Summer 7-12-2023

The Bearing Earth: Colonization, Conservation, and Political Ecology in Costa Rica (Coto Brus 1948 - Present)

Pablo Alonso Arias-Benavides
University of New Mexico

Pablo Alonso Arias-Benavides

Candidate

Latin American Studies

Department

This thesis is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication:

Approved by the Thesis Committee:

Dr. Miriam Gay-Antaki , Chairperson

Dr. Andreas Hernandez , Chairperson

Dr. Judy Bieber

THE BEARING EARTH:
COLONIZATION, CONSERVATION, AND
POLITICAL ECOLOGY IN COSTA RICA
(COTO BRUS 1948-PRESENT)

by

PABLO ALONSO ARIAS-BENAVIDES

BACHELOR OF ARTS CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SANTA BARBARA

THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES

The University of New Mexico
Albuquerque, New Mexico

AUGUST 2023

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my brother:

Cyranno Azul Campos-Benavides

To the 1948 revolution:

"Siendo amigos míos,

Que se vayan todos a la libertad." [1]

"Abundancia para quién?
No te preocupes en averiguarlo.
¡Abundancia para todos!"[2]

To the memory of Victor Hugo:

"My mother, Citizen,
Is the Republic."[3]

The Emperor Haile Selassie I:
Conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah.

And Pablo Presbere:

King of Talamanca.

[1] "Being friends of mine, go, all of you, to your freedom." Jose Santos Delcore in *Figueres Ferrer: El Espiritu del 48*
[2] "Abundance for whom? Don't worry about it. Abundance for all!" Jose Figueres Ferrer in *Figueres Ferrer: El Espiritu del 48.*
[3] *Hugo: Les Miserables*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my mentors, committee, friends, and family for their support throughout my studies. The University of New Mexico Graduate and Professional Student Association and El Centro de la Raza provided funding to make this project possible. Thank you.

I would also like to thank my martial arts instructor, Shihan Berny Carvajal of Carvajal's Kenpo Karate International, Costa Rica: a high master and world champion.

"Be brave and strong. Put yourself at the service of all people. The deadly sword will become the living sword." Miyamoto Musashi. [4]

[4] *Musashi: The Five Rings*.

THE BEARING EARTH: COLONIZATION, CONSERVATION, AND POLITICAL ECOLOGY IN COSTA RICA (COTO BRUS 1948-PRESENT)

PABLO ALONSO ARIAS-BENAVIDES

B.A. CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

M.A. LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES

ABSTRACT

This thesis presents two questions: How are relationships between people in Coto Brus and the land – specifically, forest – mediated by social, political, and economic forces? How are personal and collective identities expressed through relationship with the landscape? I chose Coto Brus because it is a forested region of Costa Rica which was populated with state support in the 1950s, and because it is my father's hometown. In order to understand the subjective experiences of Costa Ricans involved in deforestation and reforestation, I performed interviews in the canton, visited conservation sites, and analyzed historical sources. This study combines multiscale historical narrative, analysis, and interpretation with ethnographic research methods to describe dynamic human-environment relationships in Costa Rica. By deconstructing events which produced Costa Rica's current status as a model of conservation and reforestation, it provides a case study of historic socio-environmental change.

Keywords: Geography, Anthropology, Political Ontology, Historical Sociology, Critical Theory

Table of Contents

LIST OF FIGURES ..... **ix**

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION **1**

A. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT 2

B. RESEARCH GAP AND OBJECTIVES 4

C. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK 6

D. METHODOLOGY 7

E. SIGNIFICANCE AND CONTRIBUTIONS 9

F. OUTLINE OF THE THESIS 12

CHAPTER 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: CRITIQUE AND DECOLONIZATION THROUGH POLITICAL ECOLOGY **14**

A. INTRODUCTION TO POLITICAL ECOLOGY PERSPECTIVES 15

B. POLITICAL ECOLOGY PERSPECTIVES 20

I. Robbins: The Trickster Science 20

II. Leff: Conceptualizing the Environment 24

C. CONCEPTUALIZING CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT 27

I. Escobar and Li: Conceptualizing Development 29

a. Escobar: Encountering Development 30

b. Li: The Will to Improve 36

D. NEUMANN: CONCEPTUALIZING NATURE CONSERVATION 41

E. THE NEOLIBERALIZATION OF NATURE 46

G. SUMMARY AND RELEVANCE 48

CHAPTER 3. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW AND POLICY CONTEXT **49**

A. INTRODUCTION TO HISTORICAL OVERVIEW AND POLICY CONTEXT 49

B. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW: PRECOLOMBIAN TO MID-20TH CENTURY 52

C. SETTLEMENT OF COTO BRUS: CAUSES AND EFFECTS 66

I. Description and History of Coto Brus 66

II. Family Connection 90

D. POLITICAL AND POLICY CONTEXT 96

I. 1948-1980: Land-to-Tiller Legislation and Deforestation 96

II. 1980- 2000: Debt Restructuring and Neoliberalism 104

E. FOREST LAW 7575: PES 110

F. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION 115

CHAPTER 4. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH: INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDY OF SOCIO-ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE 117
A. INTRODUCTION TO METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH 117
B. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH: HISTORICAL ANALYSIS 119
I. McMichael: Incorporated Comparison 119
C. ETHNOGRAPHIC METHODS 123
I. Conducting Interviews and Constructing Narratives 123
II. McIntosh and Eguchi: Reflexivity and the Body 128
CHAPTER 5. VIGNETTES AND ANALYSIS: DECISION MAKING IN CONSERVATION 140
A. INTRODUCTION TO VIGNETTES 141
I. EARLY SETTLERS: ROLDAN, GIL, MELCHOR 145
A. Roldan's Narrative: Urban Landowner 145
B. Idiosyncrasies of Construction: Productive and Aesthetic Uses of Space 151
I. Terrenos 152
II. Idiosyncrasies of Construction 154
a. The Italian Idiosyncrasy 156
b. The Costa Rican Idiosyncrasy 158
C. Forest Transition: Livelihood, Development and Conservation 169
I. European Inheritance 170
II. Livelihood and Market Pressures 174
A. GIL'S NARRATIVE: MOBILE WAGE-LABORER 179
I. Themes 179
II. Narrative 186
III. Analysis 192
B. MELCHOR: SMALLHOLD FARMER 195
I. Narrative 195
II. Analysis 201
C. ISMAEL AND PIEDAD: FINCA MAQUIQUE 203
I. Introduction 203
II. Motivations 211
A. Traditional Medicine 211
B. Agroecology is Traditional 212
II. Changes over their Lifetimes 217
A. Changes on the Property: *El Lechon* (*Maquique)* 217

B. Changes in the Community 219
III. How will the Community and Landscapes Change in the Future? 221
A. Development and Ecology 221
B. Markets vs. Policy: Lack of Popular Will 223
1. Example: Apiculture 224
IV. Conclusion: How do you Feel about Changes? 231
V. Analysis 237
D. FINCA CANTAROS: SILVIO 239
I. Local NGO 239
II. History of the Site 240
III. Connecting Forested Spaces 249
IV. Livelihood Pressures and Mediation 250
V. Role of the National State 253
VI. Conclusion: Impacts of Finca Cantaros. Return to Indigenous History 255
E. CONCLUSIONS FROM VIGNETTES AND ANALYSIS 262
CHAPTER 6: CONTRIBUTIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH 264
A. SUMMARY 264
B. DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH 268
I. IDIOSYNCRACIES AND AESTHETOGENESIS 268
II. ADDRESSING THE RESULTS OF COLONIZATION 268
III. POST-CAPITALIST DESIRE 270
APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS 272
APPENDIX B: THE COSTA RICAN IDIOSYNCRACY 278
REFERENCES CITED 284

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Los Pioneros al Pionero 44
Figure 2: Colonial population with Camino Real 57
Figure 3: Expansion of the Hispano-American Ecumene 59
Figure 4: Founding of villages and cities, 16th-20th centuries. 62
Figure 5: Evolution of the Transportation Network 1870 – 1980 63
Figure 6: Continued. 1950, 1980 64
Figure 7 Internal Migration 1950, 1963 and 1973 65
Figure 8: Map of Costa Rica with the globe 67
Figure 9: Location of Coto Brus in Costa Rica. 68
Figure 10: Detail of Map of Costa Rica, centered on San Vito de Java, municipal capital of Coto Brus. 69
Figure 11: A view of Coto Brus from Finca Cantaros. 86
Figure 12: Cattle pasture in Coto Brus. 87
Figure 13: A pasture higher in the foothills. 88
Figure 14: The rural road leading to the finca in Figure 14 89
Figure 15: Homenaje a Sabaneros Fallecidos 93
Figure 16: Homenaje a Sabaneros Fallecidos, continued. 94
Figure 17: My grandfather, Reinaldo Arias Porras. 95
Figure 18: Terrestrial and Inland Waters Protected Area Coverage (Contemporary) 101
Figure 19: FONAFIFO Organizational Diagram. 109
Figure 20: Roldan's building on Commerce Street, at the center of San Vito. 146
Figure 21: A traditional adobe structure in San Ramon, Heredia. 164
Figure 22: Another perspective. 165
Figure 23: A traditional structure in San Ramon. 166
Figure 24: A traditional dwelling seen on the road to Coto Brus. 167
Figure 25: Ismael's contemporary take on traditional regional architecture 168
Figure 26: A "rancho" structure which was part of my family's first dwelling in the area. 169
Figure 27: Gil at his home in Coto Brus 182
Figure 28: A view of Gil's traditional home under the awning of his children's new house. 183
Figure 29: A cantarilla (watershed) at Finca Maquique, ... 206
Figure 30: The cabin and forest at Finca Maquique. 209
Figure 31: A ceiba tree in Sabalito. 210
Figure 32: A toucan eating from an Hoja Santa tree at Finca Maquique 216
Figure 33: A hive for native bees at Finca Maquique. 228
Figure 34: A flower at Finca Maquique with a native bee foraging inside 229
Figure 35: Orchid with ants and other insects at Finca Maquique. 230
Figure 36: An example of the biodiversity at Finca Maquique. 235
Figure 37: Piedad, Ismael, and their son and dogs. 236
Figure 38: The lagoon at Finca Cantaros (Laguna Zoncho) 244
Figure 39: Laguna Zoncho Signage. 245
Figure 40: A stone with petroglyphs near Laguna Zoncho. 246
Figure 41: A metate at Finca Cantaros. 247
Figure 42: Metate signage at Finca Cantaros. 248

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

My thesis explores relationships between people in the canton of Coto Brus, Costa Rica, and the land they live on, during a period called the Forest Transition – a cycle of deforestation and reforestation which occurred in the 20th century. This period was also characterized by a colonization movement within Costa Rica. By conducting interviews, visiting settlement and conservation sites, and using historical sources, I aim to understand the subjective experiences of Costa Ricans involved in these processes. This research combines historical narrative, analysis, and interpretation with ethnographic research methods to provide insights into dynamic human-environment relationships in Costa Rica.

This introduction highlights the significance of Coto Brus as a research site. Then, it discusses the role of politics, institutions, and economic factors in mediating relationships between people and the land in the canton. These mediating factors include the interplay between the desires of local landowners and other entities, such as states and commodity markets. Finally, it outlines the structure of this thesis and provides a summary description of each chapter.

A. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Coto Brus is a canton in the Southwestern portion of Costa Rica, bordering Panama. It is located in the province of Puntarenas, spreads over approximately one thousand square kilometers and has 40,000 inhabitants (Censos, 2011). It is characterized by foothills and gullies which create sharp differences in elevation and exposure. Due to its location near the center of the Costa Rican isthmus, Coto Brus is characterized by cooler and dryer weather than the coasts. These factors combine to create an environment with great ecological diversity.

The canton was populated, according to Costa Rican historians, during the 1950s following the foundation of the Second Costa Rican Republic in 1948. Historical sources and vernacular expression characterize the settlement of Coto Brus and other areas of Costa Rica during the late 20th century as "colonization." This colonization effort was related to a Costa Rican project of democratic socialism and nation building, a program of Italian colonization, and significant expansion of the global market following WWII, during which commodity production boomed. As part of the colonization effort, people transformed the landscapes of Coto Brus according to their cultural, economic, and political needs, desires, and values. The landscape became a canvas for the expression of personal and collective identities as well as a collaborator in the production of things and reproduction of people.

During the 20th century, Costa Rica also experienced a decline and rebound of its forest cover. Forests declined in Costa Rica until the late 1980s, when they began to expand again. This historical and environmental phenomenon is known as the Forest Transition. The causes and effects of this transition are complex. Much policy and academic discussion

focuses on personal choice as a cause of deforestation and reforestation. Therefore, it is important to understand what factors influence or mediate personal choices and why these choices may result in deforestation or other environmental damages; why people choose to engage in conservation and reforestation; and which factors contribute to making any of these choices a possibility.

