything! For me if I got some small change working for a day, that would do me. I didn't care. [...] Poverty became like pain, I became like a mule working for others”. (Silvio Fontes, Curí, Brazil, 42)

Unlike the process of becoming-human, which is predicated upon the negation of nature, becoming-animal (‘became like a mule’) implies a transformation of poverty to include often marginalized expressive behaviors and experiences of desire, hunger, pain and fear. These elements of poverty are often spiritual, and include ‘enchanted’ animals, bush spirits (such as *Caipora*), other-worldly creations (like witchcraft) as well as elements of conventional religion, which cannot be reduced to wealth or traditional stereotypes of disadvantage (Hoefle, 1999). Respondents from Brazil explain:

“I think that for people here it's the devil that's poor! Something like that, well, I don't really know”. (Guilherme Carneiro, Curí, Brazil, 40)

“We are haunted by memories, forest spirits, scared of starting again – so people stay away, even if they can benefit from [anti-poverty] projects.” (Tiago Teixeira, Arapiuns, Brazil, 48)

As Hoefle (2009) stresses, in the Amazon popular beliefs that land and water are alive contribute to the development of poverty as a symbiosis, an “enchantment” open to change and experimentation. The above narratives witness the emergence of uncertain or “larval” subjects in a poverty-tinged relationship with the forest, which is formed by continuously fluctuating forces “under conditions yet to be determined” (Deleuze, 1994: 215). The resultant poverty produced by different expressions and things emerges as more-than-human, elusive and unsettling. It appears as an “in-between poverty”, where the poor emerge as neither subjects nor objects, but multiple (unlabeled) beings best described in terms of determinations and magnitudes. The next section explores this uncertain and relational poverty that emerges from such multiple and complex connections.

Relational and Uncertain Poverty

A complex 'becoming' approach to poverty destabilizes the limits of the 'poor' self and the ways in which it forms human knowledge based on the principles of rationality and reason. Poverty is unpredictable and contradictory, as a carpenter from Brazil suggests:

"I have worked to improve my situation, but it hasn't improved much because we work, work, work but we don't know what is going to happen. We do these crafts here but we just get paid in dribs and drabs because the person who orders the work doesn't always have all the money to pay on the spot". (Alejandro de la Pena, Arapiuns, Brazil, 32)

This passage describes the uncertain nature of poverty that emerges outside existing expectations and categories of knowledge. In development discourse, poverty is often seen as a weakness to be overcome by work, but the above quote reveals the confusing relation between work and disadvantage in contradiction to the rational logic. This understanding of poverty as uncertain and something that cannot be fully grasped in knowledge also questions assumptions about how it can be framed as a rural problematic. When poverty exceeds the logic of reason, it reveals insufficiency and disconnections between development practices and rural disadvantage:

"The government tackles poverty through technical assistance, with supplies, cupuaçu saplings, and plantains. But peasants are not interested in those things. Saplings dry out at their doors. They only harvest Brazil nuts, sometimes rubber and wood. [...] They are expected to manage resources rationally". (Saúl Gutierrez, Bolpebra, Bolivia, 27)

Non-rational expressions of poverty that appear unaccounted and unjustified not only undermine the stability of development discourse, but also reflect alienation with regards to the human being. As we have seen earlier, in the process of emergence of heterogeneous poverty there is no stable 'poor' subject that connects different expressions, actions and things and makes them intelligible. Perdigon (2015: 90) stresses that such "poverty is not effectuated in the recognizable form of a "political subject of poverty"- an "I, poor"- who would emerge in the interpretative act of establishing a semiotic relationship of some kind between her malnourishment [and] ill health". The resultant poverty developed within this changing context cannot be seen as a matter of human knowledge as it is commonly understood. Due to its unpredictable emergence, poverty eschews appropriation in the certainty and regularity of knowledge based on reason. Poverty expressions that develop from unintentional relations with the forest exceed the demands of rational recognition. Attending to this uncertain poverty requires going beyond what rural dwellers call 'expert' knowledge:

"[Our] education interprets the knowledge of experts so that our knowledge can be made better. Currently, our education is really a European copy so we impose it instead of teaching [about the forest], we interpret experts' wisdom and do not move forward. [...] The forest has natural richness. What is missing for people is to discover how to have development and respect nature". (Quique Hernandez, itinerant, Bolivia, 35)

This quote refers to 'natural richness' and 'respect for nature', which involve constantly developing relationships between people and the forest and, due to their complexity, cannot be known in advance. They cannot be contained within the dominant Latin American development discourse, which treats "nature as a service provider of ecosystem services... and local populations ... as ecosystem managers" (Dietz, 2017: 46). As Bataille (1988: 51) notes, such an open relationship is a matter of "non-knowledge", lying beyond the world of presuppositions and conscious thoughts based on belief in the possibility of defining and resolving problems. Poverty that involves opening up to the unfamiliar experiences of struggle, sudden exhaustion and indeterminate conditions lying outside consciousness describes movement beyond individual experience towards an abyss of un-knowing. In this case, poverty "reconfigures the partition of the sensible" (Rancière, 1999: 53) and creates moments of suspense, radical doubt and disconnection from discursive registers. It relates to the expenditure of energies, anguish, fear rather than sense, the rationality of usefulness. A rural dweller speaks about this kind of poverty:

