

THE “GREENING” OF COSTA RICA: WOMEN, PEASANTS, INDIGENOUS PEOPLES, AND THE REMAKING OF NATURE

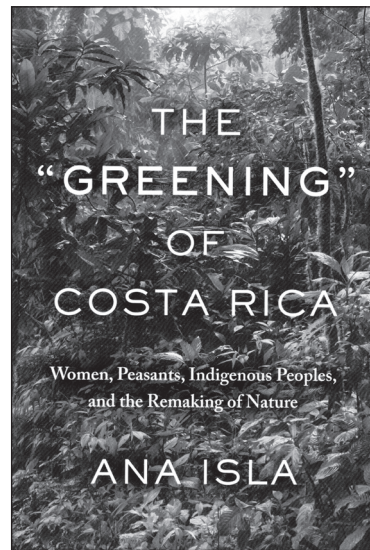
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In her book, *The “Greening” of Costa Rica: Women, Peasants, Indigenous Peoples and the Remaking of Nature*, Ana Isla elaborates upon the ways in which multi-national organizations have recuperated environmental concerns, and their respective discourses, to buttress the expansion of a new type of capitalism. Isla presents a conceptual understanding of this new form of capital accumulation, “greening,” which “represents a new form of exchange value based on biological forms and processes such as genetics and medicinal plants (bio-products), air and scenery (non-material commons), and water (material commons), which, when facilitated by debt-for-nature, is inserted into many forms of international market relations.”

She situates the “greening” of Costa Rica within an historical examination of the creation of the country’s debt and the ways in which said debt has lent itself to exploitation of the country’s natural and human resources through “debt-for-nature” exchanges within the discursive paradigm of “sustainable development.” Isla argues that such exchanges have led to the privatization of biodiversity and commodification of natural



elements, the privatization of the forest through the purchase of carbon credits from indebted rainforest-dense countries, the privatization of scenery that has resulted in the exclusion of local peoples from previously shared common spaces, wildlife, and agricultural land, the destruction of spaces and water resources by open-pit mining that has permanently damaged agricultural land and, thus, peasants’ subsistence survival, and the creation of a cycle of indebtedness and exploitative working conditions. In particular, Isla highlights the exploitation of women within this context by claiming that socio-economic shifts due to heavy-handed neoliberal policies have resulted in a restructuring of social life such that many peasant women now lacking access to land for subsistence survival have become involved in sex trade work and a medicinal plant economy that has resulted in entrapment in a cycle of debt and exploitation. Here, Isla moves beyond a traditional historical materialist approach to instead adopt an ecofeminist stance. This allows Isla to incorporate the unpaid labour of women peasants in her analysis, and also the embodied

and gendered nature of knowledge systems pertaining to such labour. The emphasis on such knowledge systems, particularly insofar as they highlight the interconnected nature of relationships between and among Costa Rica’s people and also its complex agricultural and biological ecosystems, for Isla, aids in understanding and combatting the fragmenting and commodifying tendencies, and epistemological groundings, buttressing neoliberal projects.

Isla’s analysis of the process of “greening” is intricate and highly informative insofar as it details the interconnected nature of multi-national global economic policies (as well as the involvement of Canadian corporations) and local quotidian realities in isolated and rural areas of Costa Rica. This strategy is seemingly an example of what Saskia Sassen has identified as a multi-scalar approach, which, in striving to overcome the conceptual global-local divide regarding the complex nature of power and exploitation within the global social sphere, enables the intricate examination of said power and exploitation *both within and across* varying scales of the social sphere. The strength of *The “Greening” of Costa Rica* arguably lies in this elaborate demonstration of a multi-scalar analysis that Isla buttresses with both macro-scale statistical data and also subjective personal narratives. In so doing, she cogently demonstrates the discrepancies between the quotidian impacts of international socio-economic policies and the discourse of sustainable development with which such policies have been enacted.

Isla suggests that “greening” is a type of neocolonialism. Therefore, what is arguably lacking from her analysis is an inclusion of the impacts of race in the Costa Rican context. Although Isla highlights