Because it is surrounded by forested regions and has living residents who remember the first years of the process of colonization, Coto Brus is an ideal site for this study. It is also favorable because it has both urban and rural zones, houses conservation projects from family-farm to international scales and has a unique history as both Costa Rican and Italian colony. These factors combine to make Coto Brus a place where I was able to speak to Costa Ricans from diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds and differing perspectives regarding colonization and conservation in Costa Rica. Finally, I chose Coto Brus because it is my father's hometown. Although I am not personally very familiar with the region, this sense of familial belonging encouraged me to incorporate a reflexive perspective throughout this thesis.

B. RESEARCH GAP AND OBJECTIVES

As outlined in the previous paragraphs, more research is needed to understand the subjective factors which influence choices around land use, particularly choices to deforest, conserve, or reforest. An improved understanding of the way people make choices regarding their relationship with the landscape can make policies and programs which encourage people to conserve more effective by targeting the factors which shape their choices as well as the individual choice itself.

The relationship between colonizing frontiers and the formulation of collective identity is well-studied, for example in the cases of New Mexico (Gómez, 2007) and Chicago (Cronon, 1992). However, late-20th century examples of frontier colonization in new Latin American states are limited. Costa Rica provides a case study for this topic which can be addressed through historical sources and by interviewing people who recall the events.

The objectives of this study are twofold.

1) **To describe and better understand historical and contemporary factors which mediate the human-environment relationship in Coto Brus.**
2) **To describe and interpret relationships between personal and collective identity and the landscape in Coto Brus.**

These objectives are addressed through two interrelated research questions.

1) **How are relationships between people in Coto Brus and the land mediated by social, political, and economic forces?**
2) **How are personal and collective identities expressed through relationship with the landscape?**

C. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study uses an interdisciplinary theoretical framework. I draw on current discussions in Political Ecology and employ the concepts of development, conservation, and neoliberalization of nature. A framework of Political Ecology centered around these concepts allows me to interrogate political and ecological aspects of Costa Rican society, economy, and governance together. Chapter 2 discusses my theoretical framework in detail.

Throughout this thesis I argue that, in contemporary Costa Rica, conservation and development are tightly linked concepts. However, this was not always the case; these concepts evolved historically in the region throughout the twentieth century and within a context of global dialogue. The current policy and discursive formations in Costa Rica have been influenced both by its social democratic constitution and the ascent of neoliberalism as a global governing ideology beginning in the 1980s.

This thesis places the subjective experiences of Costa Ricans in dialogue with the theoretical frameworks of Political Ecology (PE), critical theory, and decolonizing philosophies. PE is a contemporary framework influenced by Marxism, and socialist engagement with ideas about nature and development had a strong role in the formation of the second Costa Rican republic in 1948. Therefore, the relationships between the official founding ideologies of the Costa Rican state, Political Ecology as an influential current in contemporary academic thought, shifting global ontologies of nature, and the views and perspectives of people in Costa Rica can and should be fruitfully explored; this thesis begins that project.

D. METHODOLOGY

This section introduces the methodology employed in this thesis. It is described in greater detail in Chapter 4. I use an interdisciplinary methodology to study social and environmental change. My thesis uses historical data and analysis to examine long-term causal factors of the Forest Transition, especially the expanding agricultural frontier of 20th century Costa Rica. It employs a comparative ontological approach and multi-scalar frame of reference informed by historical sociology, which allows me to "analyze the historic interdependence of distinct ontologies: 'economic,' and 'ecological'" (McMichael, 2019, p. 1) and relate the expansion of capitalism across multiple temporal and spatial scales to development as a global project. I argue that Costa Rican colonization projects, like that carried out in Coto Brus, were influenced by the global forces of development and capitalist market dynamics as well as personal choices and motivations.

I also used field methods such as interview, thick description, and *platica* (Geertz, 1973; Montiel et al., 2009) to understand people's feelings, thoughts, and motivations concerning development, colonization, deforestation, conservation, and reforestation. I visited sites and examined architecture to understand the material expressions of the human-environment relationship in Coto Brus. I used these methods to create a coherent set of narratives which interact across temporal and spatial scales. By analyzing these narratives through the theoretical framework of political ecology, I related structural and subjective factors to understand how local and global, social, and individual, forces influence each other.

In compiling narratives to analyze and interpret, I have remained conscious of my role as author in this work. I am also conscious of the ways my collaborators guided me into particular spaces and relationships as a way to take agency in this research project. To understand my own role and the role of my collaborators in constructing this thesis, I adopt a decolonizing perspective influenced by postcolonial literature and social science. I also adopt a reflexive perspective throughout the thesis. Rather than claiming an objective stance, I interrogate my own biography and views as they relate to the subject of my study. Rather than claim this is a study I performed alone and with complete control, I recognize that people in Coto Brus collaborated in creating this work, shaping my research experience, and influencing its final form through direction, sustained dialogue, and contemporaneous interpretation.

E. SIGNIFICANCE AND CONTRIBUTIONS

"The role of art is to uncover the questions which answers hide." – James Baldwin

This thesis works to deconstruct myths of Costa Rican environmental history and present, in their place, detailed personal accounts and historical data. Myths as monolithic as 'Costa Rica as Ecoparadise' or 'Colonization as Deforestation' demand deconstruction and are vulnerable to theoretical interventions at the middle range of speech, direct signification, and personal recollection (Barthes, 1972; Johnson, 2010, pp. 50-102). While the literature on Costa Rican environments is voluminous in Biology, Ecology, and other natural sciences, the subjective experiences of Costa Ricans engaged in relationships with the land are not well studied at this middle range. **(1)** Therefore, this study provides some of the context, information, and perspectives required to practice environmental sustainability and restoration in a way that is congruent with people's needs, desires, and values rather than relying on simple narratives. It deconstructs dominant mythological narratives to show complex underlying realities. I invite readers to consider new strategies and possibilities for conservation based on a thick description of Costa Rican experiences.

It is possible to create conservation programs which succeed environmentally and fail socially. However, I am personally committed to including people in environmental governance in a way that is democratic and culturally sensitive. Therefore, **(2)** this study contributes to the theory, methodology, and data which is needed for the imagining and practice of a global social-democratic environmentalism based in Latin America.

Finally, **(3)** this study makes narratives of individual rural Costa Ricans accessible to US academia. The voices of Costa Ricans are often excluded from discussions about the environment in Costa Rica. For example, in an edited volume consisting of eighteen studies, there are few direct quotes from Costa Ricans and no extended narratives from a Costa Rican perspective even in chapters based on ethnographic fieldwork (Fletcher et al., 2020).

These three goals are necessary contributions. First, because the triumphalist tone in much of the literature regarding Costa Rican environmental engagement risks obscuring real problems with the ways that conservation is implemented in the country (Fletcher et al., 2020, pp. 10-13). Second, because a non-democratic approach to environmental governance will create significant social disruptions which could, in turn, make such governance impossible or impractical, whereas a humanitarian and democratic environmentalism could address many of the major crises of our time. Third, because access to US academic institutions, the ability to publish in US academic journals, and the ability to represent themselves at international meetings such as the Conference of Parties (CoP) is extremely problematic for Central Americans and other marginalized people; this causes some narratives to be mobilized and others to become invisible (Gay-Antaki, 2020). I am leveraging my position within the elite space of US academia to represent Costa Rican perspectives (including my own), while being cognizant that I am also acting as a mediator and interpreter in my own right.

The concluding section of this thesis summarizes the conclusions I draw throughout the text and suggests avenues for future research. I argue that **(1)** Costa Rican relationships with the landscape in Coto Brus are mediated by a complex set of local and global factors

including prices of agricultural commodities on world markets, shifting perspectives on nature and the environment, post-war geopolitics, and the development of new technologies which make transportation and communication over rough terrain more feasible and efficient; it is not the isolated village of developmentalist mythologies.

I also argue **(2)** that people in Coto Brus inscribed their own identities on the landscape, shaped by global, national, and local concepts and sympathies. This modification of the landscape according to collective and personal values created a new set of circumstances which are currently addressed through developmentalist and conservation-oriented interventions, but which could also be addressed by revisiting, reconsidering, and possibly transforming the values which inform Costa Rican identities. Policies, governance, and community collaboration around environmental issues at the local, national, and international scales must grapple with questions of identity, aesthetics, and politics as well as the needs, preferences, desires, rhythms, and customs of animals, plants, bodies of water, materials, and landscapes.

F. OUTLINE OF THE THESIS

This thesis is divided into six chapters. The first is this introduction.

Chapter 2 describes key parts of the theoretical framework I used in this study. It introduces political ecology perspectives and three related concepts: development, conservation, and neoliberalization of nature.

Chapter 3 discusses my methodological approach. This includes historical and field methods. After describing my methods, this chapter examines my use of a postcolonial and autoethnographic authorial perspective.

Chapter 4 gives background information on Costa Rica and the study region, Coto Brus. It gives a general historical overview to provide context necessary for understanding the forest transition. It describes the role of Costa Rican and Italian colonization organizations in the settlement of Coto Brus. Then, it discusses post-1948 Costa Rican policy as it related or relates to colonization, conservation, and reforestation. Finally, it focuses closely on one specific law, Forest Law 7575, and discusses the Costa Rican state's successes and limitations in influencing land use in Costa Rica.

Chapter 5 consists of the narrative vignettes constructed from interviews I performed in Coto Brus. After introducing the vignettes, I present and analyze the narratives. I place these vignettes in conversation with my theoretical framework and methodological approach. I discuss relationships between personal and collective identity and landscapes in Costa Rica.

Chapter 6 ends the thesis with a list of conclusions. I make several related statements: **(1)** development (colonization) has local and global causes; **(2)** conservation also has local

and global causes; **(3)** Therefore, local, and global factors must me mediated effectively to make conservation a possible choice at the scales of individual and community human-environment relationships.

I argue that the transformations of the environment through landscaping and construction can tell us something about Costa Rican identities, and that the variety of architectural and land use styles in Coto Brus represent the diversity of peoples and values in the region. I write that styles of landscape and construction create proximity, sympathy, political economies and ecologies, and call this effect *aesthetogenesis* (Soleri, 1981). Finally, I suggest that the positive affects produced by visiting forested sites can be a powerful force for promoting their conservation. Late capitalism is highly effective at producing and meeting desires: this could be leveraged into the neoliberalization of nature, which monetizes positive affects to make conservation an economically rational choice. Or these circuits of desire and fulfilment could operate outside of market logics, and create political ontologies of "Post-capitalist Desire" (Fisher, 2021).

CHAPTER 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: CRITIQUE AND DECOLONIZATION THROUGH POLITICAL ECOLOGY

"*Si me dijeran, pide un deseo,*

Preferiría un rabo de nube:

Un torbellino en el suelo,

Y una gran ira que sube:

Un barredor de tristezas,

Un aguacero en venganza --

Que cuando escampe:

parezca nuestra esperanza."

- Silvio Rodriguez. "Rabo de Nube."[5]

[5] "If I had a wish,
I would ask for a scrap of cloud:
A little whirlwind on the ground,
A great mounting rage:
A landslide of sorrows,
A downpour of vengeance --
And when it clears;
Our hope would appear."

(My translation.)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bcoTl3j5Nz4

A. INTRODUCTION TO POLITICAL ECOLOGY PERSPECTIVES

This thesis uses a theoretical framework drawn from political ecology, which itself draws from critical theory, geography, and anthropology. It fits within a broader context of decolonizing philosophies. Here, I will describe Political Ecology (PE) as a theoretical framework. Then, I will discuss two interlocking theoretical and normative perspectives from PE scholars Paul Robbins and Enrique Leff which inform this thesis. Finally, I will define several concepts which are employed throughout this text: conservation, development, and neoliberalization of nature.

Political Ecology is an interdisciplinary field of study that uses a combination of historical and field-based methods to examine human-environment relationships and their political manifestations. It emerged in the second half of the 20th century as a response to the popularity of apolitical and anti-human formulations of environmental problems such as Malthus' theory of population (Malthus, 1798). It critiques the supposedly neutral or objective character of knowledge production, especially the production of environmental knowledge, while using mixed methods to describe human relationships with environments and the ways they are mediated socially, economically, and politically (Perreault et al., 2020, pp. 4-8).

The field has five main characteristics. **(1)** It is a response to "the encounter between Marxism and contemporary environmental questions" and an attempt to "develop a specifically geographical Marxism, inventing and refining concepts and approaches such as dependency theory, [and] uneven development." Although Political Ecology is not

deterministically Marxist, “the debt and assumptions are clear: can we imagine a work of political ecology framed in terms of neoclassical economics?” (*Ibid.*, p. 622).