"I am not exactly abandoned, but I don't care about anything. I don't always have nutritious food. [...] It is the pain of being on my own because my son-in-law who lives with me is away at the plantation. I am fearful, hurt and lost, I haven't been hunting any more, I forgot how walk around in the forest". (Danilo de Oliveira, Arapiuns, Brazil, 65)

Although such expressions of poverty (lack of food) fit within the existing stereotypes of disadvantage, they articulate the exposure of an individual in a moment of risk and pain, and movement beyond oneself. When an individual is lost and exposed to unbearably foreign forces in the emergence of poverty, the self-enclosure required for the possession of rational knowledge is no longer possible. As Bataille (1988: 52) asserts, "non-knowledge lays bare", it reflects the moments that cannot be grasped and cannot be reached without the withdrawal of the individual. In the above quote, this is evident in a passivity in relating to the foreignness that poverty brings and the movement of the exception in affliction: "I don't care about anything". This affliction (hurt) does not belong to the economy of time, it forgets itself as something present or meaningful (Derrida, 1991: 17).

The withdrawal of the individual ('I, poor') as a self-enclosed and rational agent acting upon nature opens up spaces for alternative interpretations for anti-poverty politics and its impacts in the Amazon. In many cases, this leads to increased

dependence on government support, submission in weariness to fate or the order of things:

"Here today most people live off government support. [...] There is not much extractivism. The [government] says 'no, you can't do that anymore', so the person just sits around waiting for the gift, the pittance that the government is giving out". (Tiago Teixeira, Arapiuns, Brazil, 48)

"We borrowed this money, but didn't actually see any of it, not actual money. Just rubbish, them bringing the amount in saplings. [...] They left it up to us. "Get on with it". We were left with just a debt. And we still don't know if the debt has been paid or not. [...] If we had received this money, we wouldn't have spent it working with our own hands, doing what we know best with the maniva [manioc leaves]". (Emilio Carvalho, Pedreira, Brazil, 37)

In these quotes, poverty appears as a process of growing dependence and uncertain (un/paid) accumulation of debt because of government support. The success of the *Bolsa Família* (Family Grant) in addressing poverty, portrayed as the Brazilian president's personal "gift" to the deprived (Hall, 2008), relies on clear identification of the "poor" and "very poor" on the basis of household income. As Derrida (1991: 11) explains, providing such a "gift" of government support requires that some "one" has to give some "thing" to some "one else". This understanding of a gift speaks to the values of subject, self, consciousness, and intentional meaning in the situation of uncertainty where poverty and subjectivity cannot be reduced to clear and recognizable forms. In Derrida's (1991: 23) terms, poverty in this case is interpreted as a possible outcome of an exchange, with "donor and donee constituted as identical, identifiable subjects, capable of identifying themselves". When the state gratifies itself (as a donor), it sets the conditions for reciprocity and exchange and annuls the "gift" because it amounts to doing harm. Effectively, such a form of support aggravates poverty since it presents the "poor" subject as the figure of circulation and expects her to obligate and further indebt herself. To escape poverty re-created within such a system of exchange, forest dwellers refuse the government's "gift":

"I have done one important thing to escape from poverty, I did not ask for a loan to harvest Brazil nuts". (Ignacio Montejo, Planchon, Bolivia, 40)

This example points towards the harm of receiving support as a part of rational development initiatives. To eschew the mechanisms of symbolic exchange and accumulation Derrida (1991: 27) offers an alternative of "a gift without wanting, an insignificant gift" that he describes as "counterfeit money". To become unbound from the obligation of debt and exchange would require forgetfulness, reformulation of the gift (reviewing its implied generosity, restitution of the time spent waiting for

the gift), and non-appearance of the subject. In the context of ecosystem-related disadvantage in the Amazon, poverty would need to be considered outside of the logic of circulation to make development interventions sympathetic to the suffering of disordered 'poor' selves, irreducible to the 'gift' economy of exchange and open to the uncertain expressions of rural malaise.

Conclusions

Drawing on the examples from fieldwork in the Brazilian and Bolivian Amazon, this chapter has questioned the subordination of the poor within clearly defined 'problem' areas and structured 'poor' social groups. It highlighted the disconnection between development discourses, the state's conceptualizations of poverty and local understandings of poverty and development, which aggravate rural poverty in the Amazon. The chapter argued that existing development interventions (such as Payment for Ecosystem Services) tend to draw on the logic of capital to prioritize economic dimensions of poverty and focus mainly on material practices of the poor, which separates them from nature and offers limited anti-poverty solutions. Alternative understandings of poverty as fluid, complex and uncertain developed in this chapter problematized traditional visions of developmental frontiers in the Amazon central to the debates in this book.

