

# Review of anna tsing's friction essay sample



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Friction discloses the particularities of different collaborations that disrupt or develop processes of economic transformations that reflect on landscapes, and at the same time accentuates the role that imagination plays in recreating the wild as fields of profiteering. The title is so well chosen, that I can't even begin to write about how significant the idea of 'friction' should be in understanding the creation of new enclosures. Friction does justice to a real account (not just a romanticized version) of the huge amounts of complexities in winning and losing battles for environmental justice. The strange bedfellows, the political opportunities (expected or unexpected), that have to be seized with perfect timing, what's at stake ecologically, culturally, and financially.

It exposes some Western myths of "What is the environment," "What it means to preserve it" and for whom, and establishes the mountainous regions of Indonesia in question as not simply a part of nature, but a social sphere. Friction has a compellingly simple but important premise: universals - like capitalism, modernity, environmentalism, and feminism don't travel abstractly as mere ideologies. Rather, they travel through people, through institutions, through stories, and through cultures. And along the way, the friction of travel, the friction of encounter with others, the friction of translation of universals by localities, changes those actually lived universals.

It is not a new insight, but it is worth repeating since our tendency is to treat the travel of ideas, ideologies, and universals as frictionless, smooth, un-bumpy, and easily transparent in translation. Tsing's task is not merely to say this but to show it. She tells the story of how environmentalism travels in

this frictional manner. The setting is Kalimantan, Indonesia in the 1990s.

Tsing hangs out with the indigenous people who live the forests; she hangs out with many individuals from different institutional bodies. And her patient, non-judgmental hanging out allows her to tell really well told stories.

These various groups all do very different things in the name of the environment. Sometimes their different travels create frictions that are productive to some end (almost by accident), and sometimes these groups seem to live in different cosmologies where their encounters and seeming collaborations against the state, against international corporations, and against capitalism fizzle away into seeming nothingness. To begin with, there is a lot of theory talk: how to think about cultural encounter, how to think of how ideologies travel with friction, how to conceptualize a world where every locality's ideas are potentially universal and every universal notion travels through localities, where as it travels it is transformed.

The second kind of narrative she employs is short (10 pages or more) sections between the major chapters. In these the form is sometimes more direct, more experimental, more charged with anger and poetic pointedness. The third, she implies in a story-telling mode of ethnography.

These narratives are part travel tales, part investigative journalism, part rich expositions of her main concepts, and part descriptions of our astonishingly interesting world. Together the three narratives work well and their juxtaposition solves, I think, the problems that each of these narratives would have if they were not next to each other. They would seem too theory-

headed, to righteous, and too apolitical. So the form alone is interesting to contemplate.