(2) Political Ecology is characterized by an explicitly normative and critical stance wherein authors often side with subjects they perceive as poor, marginalized, or less powerful. It is “a form of critique” (*Ibid.*, p. 622). This normative commitment affects the methods employed by political ecologists, which draw on cultural geography and anthropology as well as history and ecology (*Ibid.*, p. 4). Political ecology questions the ways that dominant concepts and narratives about human-environment relationships – such as conservation and development – obscure important aspects of environmental change: its causal factors, motivations, consequences, and potential responses. It is empirical, interpretive, and critical at once. “Questions of meaning are as important as questions of fact” in PE (*Ibid.*, p. 623); further, it “extends beyond academic enquiry,” to describe and support the “knowledge claims and political practices advanced by people, many of them poor, who are subject to rationalities of resource management, environmental projects, and/or pollution to which they do not consent” (*Ibid.*, p. 3).

(3) PE is shaped by feminist theory and politics. Political Ecology examines the complex ways power articulates itself in social and geographical space through differences of categories, bodies, and identities; and how these conceptual sets imprint themselves on landscapes. This theoretical orientation has “led directly to a broader engagement with questions of how identities [are] socially produced [articulated, and managed,] and with what consequences for environmental politics and outcomes” (*Ibid.*, p. 622).

(4) PE is "characterized by largely qualitative and interpretive methods and methodologies," and **(5)** it is "attentive to historical and social context." The PE approach to methodology is linked to this attentiveness; it is also practical and based on experience. "Studying marginalized people, political ecologists realize that the official records tell only a partial story: what is often at stake is precisely the facts and motivations of [people] … the grievances and desires that give rise to social movements, and so on" (*Ibid.*, p. 623).

Future directions for Political Ecology include fostering dialogues between scholars of different national, disciplinary, and linguistic backgrounds to mediate the colonial and siloing influence of Cold-war regional studies programs; engaging theory with the practice of politics and environmental work more directly; and speculating boldly about the future, "[to] suggest, endorse, and contribute to the development of specific visions and plans" (*Ibid.*, pp. 626-627).

Given these characteristics and future directions, one can state that political ecology is "an epistemological project" designed to "shatter comfortable and simplistic truths about the relationship between society and its natural environment," and also the ways such truths are produced and validated (*Ibid.*, p. 5). The field is not characterized as much by method, subject, social or temporal scale, as by a "set of commitments that are held in common," including "a theoretical commitment to critical social theory and a post-positivist understanding of nature and the production of knowledge about it" (*Ibid.*, p. 7). PE also applies this epistemological critique to the truths of social science. This is a major link between PE and critical theory.

Because the role of critical theory in PE is "constitutive," its study methods and modes of interpretation skew away from the mainstream and towards the radical and experimental. It is "trickster science" (*Ibid.*, p. 7). After decades of transformation which failed to result in a more unitary definition or standardized approach, "one can say that political ecology continues to be radically experimental … mixing conceptual genres and methodological registers in an effort to understand and transform socio-ecological relations" (*Ibid.,* p. 9).

Political Ecology is "closely associated with radical scholarship and a rejection of positivist approaches to social relations and environmental science." Because of these normative and theoretical commitments, political ecology is characterized by a "methodological commitment to in-depth, direct observation involving qualitative research … underpinning these methodological commitments is a conviction that there are vital elements of nature-society relations that cannot be read from a social, spatial [or socio-temporal] distance" (*Ibid.*, p. 7). The normative and theoretical commitments of PE encourage mixed and experimental methods, both in the production and presentation of knowledge.

The editors of the Routledge PE handbook paraphrase Marx to say, "the point of political ecology is not merely to understand the world but to change it" (*Ibid.*, p. 8). The framework of PE provides tools to analyze and critique relationships within society and between societies and environments, and it also provides conceptual tools which are useful in understanding the collection, production and interpretation of knowledge which is used for

such analyses. It is a liberatory framework where theory, critique, praxis, analysis, transformation, and adaptation are put into close relationships.

In this thesis, PE works as a field to contain disparate theoretical orientations, modes and objects of inquiry, and a complex engagement with power relationships as they effect and effected the processes and phenomena under study as well as the process of the study, its interpretation, and my drafting of the results. The semi-structured, open-ended, and experimental framework of PE allows for this reflexivity on multiple registers. It is useful for connecting ideas and practices related to the environment, development, and conservation in Costa Rica to dynamic currents of global thought represented through universities, planning agencies, governmental and inter-governmental bodies.

The next sections will describe PE perspectives in more detail and define the concepts of development, conservation, and neoliberalization of nature.

B. POLITICAL ECOLOGY PERSPECTIVES

This section will describe two interrelated perspectives from PE scholars, which inform the theory and method employed in this thesis as well as my political and ethical commitments as a scholar and author.

I. Robbins: The Trickster Science

Geographer Paul Robbins presents a view of PE as "The Trickster Science" in a chapter of the Routledge Political Ecology Handbook (Robbins, 2020, pp. 89-101). He asks how a field "which accepts almost any method, and a great many concepts … [can] sustain an identity?" and answers by comparing PE to an archetypal figure of world mythology, Trickster. Robbins argues that PE advances empirical explanations of social and ecological change, "freely adopting the methods and conceptual apparatus of related research traditions, while constantly critiquing and undermining the projects of these other fields" (*Ibid.*, p. 89).

PE is a discipline for "mischievous subversives," within academia. PE seeks to "produce a 'moment of chaos' in which the world and our understanding of it are reversed, inverted, and reconstructed." By adopting and subverting "the forms and positions of others" PE as Trickster "schemes new forms to outwit those around [them]" (*Ibid.*, pp. 92-93). Like critical theory, Trickster recognizes the productive power of uncertainty: "[they] make us sensitive to the inevitability and power of contradiction" (*Ibid.,* p. 98).

Rather than simply puerile troublemaking, Robbins sees this mischievous relationship with truth and authority as a productive practice of insight and innovation. Robbins points out that, while Trickster is sometimes a "boastful clown or jester, occasionally acts as a thief, and constantly undermines haughty heroes … [they] also protect the weak, transport the seeds of culture, and provide gifts for humanity … either way, Trickster rarely plays by the rules … Coyote brings fire; Spider ends famine; Raven brings light" (*Ibid.*, pp. 92-93).

Trickster can understand problems from several vantage points and produce new ways to consider by borrowing various methods, forms, and perspectives hermeneutically. In turn, these multiple and varied perspectives can produce new and diverse social and ecological imaginaries, new "ways to consider," and drive social and environmental adaptation and transformation (Hernandez, Forthcoming). For new imaginaries to be effective rather than fanciful, they must have some *congruence* with the complex systems of the material and social worlds.[6] Therefore, another advantage of adopting diverse perspectives and methods, even when they seem contradictory, is that doing so allows researchers to more "precisely map the power-laden source and circulations of discourses and legitimate authority" (2020, p. 91). PE scholars can advance concepts or conclusions in several styles and registers and incorporate reflexivity in considering what kinds of truth claims and discourses are conferred power and legitimacy, and in which spaces.

[6] "EQUITY AND CONGRUENCE: The well being of society depends on two factors: equity and congruence. Equity is a social necessity … congruence is proto-human, human and ultra-human. It is the necessary co-ordination of the many factors performing reality, the reality that developed from an unmanned universe into a manned universe and that might be moving toward an ultra-human reality. Without congruence the structure of things falls apart … Congruence is ecological, that is to say, it is total, or it is not. Where it is not, it does not let anything else be." Soleri, P. (1973). *The bridge between matter & spirit is matter becoming spirit : the arcology of Paolo Soleri* (1st ed.). Anchor Books.

Robbins uses the term *mimesis* to describe the free adaptation and incorporation of methods and perspectives from other sciences into Political Ecology. This term means, roughly, imitation, and it is closely linked to theories of representation. The literary critic Erich Auerbach (Auerbach & Trask, 1957) discussed *mimesis* as the key to the development of techniques to represent reality in the Western world. Crucially, Auerbach argues that representation requires direct and interpreted observations — this principle drove the artistic production and scientific inquiry of Greek and Renaissance artists specifically, of whom the supreme example is surely Leonardo da Vinci.

Da Vinci taught that art, design, and knowledge must be produced directly from the observation of nature in order to avoid reproducing errors by copying masters (Cooper, 1965; da Vinci & Richter, 1989; Keizer et al., 2016; Vasari & Bull, 1987). This maxim relates to one of the core principles of deconstruction as expressed by Jacques Derrida: "let us not be accused, here, of forcing words or things. Let us, rather, read [observe]" (1994, p. 115). These three points – Auerbach's about representation, da Vinci's about observation, and Derrida's about deconstruction – show the utility of *mimesis*: more than a game or form of play, it is also a way to observe, interpret, analyze, and represent.

Robbins discusses an important set of volumes by Fairhead and Leach which demonstrate the importance of these artistic, philosophical, and deconstructive principles in the theoretical, empirical, and critical work of PE (Fairhead & Leach, 1996, 1998). Fairhead and Leach showed that deforestation in Africa was greatly exaggerated by scholars who relied on chains of citation without critical reflection. They did this by "carefully dissecting surveys, remote sensed analyses, and historical records … each of [which] … rested upon

previous sets of statistics and categories, all inherited from earlier researchers … back to shaky imperial foundations and before" (2020, p. 92). They concluded that the uncritical citation of others had reproduced errors which should have been avoided through direct observation. They proved this further by conducting their own studies with "time-series photography and satellite imagery," which produced "straightforward" findings "now widely recognized across multiple academic fields and disciplines as well as in planning circles … [that] forest cover loss is grossly overstated and many areas ham-fistedly regulated as losing forest cover, are actually *gaining* it, owing to local cultural practice and community decision making" (2020, pp. 91-92).

While da Vinci might have said something like, 'to create, we must observe,' Robbins states that "to behave ethically, we must explain" (*Ibid.*, p.98); the case of Fairhead and Leach shows that all of these elements need to come together in empirically rigorous and ethically defensible PE work. However, Robbins argues that "any attention to ethics and justice necessarily brings with it the need to interrogate and undermine such explanation itself … [PE] abides, scheming new ways to extend, mimic, adopt, and upend the scientific fields around it in pursuit of more just outcomes" (*Ibid.*, p. 98). Like art employs *mimesis* in order to understand nature **and** express the values and meet the needs of society, PE employs *mimesis* in order to "empirically explain important outcomes in land change, human vulnerability [etc.]" **and** reflect critically on the way such explanations are produced, represented, legitimized, or rejected: "but this need or drive is inevitably accompanied by the necessary counter-urge to advance skepticism about any such explanation" (2020, p. 97). It may seem foolish; but, to continue the Trickster analogy, maybe political ecologists are simply *crazy like a fox*.

II. Leff: Conceptualizing the Environment

Paul Robbins proposes a Trickster ethic of Political Ecology as a way to adopt, mimic, and disrupt the truth claims of other sciences, and environmental sociologist Enrique Leff (Leff, 2020, pp. 64-75) argues that such creative deconstruction opens the way for thinking new political epistemologies and ontologies of the environment which should be deployed and mobilized in the production of new forms of social appropriation of, or integration with, nature; "the reconstruction of sustainable eco-cultural territories;" the proliferation of diverse "lifeworlds" and "ways of being-in-the-world" (*Ibid.*, 68-70). In the Trickster analogy, this side of PE is the animal ancestor when it brings creative gifts, like fire, to the people. After undermining accepted truths and ways of producing knowledge through "deconstruction," PE points the way towards political geographies and ontologies of difference where varying and diverse forms of truth, nature, knowledge, and society could comingle, "hybridize," and "reterritorialize" (*Ibid.*, p. 73).

In this sense, PE is as much a philosophical and normative project of discursive and realist politics as it is an empirical and post-positivist science of description. The project of PE is, therefore, not only to describe the ways environments are intervened upon, appropriated, and managed through political economies, but also to engage in the politicization of nature informed by regional, cultural, and personal values: to construct a "process of politicization … an ontology of difference," which surveys and engages in "the deployment of the Real oriented by existential meanings and mobilized by cultural rights for

the construction of diverse lifeworlds" (*Ibid.*, p. 68). For Leff, the "the field of political ecology is moving toward the inquiry and practice of *political ontology*" (*Ibid.*, p. 70).

Leff argues that "one of the keys to the deconstruction of the theories that dominate the field of environment – and political ecology – is the epistemological understanding of the concept of environment." In contrast to "economic and developmental theories" where the environment "is thought of as [storehouse,] an externality and cost," or the biological and anthropological understandings of environment as "the environment of an organism" or the "cultural organization [of nature]," Leff conceptualizes the environment as "the exteriority of the normal paradigms of science … the 'other' of the *logocentrism* of science" (*Ibid.*, p. 68).

