

Scanlan Lyons

Running After Paradise

Hope, Survival, and Activism in Brazil's Atlantic Forest

Brazil's Atlantic Forest is a paradise to many. In Southern Bahia, surfers, billionaires, travelers, and hippies mingle with environmentalists, family farmers, quilombolas (descendants of formerly enslaved people), and nativos, or "locals." Each of these groups has connections to the unique environment, culture, and character of this region as their home, their source of a livelihood, or perhaps their vacation escape. And while sometimes these connections converge—other times they clash. The pressures on this tropical forest are palpable. So are people's responses to these pressures. What was once the state's economic mainstay, cacao production, is only now beginning to make a comeback after a disease decimated the crops of large and small farmers alike. Tourism, another economic hope, is susceptible to economic crises and pandemics. And the threat of a massive state-led infrastructure project involving mining, a railroad, and an international port has loomed over the region for well over a decade. Southern Bahia is at a crossroads: develop a sustainable, forest-based economy or run the risk of losing the identity and soul of this place forevermore. Through the lives of environmentalists, farmers, quilombolas, and nativos—people who are in and of this place—this book brings alive the people who are grappling with this dilemma. Anthropologist Colleen M. Scanlan Lyons brings the eye of a storyteller to present this complex struggle, weaving in her own challenges of balancing family and fieldwork alongside the stories of the people who live in this dynamic region. Intertwined tales, friendships, and hope emerge as people both struggle to sustain their lives in a biodiversity hotspot and strive to create their paradise.

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32,50 €

30,37 € (zzgl. MwSt.)

Lieferfrist: bis zu 10 Tage

Artikelnummer: 9780816548293

Medium: Buch

ISBN: 978-0-8165-4829-3

Verlag: University of Arizona Press

Erscheinungstermin: 07.02.2023

Sprache(n): Englisch

Auflage: Erscheinungsjahr 2023

Serie: Critical Green Engagements:
Investigating the Green Economy and
its Alternatives

Produktform: Kartoniert

Seiten: 304

Format (B x H): 152 x 229 mm

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24.07.2024 | 21:26 Uhr

