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in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Luis R. Vivanco. *Green Encounters: Shaping and Contesting Environmentalism in Rural Costa Rica.* New York: Berghahn Books, 2006. xv + 222 pp. $75.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-84545-168-4.

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Published on H-Environment (November, 2007)

Quakers, Quetzals, and Tourists

For many of us, just the name "Costa Rica" conjures lush green rainforests, peeping tree frogs, and cool clear waterfalls. Images of Costa Rican nature come to us by multiple pathways–tourism brochures, wildlife documentaries, environmentalist campaign literature. With them come a host of corollary concepts, like "sustainable development" and "ecotourism" that have come to be almost synonymous with Costa Rica for those of us in the North. The particular histories of social mobilization and global connection that make Costa Rica the "Green Republic" are actually quite recent and contingent in some surprising ways.

In *Green Encounters*, Vivanco (an associate professor in anthropology at the University of Vermont) explores some of the tensions between locality, ownership, justice, and nature that emerge with the phenomenon of Costa Rica's greenness. He draws on ten years of fieldwork in Monte Verde, a region widely–and uncritically–celebrated for its conservation projects, ecotourism industry, and participatory sustainable development. Rather than challenge these success stories on their own terms (number of hectares purchased, quantity of tourist dollars), Vivanco asks what particular histories made them possible, and what discursive strategies defined their "success."

In the first section, Vivanco discusses the emergence of Monte Verde as it now appears in terms of visibility. The biodiverse forests of Monteverde (note that the original one-word name "Monteverde" became "Monte Verde" with the increased attention from without–to emphasize its green-ness?) only became legible as part of a process of agricultural development. The state and NGOs began interventions in the region to improve agricultural production and livelihoods for colonists. In order to do so they mapped the territory and defined the natural features of the landscape in ways that made land tenure simultaneously more rational and more tenuous. Colonists found themselves engaging with the state and other actors in these new terms that led more and more to a concept of the region's landscape as valuable nature.

Green Encounters' second section addresses "environmentalism's social work," the process by which sustainable development and conservation initiatives set out to transform *campesino* collectivities and individual subjectivities. Vivanco offers two particularly telling examples of these processes. In the first, a participatory community development project is repeatedly forced to redefine its mission, and the community it intends to serve, in order to maintain any kind of working membership. In the second, Vivanco's host Manuel brings his camera on an *aventura* in the forest instead of a gun, demonstrating his interest in "foreign" environmentalist attitudes towards wildlife. The senses of self and the new social organizations that emerge from encounters with environmentalism provide *campesino*s with new resources for engaging with the larger world.

Finally, Vivanco turns to the role of ecotourism. How could we understand contemporary Costa Rica without unpacking this concept? In Monte Verde ecotourism is the dominant source of income; and since the region is

relatively isolated, more of that income stays with local residents than is usually the case in tourist destinations. Thus ecotourism represents not only a significant livelihood, it also represents a prime point of contact between locals and foreign travelers. Ways of understanding and valuing wildlife and landscapes are exchanged along with the money. Locals involved with ecotourism speak of the nature that sustains them in ambivalent terms that encompass a tourists' sense of wonder and an entrepreneurial spirit. Material effects emerge on the landscape as well, as the cumulative impacts of "low-impact" tourists begin to mount. Vivanco explores the options for *campesino*s and environmental organizations to deal with the challenges raised by ecotourism's commanding presence in Monte Verde.

Although they are not a central theme in the book, I was struck by the way Vivanco describes the role of Quaker settlers in greening Monteverde. The municipality was famously colonized by North American Quaker war resisters in the post-WWII era, and their experiments with "progressive" agriculture helped define Monteverde as a site for new forms of intervention with nature. Part of what makes this story interesting in retrospect is the fact that the famous Quaker settlers were not necessarily conservationists by intention or identity, but became so as a result of particular relationships to land, and land-ownership. This aspect of the story follows a similar arc to that of Manuel, Vivanco's friend with the camera. Both stories demonstrate an adoption of environmentalism, but not in the same sense as it is held by Northern environmentalists–not so much an interpolation to a dominant discourse as the emergence of new kinds of environmental citizenship.

Vivanco's ethnography is top-notch. Every page demonstrates the depth of his relationship to the region, his commitment to local projects, and the rapport that he is able to establish with *campesino*s, conservationists, government officials, and the whole range of actors local and otherwise. This kind of sensitivity to subtle shades of difference in meaning is what makes ethnography such a powerful device for understanding local worlds. In Vivanco's hands, anthropology's qualitative lens brings readers into Monteverde and shows us the shapes that environmentalism has taken there in all of their complexity.

Green Encounters may hold some disappointments for those seeking a rigorous theoretical examination of the issues brought up by the case study. There is an odd sort of disconnect in the way that Vivanco's richly detailed narrative of conversations and encounters stops short of its own full implications. For example, the discussion of bureaucratic language, visibility of agriculture, and rural peoples' selective adoption of conservationist rhetoric seems to speak directly to current discussions about environmental governmentality, citizenship, and subjectivities. Vivanco, however, makes only passing reference to the more current work in this domain, and none to its theoretical foundations.[1] Likewise, Vivanco brings up the groundbreaking geographical work of Henri Lefebvre, but only in reference to his concepts of the social "façade" and the deviant actor as "obscene," (p. 25), and not to his general theory of the production of space which seems so relevant to the case at hand.[2] Other recent works in environmental anthropology have been clearer demonstrations of how to maintain the rich particularity of ethnographic narrative while engaging these complex aspects of theory.[3]

These criticisms aside, *Green Encounters* is definitely a solid and valuable contribution to these contemporary discussions about conservation. Written in accessible and, for the most part, clear and concise prose, this book would be an appropriate monograph for graduate or advanced undergraduate classes. Scholars and practitioners interested in the relationships between conservation and rural people are likely to find Vivanco's insights helpful.

Notes

[1]. For example, Arun Agrawal, *Environmentality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005); and Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (New York: Vintage, 1980).

[2]. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1991).

[3]. For example, Paige West, *Conservation is Our Government Now* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005); and Paul Nadasdy, *Hunters and Bureaucrats* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2003).

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Citation: Adam Henne. Review of Vivanco, Luis R., *Green Encounters: Shaping and Contesting Environmentalism in*

Rural Costa Rica. H-Environment, H-Net Reviews. November, 2007.

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