This epistemological conceptualization of the environment as that which (does, can, or should) lie outside of the appropriation and organization of scientific, economic, and governmental gazes invites scholars to think critically about attempts to integrate environmental concerns into existing world-systems such as capitalist representative democracy. Rather than accepting the "'normality' of economics and political economy," Leff's concept of environment challenges scientific, political, and epistemological paradigms to move outside of themselves into the space of otherness or alterity represented by 'nature;' this gives PE a "*strategic and prospective purpose*" in setting the stage for future, environmentally relational, radical imaginaries, and political movements (*Ibid.*, p. 70). Leff also suggests that PE studies should continue to focus on tropical rural places as the "space [where] environmental problems are radicalized as territorial conflicts, where disputes over modes and rights to appropriation of nature are played out … and where possibilities are open for constructing new, negentropic ways of (re)producing life" (*Ibid.*, pp. 71-72).

Leff provides a powerful epistemological, political, and ontological argument for the continued study of rural human-environment relationships in the Global South and the ways that people conceptualize such relationships. Such studies will allow scholars to better understand "regional political ecologies," and the values, motivations, and lifeways at stake in their deployment (*Ibid.,* p. 67).

This thesis is an experiment in bringing the critical epistemology, perspectivist and political-ontological commitments expressed by Robbins, Leff, and Perreault et al., to bear on understanding and interpreting the historical events which led to Coto Brus, and Costa Rica's, turn from agricultural colonization to conservation. It does this by representing and interpreting personal and historical narratives within the framework of analysis I outline in this chapter. My interlocutors presented their ideas and viewpoints regarding the history of Coto Brus' colonization, its effects, current issues and policies, and future possibilities. From these presentations, I drew out arguments or ideas which respond to this thesis' themes of colonization, conservation, and neoliberalization. Particularly, several of my interlocutors argued for integrating people with conserved landscapes rather than restricting access, and for addressing livelihood pressures as a crucial step in protecting and restoring forested landscapes.

C. CONCEPTUALIZING CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT

I had two experiences which profoundly affected my understanding of conservation and development. The first happened in Costa Rica when I was in high school. My cohort travelled to a small settlement called Tortuguero to observe and learn from biologists and ecologists working to conserve the habitat and reproductive viability of leatherback turtle populations. At that time, my (somewhat skeptical) understanding of this issue centered around poaching of the turtles and their eggs by locals: as far as I know, this is a common shared belief in Costa Rica. My class traveled by bus from the Central Valley to the eastern coast, where we boarded boats and proceeded to the conservation site.

When I stepped down from the bus, I stopped to smoke a cigarette and a black man with dreadlocks came over to chat. We introduced ourselves and when I told him the reason for my travels, he explained to me that he spends part of every year working odd jobs and raising crops; during the other part he boards a raft and lives on the various bodies of water and coasts which traverse the region.

During that time, he relies on many food sources including leatherback turtle eggs. He told me that this is a traditional practice that goes back as far as anyone can discern. ‘So,’ he asked me, ‘what do you think the problem is? Do you think it’s something that people like me have done for a long time? Or is it something more recent?’ He said that he saw many people coming from other places to address the turtle issue without taking time to understand the cultures, realities, needs, and concerns of the locals.

Over time, I have thought about and reinterpreted his point as having been, that transformations or adaptations of traditional lifeways, and not necessarily the lifeways themselves, produce the need for conservation. In other words, development practices which displace and disrupts traditional practices, while creating novel human-environment relationships, create the necessity for conservation. His remarks stayed with me for many years and provoked formulation of and much reflection on questions which I now recognize as central concerns in PE: what produces the need for conservation? And is 'development' the same as 'improvement'? These questions will be addressed in the next section of this chapter.

The next moment happened when I was working on restoration ecology projects while studying at Santa Barbara City College (SBCC) and the University of California at Santa Barbara (UCSB). My mentors and employers, Karen Flagg and Don Hartley, taught Restoration Ecology (RE) at SBCC and through an organization called "Growing Solutions Restoration Ecology and Education Institute." During one of the theoretical lectures they would give before starting fieldwork, Don asked, 'What do we restore to? What do we conserve?' He noted that any idea of 'natural,' 'native,' ecologies formed without human intervention is simply ahistorical, and in the case of Southern California, where we were working, erases the extensive modifications of the landscape that the indigenous Chumash-speaking and other peoples of the area engaged in.

The decision of what to 'restore' is always based on values, perspectives, politics, and competing rationalities; even without considering the legal and institutional frameworks which structure RE as a practice, or the economic, technological, social, and environmental

factors which limit the possibilities and success of any RE project. In fact, RE is about imagining the ecologies of the future, even though it uses the term 'restoration' in a way that implies a return to the past.

My experience working in RE demonstrated to me that conservation responds to specific historical events, and that conservation and development are causally and discursively linked. The changes often referred to as 'development' create a need for others labeled 'conservation' or 'restoration.' In that vein, colonization, development, and conservation are tightly linked in this thesis; throughout the thesis I argue that **colonization is a recent historical mode or form of development in Coto Brus.**

I. Escobar and Li: Conceptualizing Development

Like the concept of 'environment,' development and conservation demand nuanced definition. In this thesis, 'development' is used to refer to directed processes which increase the complexity, intensity, scale, or permanence of human activities in geographic environments; it is also used in a more specific and historical way to refer to formal projects of organization, planning, governance, policy, and international coordination which transform social and productive relationships among people and between people and environments.

This section will provide context for understanding the history and concept of development and the multiple ways it is used in social science discourses. This contextual understanding of the term will make the ways I deploy it in this thesis more legible. I will discuss two conceptualizations of development, by anthropologists Arturo Escobar and Tania

Li. I chose these because Escobar makes a convincing argument that development can be well understood through an anthropology of modernity, and Li expands Escobar's discourse-centered explanation with a focus on practice and motivations.

a. Escobar: Encountering Development

First published in 1995, Arturo Escobar's book, *Encountering Development* (Escobar, 2012), problematized the concept of development and the ways development discourse is used to justify interventions in the global South. It is a key work in development studies.

The following paragraphs will interact with Escobar's treatment of the concept *development* in three modes or moments: **(1)** in the anthropology of modernity, **(2)** in the problematization of poverty, and **(3)** in terms of economics, space, and power.

(1) First, Escobar argues that the anthropological concept *development* has been at the core of multi-billion-dollar schemes of governance and organization since it was introduced to governing discourses in the US by President Harry Truman and at the United Nations (UN) through the Department of Social and Economic Affairs after World War Two (WWII). During the 1950s, development was conceived as a project of "[globally] replicating … the features that characterized the 'advanced' societies of the time – high levels of industrialization and urbanization, technicalization of agriculture, rapid growth of material production and living standards, and the widespread adoption of modern education and cultural values." This project amounted to "a total restructuring of 'underdeveloped'

societies" (*Ibid.*, p. 4) in part by using the methodological tools and conceptual apparatus of anthropology to make surveys possible and interventions justifiable.

Development, then, is a "historically singular experience, the creation of a domain of thought and action … an efficient apparatus that systematically relates forms of knowledge and techniques of power" (*Ibid.*, p. 10). Its historical specificity and imposing, interventionist nature is due to the fact that development draws from a single tradition of thought: "[it] has relied exclusively on one knowledge system, namely, the Western one" (*Ibid.*, p.13).

Escobar cites a volume titled *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter* edited by Talal Asad (Asad, 1973) to express his and other scholars' concern that "'development today, as colonialism did in a former epoch, makes possible the kind of human intimacy on which anthropological fieldwork is based, but insures that such intimacy should be one sided and provisional' (17) even if the contemporary subjects move and talk back" (2012, p.14). He goes on to argue that the encounter between development studies and anthropology should "question the limitations of the West's self-critique, as currently practiced in much of contemporary theory," and quotes decolonial scholar V.Y. Mudimbe's call for a "'discursive insurrection, by third world people … in relation to the 'sovereignty of the very European thought from which we wish to disentangle ourselves'" (*Ibid.*, p. 17).

Escobar argues that economy is the central focus of development theories, and that the modern economy "must be seen as an institution composed of systems of production, power, and signification … [the economy is] a cultural production, a way of producing human subjects and social orders of a certain kind," building on the classic Durkheimian theory which defines society as the management of flows of reproduction, materials, and

signification within and among human groups (Clastres & Hurley, 1989; Durkheim et al., 2001; Durkheim et al., 2014). Therefore, contemporary capitalist markets, which engage in management of these social flows, should be understood in a wider frame of reference which Escobar calls "the anthropology of modernity" (2012, p. 61).

Next, **(2)** Escobar argues that fears about communism and what was then termed the 'population problem,' became entwined with development strategies during the 1950s to produce a new geopolitical/strategic orientation known as the 'war on poverty;' "doctrines of national security" were "intimately linked to development strategies" (*Ibid.*, pp.34-35). Development became a totalizing (governing) concept which used knowledge produced through scholarship to organize relationships between capital formation, programs for culture and education, national planning agencies and international organizations such as the World Bank (WB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF) (*Ibid.*, p. 40). This organized set of relationships distributed capital, technical expertise, and access to exchanges of knowledge based on values of Western modernity.

The war on poverty "proceeded by creating [concepts about] … the 'illiterate,' the 'underdeveloped,' the 'malnourished,' 'small farmers,' or 'landless peasants,'" whose problems and existence development programs could target, "treat and reform" (*Ibid.*, p. 41). However, Escobar argues that the war on poverty and the discourse of development excluded the very people they were meant to help (*Ibid.*, p. 44). A key way people were excluded was by the removal "of all problems from the political and cultural realms and [the] recast[ing of] them in terms of the apparently more neutral realm of science" (*Ibid.*, p. 45). By removing social problems from the realms of politics and culture to that of science, development

discourses implied that there are 'correct,' 'neutral,' and 'technical' solutions to the problems of poverty which should be imposed without political negotiation.

These discourses also obscured the true causes of the negative consequences of development, such as deforestation. This is a central argument in my thesis. Escobar discusses anthropologist James Ferguson's book, *The Anti-politics Machine* (Ferguson, 1994) which argues that practitioners of development invented an ideal target for their interventions: the rural 'village.' Ferguson argues that "this construction relied on three main features: portraying the country as an aboriginal economy cut off from world markets; picturing its population as peasant and its agricultural production as traditional; and assuming that the country is a national economy and that it is the task of the national government to develop the country." Often, the problems of this fictional village are construed "in terms of natural limits, topography, physical space, and social reproduction, calling for solutions such as improved management, new technologies, and population control" (2012, p. 47). The case study of Coto Brus in this thesis provides one example of a rural place which is decidedly unlike the mythical village of development discourses.

This leads to the next point, **(3)** the ways that development is conceptualized in relation to space, economics, power, and capital. As discussed in the previous point, one way development theories, and postwar exchanges generally, linked spaces was by connecting scholars in the Global North to subjects for study in the Global South. This linkage was both discursive and practical, as it distributed opportunity and prestige along with knowledge: "to be involved with the poor countries provided the scholar with a foothold in the field of study

that would assuredly expand and endure" (John Kenneth Galbraith quoted in Escobar 2012, p. 57).

Development also linked spaces together through, first, massive investment in poor countries through institutions like the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and then through the infamous Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) enacted by governments in the Global South in collaboration with the World Bank (WB) and International Money Fund (IMF) throughout the 1980s and 1990s (*Ibid.*, p. 57). These two phases of economic intervention produced the global ascendancy of neoliberal policies which is discussed in section E (this chapter) and in Chapter 3, sections D and E.

Finally, development distributed US power and market hegemonies throughout the newly interlinked spaces of the planet. Anthropologist James Scott discusses technologies which he calls "space-destroying," including all-season tires and roads, radio, air travel, and the widespread use of combustion engines and all-wheel, manual drive transmissions (Scott et al., 2009, pp. 10-11); these technologies experienced widespread adoption after 1948 and facilitated a new level of connectivity through which power could be dispersed and administrated. These technologies have allowed modern states, especially the USA, to address what anthropologist David Graeber called the problem of the "pretentious state:" the fact that it was very difficult for states throughout history to effectively distribute power through the spaces they claimed sovereignty over. Graeber argues that much of the power claimed by ancient states was at least partially fictive and mythological, and much more vulnerable, unstable, and negotiable than royal representations would suggest – claims of royal power, Graeber argues, often "only applied fully within a few dozen yards of the

monarch in any direction" (Graeber, 2004, p. 66). The Costa Rican state, which before 1948 had difficulty expanding its spatial presence, is a good example of a pretentious state which sought to improve its spread, legitimacy, prestige, and effectiveness through the adoption of space-destroying technologies.