First, the chapter questioned the construction of poverty as a fixed entity and argued for its *fluid* articulation. It demonstrated that attempts to measure one's poverty contribute to creation of boundaries/frontiers around seemingly stable poor subjects separated from changing temporalities of disadvantage to the detriment of their living conditions. The examples from fieldwork demonstrate that the lives of poor people cannot be evaluated in terms of their emplacement and units of measurement in proportion to developmental progress. Attending to dynamic poverty expressions and practices calls for acceptance of the unstable and incomplete nature of poor "subjects" as "between things, interbeings" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). Furthermore, the chapter undermined the ordering of ecosystems in terms of their usefulness and moved beyond the "rigid segmentarity" (Deleuze and Parnet, 2007: 96) of existing policy approaches to highlight the impossibility of creating a uniform view of forest-related poverty. It questioned utilitarian approaches in dominant anti-poverty policies and unsettled the existing binary oppositions between people and ecosystems, and frontiers they create. The stories from disadvantaged people in the Brazilian and Bolivian Amazon suggested that attempts to reduce lives in the forest to orderly frameworks of exchange and calculation (i.e. translated into different forms of capital) oversimplify disadvantage and aggravate poverty.

Second, by engaging with the stories from the Amazon the chapter unravelled *more-than-human* and *assembled* dwelling poverties. In exploring the process of becoming-poor, the chapter highlighted different intensities, potentialities and complexities generating poverties assembled from combinations of objects, actions,

bodies and expressions. It used fieldwork examples to destabilize clear distinctions between people and the forest and to redefine the categories of minor and major in development discourse, thus contributing to the broader discussions about changeable frontiers and positioning central to this book. The discussion explored the 'minor' processes that destabilize the notion of poverty, dynamically shift centers and margins and rethink seemingly marginalized minor positions in the emergence of disadvantage. This complex approach to poverty goes beyond the vision of a "constitutive interconnectedness" (Therborn, 2015: 17) between nature and society, which often allocates the place to nature as an explanatory variable producing inequalities. By focusing on expressions of pain and fear and combinations of beliefs and memories in the production of forest-related disadvantage the chapter developed a vision of poverty as an 'enchantment' (Hoefle, 2009), an always-developing symbiosis between different elements that redefines frontiers of change in the Amazon beyond material terms.

Third, the *relational* and *uncertain* approach to poverty unsettled the visions of disadvantage as an object of rational knowledge and further destabilized the oft-assumed frontiers of the poor 'selves'. It attempted to respond to the limited success of cash transfer programs (such as *Bolsa Família* in Brazil and *Bono Juana Azurduy* in Bolivia) in providing poverty relief and attending to the specific needs and concerns of the poor, which are constantly evolving and go beyond economic and self-advancement targets (Hall, 2006; Molyneux and Thomson, 2011). While in development policies poverty is often constructed as a failed condition requiring interventions in the form of work and income generation, this negative view assumes the ability of knowledge to contain poverty and make it reasonable. Several examples from the rural Amazon go beyond rational knowledge and outside demands of development discourse, thus challenging the predictability of poverty trajectories, the possibility of rational resource management and the intelligibility of poverty-related outcomes within the ordered force of (expert) representation. Moreover, these examples articulate the 'non-knowledge' of the uncertain emergence of poverty, which expresses an opening up to the shared strangeness of pain, risk and loss that exceed determinate conditions of consciousness and go beyond an individual experience (in the sense of *Ekstatikon*, cf. Shubin 2015). Such experiences of poverty escape assimilation by the external authority of knowledge and challenge the positioning of the poor beyond the development frontiers, outside political rationalities and economic calculations, often condemned for their apparent inaction.

Importantly, the dynamic, complex and uncertain understanding of poverty developed in this chapter challenges the dualistic frontiers of knowledge used in development discourse. It presents the distinction between interiority (felt expressions) and exteriority of knowledge (expert knowledge) as false. As the research findings demonstrate, support for the poor based on clear identifications of subjects involved in an exchange (donor and donee), calculable interests and intentional meaning can aggravate poverty. The chapter suggests a reconfiguration of the frontiers of exchange and subjectivity through passivity and withdrawal, where

rejection of the government's 'gift' to the deprived implies forgetfulness and non-appearance of the subject. This complex and uncertain approach contributes to recent discussions about socio-ecological disadvantage in Latin America by challenging the understanding of ecosystem services as producing 'socially-relevant good' and as part-objects of compensatory policies addressing socio-economic inequalities in terms of income and wealth (Görg et al., 2017). It supports recent criticisms of the social abstraction of nature, stressing that it is not possible to understand nature solely within the system of exchange and define "all of life as bearers of value" (Robertson, 2012: 388); this executes real violence on poor people. By calling for affirmation of difference and rejection of utilitarian logic in expressing frontiers of development it encourages increased attention to changing temporalities, unstable positions, "assembled" becoming and potentialities of poverty. In so doing, it adds to the debates on exploring alternative articulations of poverty by moving beyond inequalities of opportunity and positions to study dynamic and unpredictable frontiers in 'entangled inequalities' (Costa, 2018).

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