

Pineapple Patriarch: Local Agency in Sustainability Initiatives despite Community Reliance on Pineapple Monoculture

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Abstract : This paper addresses the nuances in the relationship between the rural community of Volcan, Costa Rica, and the presence of multinational pineapple giant Pineapple Development Corporation (PINDECO). The paper analyzes the continuous negotiation between the need for environmental protection in the face of pineapple monoculture and the socioeconomic dependencies of the community on the company. Drawing on eight years of ethnographic work in Volcan de Buenos Aires and relying on intergenerational interviews that document oral histories, this article provides a socio-historical account of the economic and environmental impact of the presence of PINDECO in the southern zone of the country. The paper draws on interviews and in-depth participant observation, conducted by the author in intermittent periods over eight years. The research sheds light on the tensions between the village and PINDECO, as simultaneous acceptance of and opposition to the company persist by different stakeholders in the region. In doing so, this paper examines the strikingly powerful affinity toward the company and the community's regard for PINDECO as the town patriarch despite social and environmental injustices. In demonstrating these tensions, the author problematizes the practice of conducting foreign environmental research in developing countries, and more importantly, proposing changes to environmental conservation and socioeconomic structures without understanding community reliance on the presence of corporations such as PINDECO and the threats that changes to existing structures could pose to community members' livelihoods. In complicating these common western academic practices, the author takes an anti-colonial approach to environmental research, refusing the assumption that the affinity toward the company by the community of Volcan is rooted in ignorance, lack of education, or lack of interest in environmental conservation. The author instead highlights local knowledge and agency, demonstrating the many ways in which the community itself is producing knowledge and taking action. Through this paper, common assumptions regarding the agency of such communities are contested, and the grassroots environmental initiatives of Volcan, Costa Rica are brought to life.

Keywords : environmental conservation, grassroots movements, local knowledge, agricultural multinational

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