To summarize, Escobar provides a coherent narrative of the evolution of the concept of development from WWII to 2012. However, his arguments focus on the discursive elements of development and, in my opinion, obscure the material processes and innovations which produce power in combination with discourse. In the updated preface, he argues that a "'promiscuous mixture' of capitalist hegemony and movement counterpowers" is creating a "steady decentering and displacement of the capitalist economy with the concomitant expansion of diverse forms of economy" (2012, xxix). These assessments are overoptimistic and ignore, for example, the way that 'movement counterpowers' are attacked through violent state and vigilante repressions (Wallace, 2014) and capitalist hegemonies continue to consolidate themselves through the increased securitization and integration of the First World through geopolitical and economic pacts such as the EU, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), North and Central American Free Trade Agreements (NAFTA and CAFTA), the Group of Eight [economic powers] (G8), and the improved articulation of private extractive enterprises, exemplified by the integrated private security and extraction-and-transportation infrastructures of modern oil companies (Ferguson, 2005)

Where Escobar writes, "'postcapitalist … means looking at the economy as made up of a diversity of capitalist, alternative capitalist, and noncapitalist practices," I wrote in the margins, "in what universe does capitalism encourage or even allow a diversity of systems?"

(2012, p. xxix). The narratives presented in this thesis made me consider whether the subsistence methods and limited cash economies described by my interlocutors should be considered alternative or non-capitalist and made me reconsider my earlier certainty. However, I argue that rather than alternative systems, these are constitutive but obscured elements of capitalism which can be described under the rubric of *cheap things* (Patel, 2017).

I found a valuable counterbalance to Escobar's postmodernist approach in the more grounded theoretical and descriptive work of Tania Li.

b. Li: The Will to Improve

Tania Li's book, *The Will to Improve*, balances attention between structural and individual scales carefully (Li, 2007). Li gives detailed descriptions of local life and motivations in the Sulawesi highlands of Indonesia and balances this with an exploration of the interlocking spheres of power which structure the country's realities more broadly. By doing so, she gives readers a concept of development which, in my opinion, is more holistic than Escobar's. Her conceptualization highlights practice as well as discourse; and she states in her conclusion that

> My study has focused on the rationale of improvement programs … I have also attended to the limits of government … [which seeks to administrate] men in their relations to floods, diseases, the quality of the soil, customs, and beliefs … to examine these limits I argued for combining attention to the rationale of improving schemes

> with the investigation of what happens when these schemes entangle the world they would regulate and transform (*Ibid.*, p. 270).

Beyond development as a historical, transnational, and geopolitical orientation, Li discusses improvement projects which are nationally and locally based, and which are often seen through a lens of "common sense." She links the terms development and improvement: development is the aggregate of structures and people who mobilize the "will to improve" in organized ways and with diverse sets of goals. Through Foucauldian political theory, she argues that "many schemes [which could be called development] appear not as an external imposition, but as the natural expression of everyday interactions of individuals and groups … the will to improve is situated in the field of power Michel Foucault termed 'government.'" This aspect of government "operates by educating desires and configuring habits … 'artificially arranging things so that [theoretically,] people, following only their own self-interest, *will do as they ought*'" (*Ibid.*, p. 5). Those who engage in improvement schemes as a form of governance, whom Li calls 'trustees,' "structure a field of possible actions" (*Ibid.*, p. 5) in their attempt to "balance all sorts of relations between 'men and things'" (*Ibid.*, p. 9).

In this thesis, there are examples of local individuals and groups taking part in improvement projects, as well as national and supra-national agencies which take part in development projects. According to Li's definition of governance, the factors which mediate human-environment relationships in Coto Brus are engaging in a form of governance. The narratives I present in Chapter 5 show, for example, that market conditions historically

shaped people's belief that coffee or cattle production are the 'appropriate' uses for land in Coto Brus; in other words, people's belief that they 'ought' to plant coffee or raise cattle. Whether there is potential for an alternative form of governance which determines what people ought to do in accordance with the needs, desires, and motivations of natural entities is a question I am raising in conversation with my interlocutors and with Li's concepts of development and governance.

Li links improvement, development, and governance through the figure of the 'trustee.' Trustees are people who "claim to know how others should live, to know what is best for them, to know what they need" (2007, p.4). Whether their aims "are benevolent, even utopian," (*Ibid.*, p.5) as Li – perhaps slyly – suggests is certainly up for debate. However, she convincingly argues that development or improvement schemes as directed by trustees are both influenced by Cold War geopolitics, as exemplified by "Walter Rostow's book, *The Stages of Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto*," (*Ibid.*, p.8) (Rostow, 1959) **and** that a "rush to identify hidden motives of profit or domination narrows analysis unnecessarily, making much of what happens in the name of improvement obscure." (2007, p.9).

Li distinguishes two practices which are critical to the work of trustees: "one is problematization, that is, identifying deficiencies that need to be rectified… The second is … 'rendering technical,' a shorthand for what is actually a whole set of practices … the practices of problematization and rendering technical are not separate" (2012, p. 7). Problems must be identified to be addressed, and problems are found according to where people are looking. Escobar argued that development discourses created problem populations like 'the

undeveloped;' Li also argues that problematization does not 'discover' 'objective problems.' It defines and targets problems according to the logic and assumptions of the observer. In this study, the main problems which were (are) addressed through discourses and practices of development and conservation are **(1)** livelihoods and **(2)** deforestation.

Li argues that "'rendering technical' confirms expertise and constitutes the boundary between those who are positioned as trustees, with the capacity to diagnose deficiencies in others, and those who are subject to expert direction. It is a boundary that has to be maintained and that **can be challenged**."[7] Next, she argues that 'rendering technical' necessarily "exclude[s] the structure of political-economic relations from their diagnoses and prescriptions [;] they focus more on the capacities of the poor than on the practices through which one social group impoverishes another" (*Ibid.*, p.7). In Coto Brus, trustees exist at local, national, and international levels.

To summarize, Li discusses the historical phenomenon of development programs within a broader concept she calls the will to improve. She argues that trustees place themselves in positions of authority based on their belief that they know better than others. At the same time, she emphasizes the commonsense and popular side of development and improvement schemes; when she discusses her critiques with a Sulawesi expert, he replied, "you may be right, but we still have to do something, **we can't just give up**"[8] (2007, p. 3). Li provides a broad and holistic way of understanding and analyzing development and improvement schemes, by balancing a willingness to accept ambiguously benevolent aims and complex results together at face value rather than assuming a grand narrative of either (1)

[7] I added bold emphasis to this quote.
[8] I added bold emphasis to this quote.

complete domination or (2) the absence of structural limitations in social choices. Her concepts can be clearly linked to historic environmental change in Coto Brus.

Li and Escobar provide valuable definitions for development. The discussion in this section has suggested that development can be understood at various scales and operates through different forms and institutions. Some development is locally motivated, and Li calls this *improvement*. Some is directed by national governments and takes the form of shaping possibilities for the 'administration of man and things;' this is a form of *governance*. At a global scale, development is a process which began after WWII and which involved the expansion and integration of spaces into markets, and markets into the new political-economic hegemony of the United States.

This thesis describes some of the ways development and conservation have taken shape in Coto Brus and Costa Rica. These cover the spectrum from individual or community-level projects of improvement to World Bank initiatives representing global financial and political entanglements. I contribute to the understanding of development by providing concrete examples of the way development is performed, discussed, remembered, and interpreted in Coto Brus.

D. NEUMANN: CONCEPTUALIZING NATURE CONSERVATION

Geographer Roderick Neumann historicizes the conceptualization of nature conservation in a chapter of the Routledge Political Ecology handbook (Neumann, 2020, pp. 391-405). His discussion focuses on state administrated Protected Areas (PAs) before introducing two new overlapping phases in the conceptualization of human-environment relationships: the "biodiversity phase," and the "neoliberalization of nature" (2020, pp. 391, 397). He also discusses four articulations of conservation: **(1)** spatial, **(2)** institutional, **(3)** through capital, **(4)** and through identities. I will describe Neumann's concept here as a reference point for my use of *conservation* throughout this thesis.

Neumann argues that the word *nature* is etymologically derived from the root *nasci*, "meaning to be born," and defines nature as a "meaning-rich assemblage of interconnecting identities, histories, geographies, ecologies, and politics" (*Ibid.*, p. 391). He writes that nature increasingly became a target of governance and national-identity formation after WWII, referencing "the earliest state efforts to establish national parks as symbols of national character and of nation-state origins rooted in nature" (*Ibid.*). Institutions designed to govern interactions between people and nature proliferated, PAs were established, and these activities produced "winners and losers" (*Ibid.)*, making conservation programs sites of conflict and negotiation: conservation, like development, involves politics at many scales.

After giving this brief history, Neumann asks "when we speak of nature conservation, what is it, exactly, that is feared will be lost … how does nature conservation relate to the emergence and development of the modern nation-state … what is won and lost and who

wins and loses with the rise of modern governance institutions of nature conservation?" (*Ibid.*, p. 392).

Next, Neumann discusses four articulations of conservation. **(1)** Conservation is articulated in space primarily through the practice of territorialization, which Neumann defines as "centralized, state-led processes of spatial demarcation for the purposes of controlling and regulating people and nature" (*Ibid*.).[9] This process is exemplified by the creation of PAs, which Neumann also describes as "conservation enclosures" which make resources and people "'legible' to the centralized political authority" (*Ibid.*, p. 393). He suggests that "another significant line of inquiry examines the [social,] technological and scientific practices that facilitate boundary making and the spatialization of nature" (*Ibid.*). **In this study, I have grouped the socio-technological and territorializing processes of spatializing nature in Coto Brus under the label of *colonization*.**

(2) Conservation is articulated through institutions. Neuman argues that "a critical understanding of the state as a totalizing institution is essential to any political-ecological analysis of nature conservation" (*Ibid.*, p. 394). He introduces the terms *state nature* and *political forests* to indicate the way that deployments of power are justified or mobilized by reference to nature and conservation. Relatedly, Neumann discusses sovereignty as it is entangled with exchanges of nature-based commodities, "transboundary protected areas," (TBPAs) and other multi-lateral projects of environmental governance.

[9] This is a useful definition for Neumann's scope, which focuses on states, but a broader anthropological definition of *territorialization* should include non- and para-state practices for administering territories. In this thesis, *territorialization* does not refer to state practices exclusively.

(3) Nature and Conservation are articulated through capital as the "neoliberalization of nature" which places an idealized "assumption of the self-interested rational actor" at the center of an apparatus which includes "speculative financing, derivative markets, and new efforts to commodify nature" (*Ibid.*, p. 397). Neumann suggests, following scholars Achille Mbembe and James Ferguson, that nature conservation and "neoliberal reforms affect state sovereignty" (*Ibid.*, p. 395). In Chapter 3, PES is discussed as a realization of the neoliberalization of nature in Costa Rica.

Finally, Neumann discusses another aspect of conservation which is of critical importance in this thesis; **(4)** the articulation of identity through nature and conservation. Neumann cites PE Geographer Juanita Sundberg, whose "research question from her ethnographic work at a Guatemalan PA captures political ecology's agenda perfectly: 'how is conservation-in-the-making constitutive of *identities-in-the-making*?'" (*Ibid.*) (Sundberg, 2004, p. 43). PE Geographer Megan Ybarra similarly interrogates the discursive links between nature and identities, for example between the concepts, 'forest,' 'jungle,' 'squatter,' and 'indigenous;' this thesis adds an important identity to the web: '***pionero,***' or colonist (*Ibid.*, p. 399).

Figure 1: Los Pioneros al Pionero

This statue stands at the center of Coto Brus' regional capital, San Vito de Java. It is on the grounds of the Dante Alighieri Italian Cultural Center and memorializes the colonists or pioneros of SICA (Sociedad Italiana de Colonización Agricola) and the Costa Rican pioneros who aided them. Notice that the colonist carries a machete and also wears a wristwatch: this is emblematic of Coto Brus' sometimes surreal layering of spaces and times. He is flanked by Italian and Costa Rican flags, but not the more afro-indigenous or Caribbean red, gold, and green flag of the canton. Author's photograph.

Environmental consciousness is central to Costa Rica's socio- and geopolitical role on the world stage. Particularly, Costa Rica was a pioneer in the development and implementation of PES and is touted by the World Bank as a sustainable development success story. This discussion is continued in the next section; in Chapter 3, Section E; and throughout this thesis.

E. THE NEOLIBERALIZATION OF NATURE

PE Geographer Karen Bakker (Bakker, 2020, pp. 446-456) discusses the way that markets and market proxies "have been deployed as mechanisms of environmental governance at multiple scales;" she calls this the 'neoliberalization of nature' (*Ibid.*, p. 446). She calls neoliberalization a "process of reforms and ideological transformations … to implement the doctrine of neoliberalism," which claims that "market exchange should serve as a guide for all human action," and which emerged out of conservative academia, think tanks, and radical governments in the late 20th century (2020, p. 447). In other words, neoliberalization means making the concept of neoliberalism a political and economic reality.

The neoliberalization of nature, like conservation and development, is both a discourse and practice. It involves "privatization; marketization; deregulation and re-regulation … market proxies in service provision … the exploitation of ecological and/or social fixes [distribution of costs and externalities] … it discursively legitimates … neoliberalism" (*Ibid.*).

As I will discuss in Chapter 3, shifts in discourses and ontologies of nature during the 1970s, including the Brundtland Report, set the stage for the neoliberalization of nature in Costa Rica and around the world by introducing the concept 'sustainable development,' and an apparent reconciliation between capitalism and environmentalism (*Ibid.*, p.448). This was followed by a rash of reforms throughout Latin America in the 1990s which cut social spending and market protections while opening ownership rights over land, social services, and commodities to corporations (*Ibid.*, p. 447).

In her discussion of neoliberalization of nature, Bakker suggests several directions for future research which are taken up in this thesis. One is as a detailed case-study which describes "specific processes at work in 'actually-existing neoliberalisms,' in part to understand the limits of the neoliberalization of nature (*Ibid.*, p. 449). Bakker suggests that research can explore the limits of the neoliberalization of nature as a reconciliation of nature and capitalism.

Next, Bakker writes that the limits of neoliberal nature point towards the limited reality of neoliberalism itself. For example, Bakker argues that studies "offer a convincing explanation of why neoliberalization might be subject to limits … it must be accompanied by an intensification of facilitative government activity, thereby countering widespread assumptions of the 'retreat of the state' under neoliberalism" (2020, p. 450). She suggests case studies which have a "closer engagement with a broader range of natures … [in order to] confront the political subjectivit[ies] of [differing] socio-natures." Costa Rica is a good site for such a study because it houses both neoliberal and democratic-socialist discourses and practices of governance, development, and conservation. The data presented in this thesis suggests, for example, that conservation successes in Costa Rica can be attributed to changing markets and decisive national legislation, causes which are obscured by the WB's narrative which attributes success to neoliberal schemes like PES.

G. SUMMARY AND RELEVANCE

This chapter described theoretical perspectives on nature, conservation, and neoliberalism within Political Ecology, Geography, and Anthropology. It also outlined some of the theoretical and political commitments of PE and situated them within broader academic conversations about development and conservation. I outlined some subsidiary questions which interact with the main research questions of this study and which merit discussion in the narrative and analytical chapters of this thesis (Chapters 3, 5, and 6).

This introduction is my thesis in current conversations within Geography, Anthropology, and PE. It discussed future directions for research in PE and mentioned ways that this thesis opens these research directions in Coto Brus.

The next chapter provides necessary historical and policy context and outlines some of the ways development, conservation, and neoliberalization of nature took form in Costa Rica, affecting domestic and international politics for the nation and everyday life for people in Coto Brus.

CHAPTER 3. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW AND POLICY CONTEXT

A. INTRODUCTION TO HISTORICAL OVERVIEW AND POLICY CONTEXT

This chapter describes the history of Costa Rica, with a focus on spatial patterns of settlement and production. After an overview of the territory's history from pre-Colombian times to 1948, I describe the settlement of Coto Brus, a process which was spurred by the 1948 establishment of the second Costa Rican Republic. The new state formulated programs to encourage the spatial consolidation of its territories and the formation of a new national identity. However, the colonization of the Southwest, including Coto Brus, was not caused only by discursive factors. Livelihood pressures also caused many people, including my grandfather and others of his generation, to move around the country in search of opportunities. The influences of the globalizing post-WWII economy and new technologies which allowed access to difficult terrains were instrumental in the colonization of Coto Brus. One of the particularities of Coto Brus is the importance of an Italian colony which became the municipal capital of the canton, San Vito de Java; it began as a globally interconnected space.

After describing the settlement of Coto Brus in a historical narrative structure, I outline post-1948 Costa Rican policies governing human-environment relationships under two conceptual formulations: colonization (a specific form of development) and conservation. Next, I focus on a specific law, Forestry Law 7575, and its implications for Costa Rican environments and economy. I use the discussion of this law's successes and failures to point out the Costa Rican state's role in development and conservation outcomes

in the country and point out that corruption and inability to collect revenues makes the regulatory environment in Costa Rica ineffective. I also link the drafting of this law and its realization through institutional funding agreements to the global development of the concept, *neoliberalization of nature*, through the Payments for Ecological Services program, of which Costa Rica is a global pioneer.

The Costa Rican state has adopted the role of *trustee* over its territory since at least 1948, governing based on its own claims to superior knowledge and practices. In other words, Costa Rica is a developmentalist state. Within this state and through its activities, ontologies like democratic socialism and capitalism, environment and ecology co-produce each other. However, the story of Costa Rica presented here shows that the state is not unitary and cannot act alone; rather, institutions and people make up the state, and many other structures and organizations exert influence on society and the environment in Costa Rica. All of these entities have aims and motivations which compete or negotiate, and such motivations are continually revised.

This line of argumentation shows the value of recording, representing, and exchanging perspectives for democratic governance, collaboration, and imagination in the country, since perspectives and values are what drive democratic politics, determine human-environment relationships, and transform the material realization of ecologies. I represent diverse perspectives in Chapter 5 through the drafting and presentation of ethnographic vignettes and their anthropological analysis. One issue pointed out in these vignettes is that, although Costa Rica has strong environmental protections, many people do not comply with them. Recording how people's understand and respond to environmental changes can help

scholars, planners, and community organizers understand what motivates people to follow or disregard environmental policies and recommendations.

B. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW: PRECOLOMBIAN TO MID-20TH CENTURY

Costa Rica has been home to sedentary, farming societies for as long as ten thousand years. As a bridge between North and South American cultures, Costa Rican populations grew yucca and sweet potato as well as basic grains like maize; the territory formed part of the mercantile routes linking Panama, Colombia, and Ecuador. The northern part of the country was influenced by Mesoamerican civilizations like the Maya and Aztec, while the southern peoples were related to the Chibcha of South America. This section describes Costa Rican history from that period to the mid-20th century, drawing from Costa Rican historical sources (Avendaño Flores, 2005; Molina Jiménez & Palmer, 2007).

By the Common Era chiefdom societies, which were called *cacicazgos* by the Spanish, were the primary organizational structures in Costa Rican territory. Populations were distributed into village communities and exhibited steady growth. Authority was wielded by a nobility united through matrilineal kinship ties and a belief in shared ancestors related to supernatural beings. Although intensive agriculture was practiced with the application of natural fertilizers, irrigation technologies, and swidden management, this management regime did not transform the landscape into anything resembling clear-cut European farmland (2007, pp. 1-14).

Estimates of population density in the pre-colonial period are currently unreliable; the framework for evaluating Central American archaeology which could provide such information is being overturned by recent LIDAR studies (Hansen et al., 2022). These show that Central America houses many urban assemblages which have remained inaccessible to and undiscovered by archaeologists due to the extremely difficult conditions of movement

and observation in tropical forests. Demographics and the state of the built environment in pre-Colombian Central America are not well understood. Therefore, it is possible that Costa Rica was more urbanized previously than currently believed. However, if such urbanization occurred in the region before Spanish colonization, it did not leave a legacy of deforestation like that produced in the 20th century.

Central America, including Costa Rica, was conquered by the Spanish between 1519 and 1525. This conquest was carried out through two "converging waves," which moved south from Mexico and North from Panama. Unlike the case in the conquests of Peru and Mexico, Central America was only gradually and incompletely integrated into the Spanish Empire, largely due to the fragmented nature of its indigenous structures of power. The transition from indigenous systems which traded within the Americas and produced for local consumption, to colonial systems of production which were oriented to extraction of natural resources, export of commodities, and the privatization of land, was "based on genocidal enslavement of the indigenous groups of Nicoya and Nicaragua, exported in huge numbers to the Antilles, Gulf of Honduras, Peru, and Panama" (*Ibid.*, p. 20).

The first colonial capital of Costa Rica was Cartago, founded by Vazquez de Coronado in 1562. From this time, the Central Valley would represent the Hispano-American ecumene, surrounded by the internal frontier of the Empire. In the next centuries, Costa Rica would largely be considered an unproductive backwater of Spain, typified by "*indios bravos*" (*"fierce Indians*") who were considered unconquerable and ungovernable. From 1570 to 1700, the territory went through three cycles of expanding and declining exports: mules, lard and leather from free ranging cattle, and cacao (*Ibid.*, 25-32).

The Spanish colonial project was based on beliefs that could not coexist with the material reality of tropical forests. The difficulty of moving through tropical terrains is discussed in the accounts of Spanish explorers and dramatized in the Werner Herzog film, *Aguirre.*[10] Legends I have heard in Costa Rica say the conquistadors abandoned many of their goods as they attempted to cross the isthmus; as they tired and their animals died, they were forced to abandon their treasures, and many died along the way themselves. Whether these legends are true, the volcanic mountain ranges which surround the Central Valley and occupy much of the terrain of Costa Rica make them believable. I have traversed the area between Sarapiquí and Quepos, on foot and raft, through a program called *Outward Bound*. Even with the infrastructural support of the program, including relationships with people who would feed us and let us rest in their houses, this traversal was extremely challenging – one guide fell out of a raft, and was carried through the rapids. They were evacuated due to a broken leg.

The Spanish conquest, such as it was, relied on a "strategy of appropriation" of mineral resources, an "extractive agriculture causing severe ecological degradation," slave labor and extensive herds of livestock. European colonists conceptualized the forest as a "green hell," which must be transformed into "pleasant and habitable" farmland; they regarded it with a mixture of "admiration and terror."[11] This Western ontology is best summarized by Roger Bacon's analogy in which Nature is an unwilling subject who must be tortured to reveal her secrets (2005, pp. 5-6, 68).

[10] Aguirre, The Wrath of God. Werner Herzog (1972).
[11] "Infierno verde ... Grata y habitable ... Admiración ... se mezclaba con temor." Avendano-Flores 6

Despite a 1569 *encomienda* system assigning 208 settlements with 22,000 people to 85 conquistadores, the Spanish system of *latifundios* never successfully launched in Costa Rica, where "they [the Spanish] had failed to construct a stable society based on the exploitation of a black or indigenous labor force" (2007, 35-38). This was likely due to the difficulty of the terrain and the existence of hierarchical and urbanized indigenous states in Mexico and Peru which were more easily integrated into the Spanish colonial system, making investments in those regions more favorable. In combination with devastating rates of mortality on the e*ncomiendas* -- populations declined by 67% from 1569 to 1611 -- it is likely that the costs of operating outside of the Central Valley were simply too great (2007, pp. 34-35).

This mortality rate is comparable to that of Chumash and other indigenous people at the Catholic Mission in Santa Barbara, where deaths were attributed to Diphtheria[12] and other diseases which proliferate in poor sanitary conditions and which are described as the result of sub-standard living conditions (City of Santa Barbara. 2000). The Spanish maintained a very limited presence in Southern California and New Mexico, which marked the northern borders of the Empire; as periphery regions of the Spanish empire, these areas may be comparable to Costa Rica despite climatic differences. It is likely that diseases like Diphtheria in all these places, and Dengue and Malaria in Costa Rica; topography; and cultural factors all contributed to the difficulty of exploiting relatively dispersed indigenous populations such as the Chumash and those encountered in Costa Rica by the Spanish.

[12] https://www.cdc.gov/diphtheria/index.html

The Spanish do not seem to have invested the resources which would have been required to create livable working conditions for laborers in the Californian missions or the Costa Rican *encomiendas*. This lack of investment created poor conditions which likely dissuaded the Spanish from creating more robust settlements in these areas. In Costa Rica, Spanish society only persisted in the Central Valley, which was accessible from the north-west and the coasts via the Camino Real (Figure 2). This society was headed by a group of aristocratic families known as the *vecinos*. These were families who could claim political rights within Spanish / Costa Rican society – privileged groups within the social geography of the *hispano-american ecumene*. (2007, p. 42) (Hall, 1984).[13]

[13] Geographer Carolyn Hall used this term to refer to the area of Costa Rica which was considered more *latino* than *mestizo* or *moreno*. It was, at the same time, a geographic space which expanded throughout time, and a set of socio-political relations based on shared European lineages, ontologies, and practices.

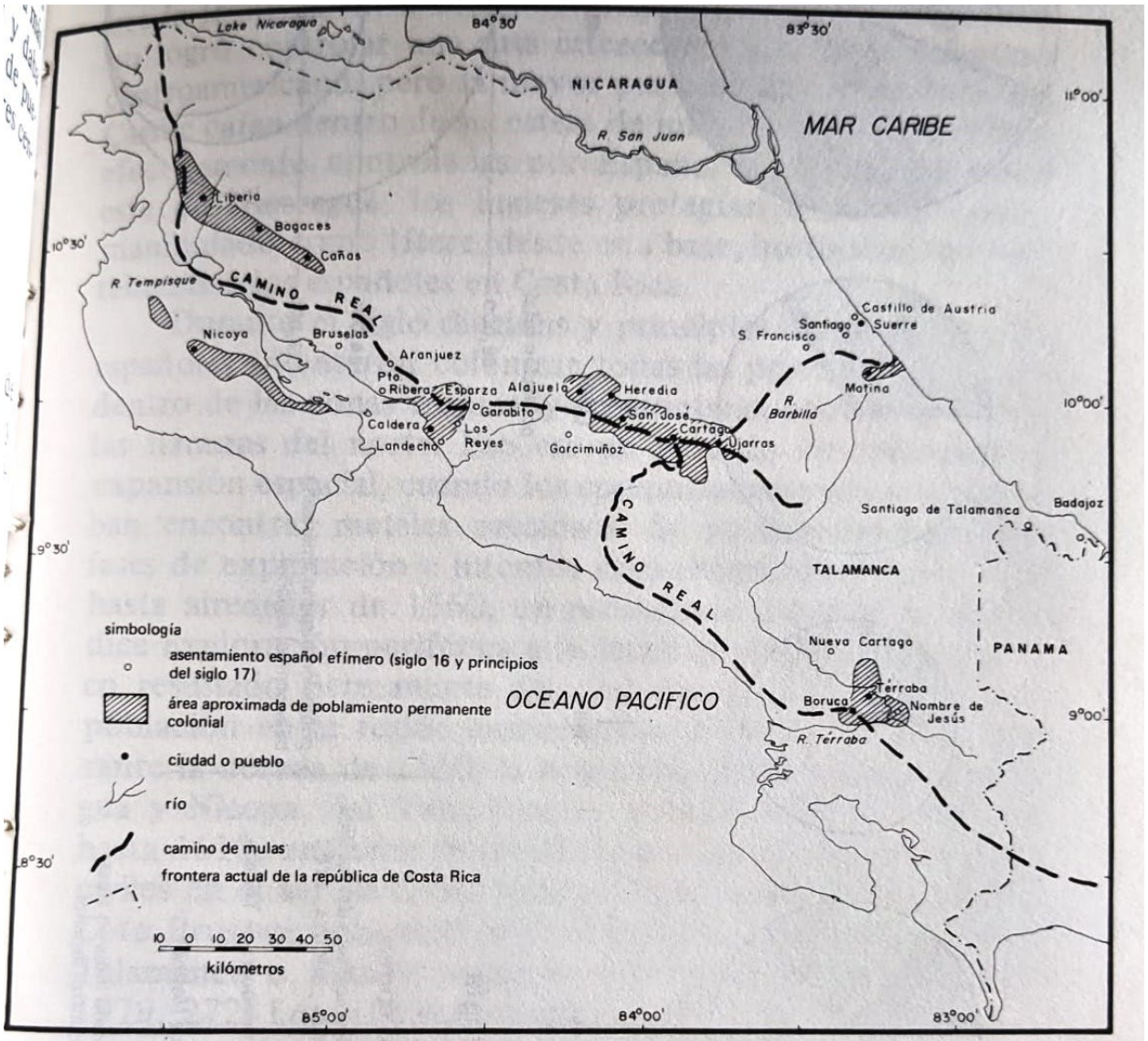


Fig. 3.1 Poblamiento colonial. Fuentes: IGM (1972); Meléndez (1977a); Ministerio de Transportes (1967).

Figure 2: Colonial population with Camino Real

(Hall, 1984)

From the 18th to 19th centuries, rural spaces in Costa Rica were typified by mestizo farmers with small landholdings, practicing a chacara form of family farming which combined subsistence and commercial activities. Land use was governed by villages. The economy was "based on peasant production, essentially devoid of servitude, and [operating in] a culturally and ethnically integrated area" (2007, p. 47). Starting in the 1830s, the introduction of coffee and development of transportation networks transformed Costa Rican society by kickstarting the development of agrarian capitalism and national integration (Figures 4-9) (*Ibid.*, p. 51). Cattle ranching on the peripheries of the Central Valley became more profitable as coffee displaced subsistence cattle within the Valley and meat prices rose (*Ibid.*, p. 82). Geographer Carolyn Hall described this as the expansion of the Hispano-American ecumene (Figure 3).

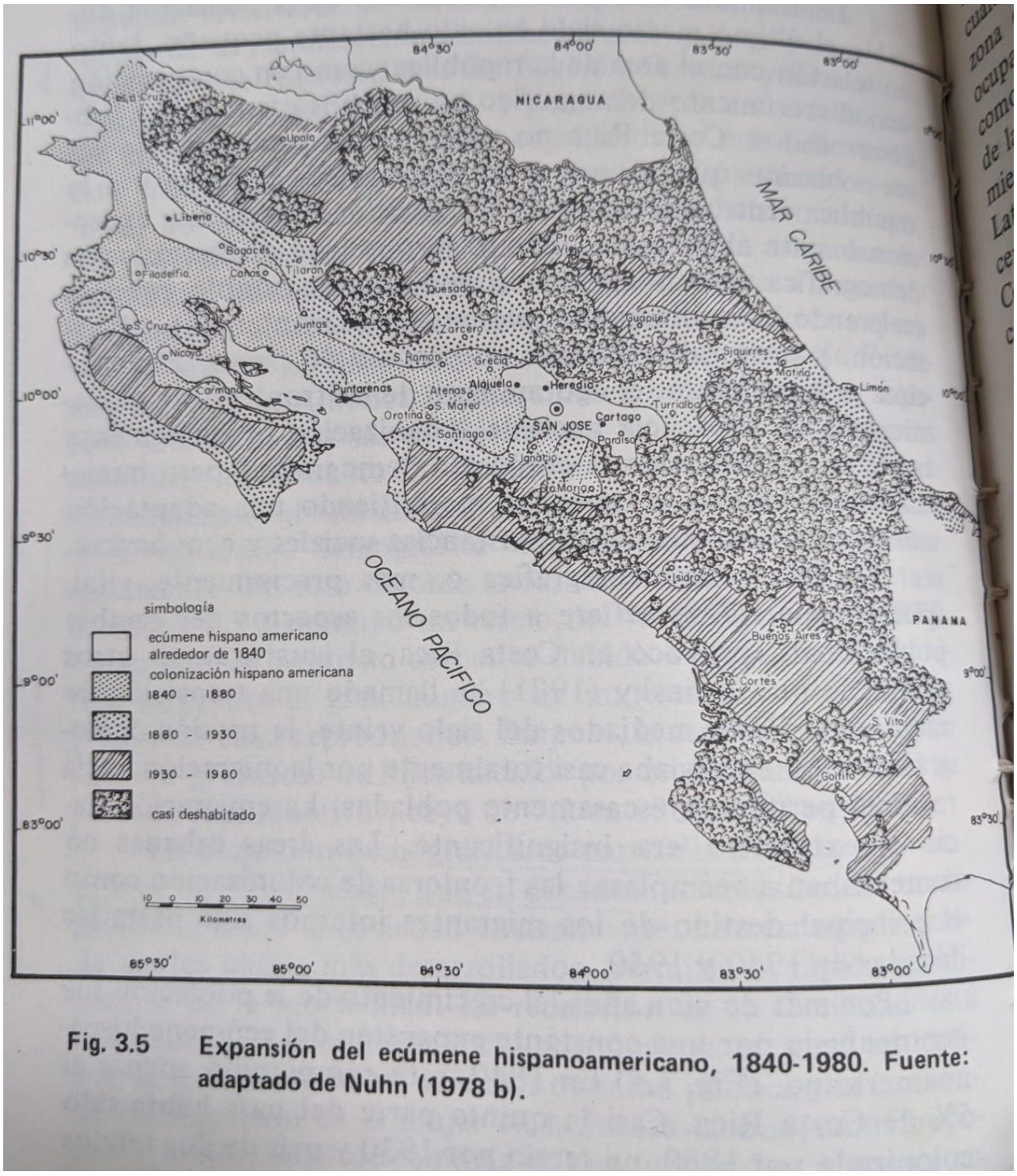


Fig. 3.5 **Expansión del ecúmene hispanoamericano, 1840-1980. Fuente: adaptado de Nuhn (1978 b).**

Figure 3: Expansion of the Hispano-American Ecumene

(Hall, 1984)

Competition between commodity and subsistence production had begun in earnest, as "coffee farming, stimulated by cheap and ever more available credit, transformed agriculture into capitalist enterprise" (*Ibid.*, p. 49). As space was divided between subsistence and commodity production, expansion into the internal frontier was intensified. Poor peasants and indigenous people were continuously displaced by these decentered waves of migration. Indigenous people of the Southwest Coast, for example, were pushed off their territories by The Costa Rican government's grant of huge tracts of land to US entrepreneur Keith Minor, in return for railroad investments (*Ibid.*, p. 80). Moreover, the practice of colonization in late 20th century Costa Rica can be linked to a long-term practice of land-grabbing throughout Latin America; these land grabs take place in territories conceptualized as "'empty, uninhabited,' or simply where nature has been neglected by 'unsuitable' (read: native) land use practices" (Mollett, 2016, p. 414). Geographer Sharlene Mollett argues that "land grabbing is both a tool for poverty reduction and, at the same time, a major factor driving poverty" (2016, p. 413). She situates colonization within wider processes of 'whitening' in Latin America; this perspective supplements the spatio-temporal analysis of Carolyn Hall with questions about ethnic and racial identity.

From this time, the consolidation of land into private holdings and a liberal project of governance exemplified by privatization of land and corresponding administrative control of land tenure exacerbated the dynamic of expansion into the internal frontiers. Growing rural populations, relying on combinations of subsistence farming, commodity production, and wage labor, also expanded the agricultural frontiers: "from the 1830s onwards, young peasant couples from established settlements set off to conquer virgin lands" (2007, pp. 64-71). These

peasant couples were young people who got married and left the family village; the accounts I heard and collected in Coto Brus indicate that this was a common pattern. Further studies may show how these individuals identified in cultural, ethnic, or historical terms.

As seen in Figure 3, nearly all formal Costa Rican settlements outside the Central Valley were established after 1820. Subsequently, and as seen in Figure 3, the Hispano-American ecumene expanded into the country's east and northwest from 1840-1880; these territories expanded from 1880-1930; and thereafter Costa Rican populations began to inhabit lands in the northeast and southwest of the country. Figures 4-7 visualize this expansion via settlements and transportation networks.

Fig. 3.11 Fundación de pueblos y ciudades, siglos dieciséis a veinte. Fuentes de datos: Estado del Cléro (1972).

Figure 4: Founding of villages and cities, 16th-20th centuries.

San Vito and Sabalito, settlements in Coto Brus, are marked as being settled between 1930-present (Hall 1984).

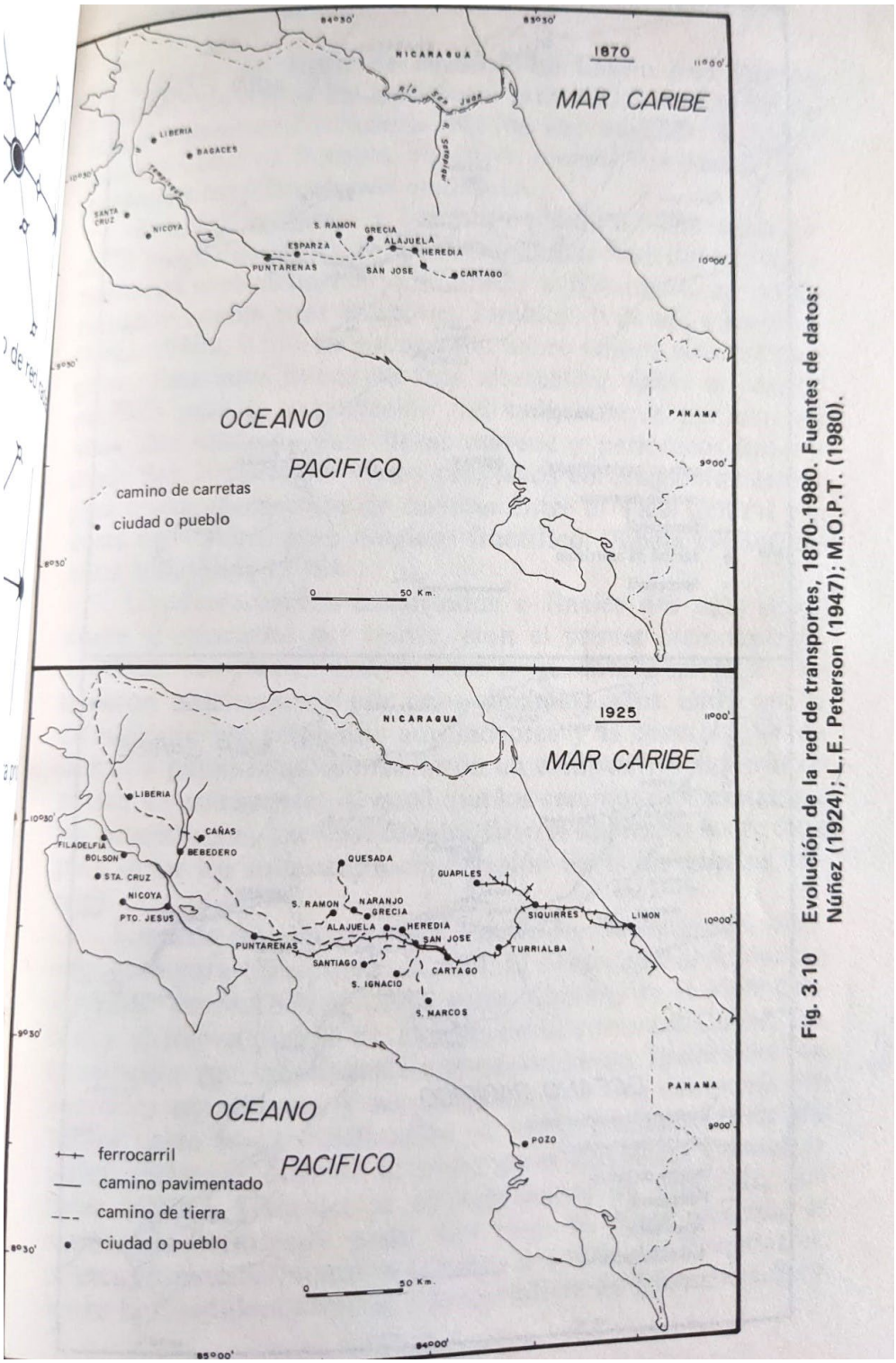


Fig. 3.10 Evolución de la red de transportes, 1870-1980. Fuentes de datos: Núñez (1924); L.E. Peterson (1947); M.O.P.T. (1980).

Figure 5: Evolution of the Transportation Network 1870 – 1980

(Hall 1984).

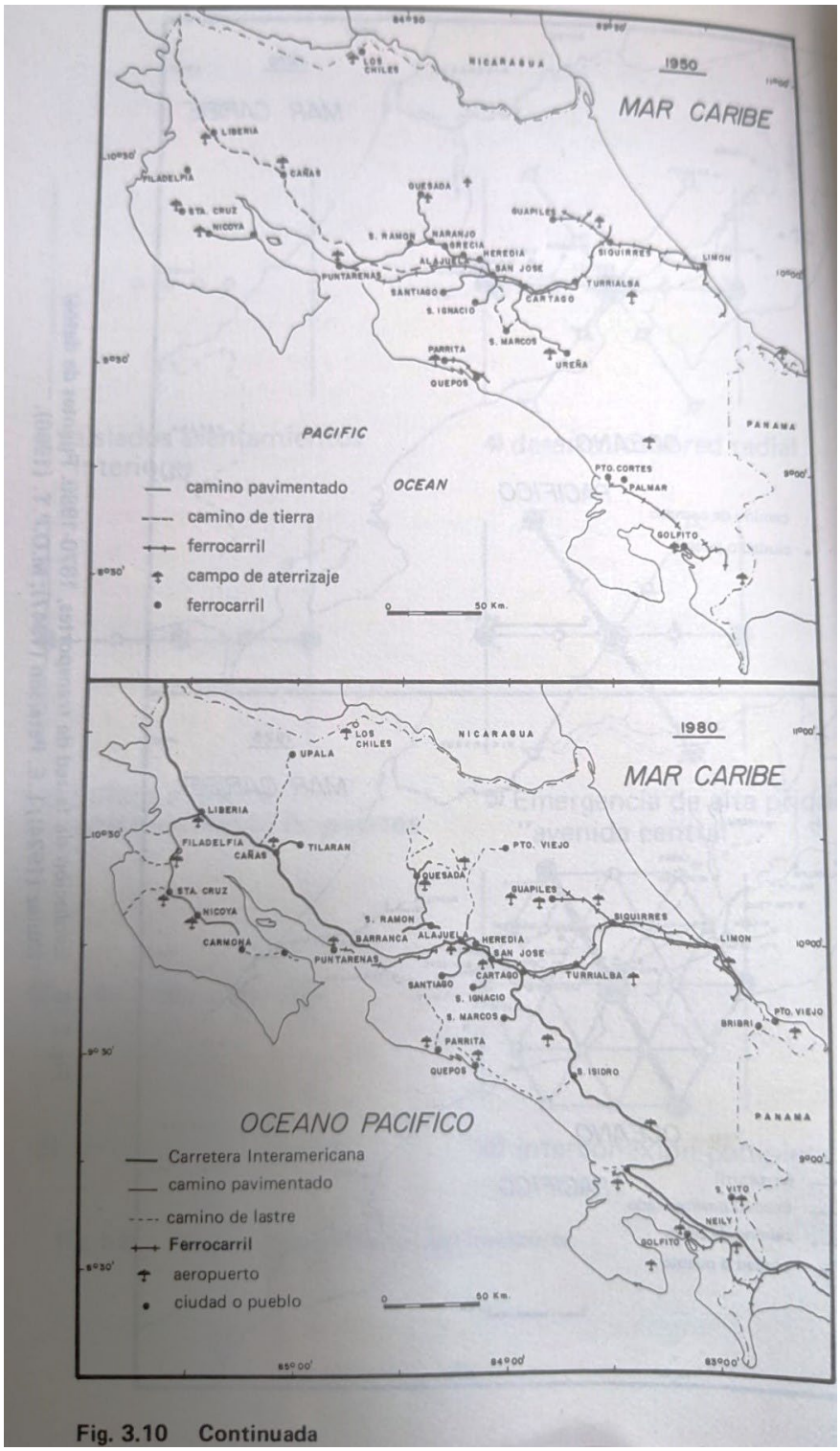


Fig. 3.10 Continuada

Figure 6: Continued. 1950, 1980

(Hall 1984)

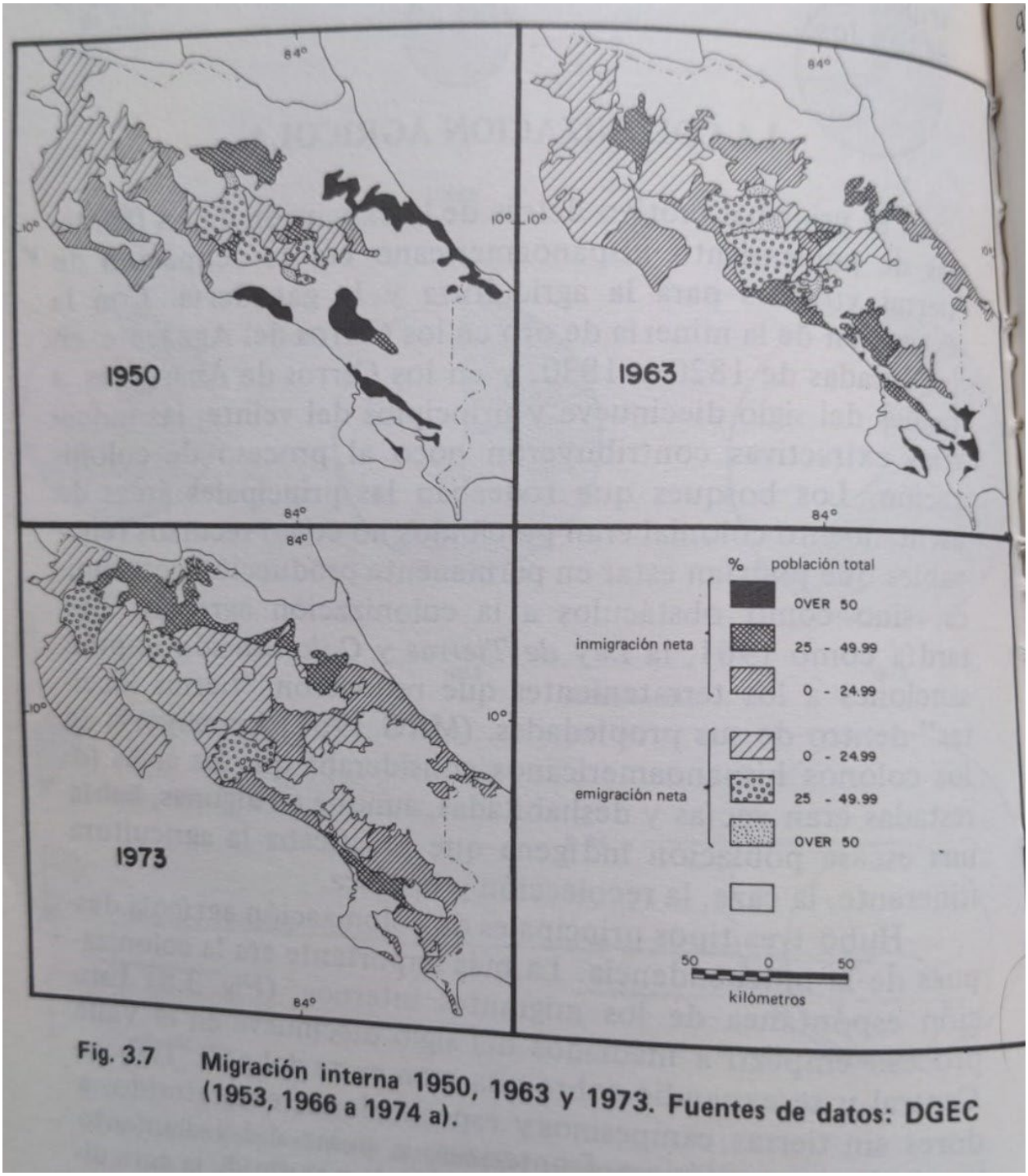


Fig. 3.7 Migración interna 1950, 1963 y 1973. Fuentes de datos: DGEC (1953, 1966 a 1974 a).

Figure 7 Internal Migration 1950, 1963 and 1973.

The square in the bottom left is a key indicating net immigration (top) and emigration (bottom) (Hall 1984)

C. SETTLEMENT OF COTO BRUS: CAUSES AND EFFECTS

I. Description and History of Coto Brus

Between 1890 and 1930, the "privatization of vast extensions of land [in the North] converted the formerly free ranging people of the area, whose deep mulatto and indigenous roots combined with an earthy 'cowboy' culture, into a poor peasantry with little land and few employment options" (2007, p. 83). After the 1930s, many Northern *sabaneros,*[14] later to include my grandfather, left the region to seek employment and opportunities to acquire land in other regions of the country. The following maps show where Coto Brus is located. This section describes the canton of Coto Brus in terms of its history and geography and explains my family connection to the region.

[14] Cowboys – literally, *savannah-, meadow-,* or *pasture-men*.

Figure 8: Map of Costa Rica with the globe.

From https://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/map/costa-rica-map.htm

Figure 9: Location of Coto Brus in Costa Rica.

From Leary, J., Grimm, K., Aslan, C., Mark, M., Frey, S., & Bath-Rosenfeld, R. (2021). Landowners' Socio-Cultural Valuation of Ecosystem Services Provided by Trees in Costa Rican Agricultural Landscapes. Environmental management*, 67(5), 974–987. https://doi.org/10.1007/s00267-021-01442-5*

Figure 10: Detail of Map of Costa Rica, centered on San Vito de Java, municipal capital of Coto Brus.

From https://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/map/costa-rica-map.htm

Coto Brus is located in the Southwest of Costa Rica. The region is named for a river which springs from its mountains; folk etymology maintains that *coto brus* means *big river* in an indigenous language. Another major river, Rio Grande de Terraba, springs from the mountainous Buenos Aires region. Climatically and ecologically, the region sits between the influences of both Pacific and Caribbean coasts. Precipitation from both oceans passes through and falls in the area, which is cooler and more humid than the coasts. The hilly terrain creates microclimates at different altitudes and exposures, and the forests of the region represent most of the species of flora and fauna found in the southern areas of Costa Rica (Mendez-Trejos, 2016, pp. 11-12)

In the west, Coto Brus is bounded by lowlands which used to be in banana cultivation and now are largely given over to palm oil. Many Panamanians and black and indigenous Costa Ricans used to work in the banana plantations, many owned by United Fruit, as wage laborers. These workers were an important base for the Communist Party during the Civil War and the labor struggles of the early 20th century. Indigenous groups live throughout Coto Brus. The last great rebellion of an indigenous *cacique*, Pablo Presbere, happened in nearby Talamanca. It is common to see indigenous women in their traditional bright dresses and men with traditional knapsacks throughout the region. Indigenous men and women have taken part in the coffee harvests since the 50s, and with a decreasing proportion of Costa Ricans engaging in agricultural work, indigenous, black, and *latino* or *mestizo* Panamanians and other Central Americans immigrate to the region to work with special permits (2016, p. 16). Gil's narrative in Chapter 5 suggests that geographical, aesthetic, and labor divisions formed as well as reproduced racial classifications in 20th century Costa Rica.

Coto Brus became a focus for migration after the Costa Rican Civil War, which concluded in 1948 with the victory of Jose Figueres Ferrer. The outcome of this war was a new national constitution created by a temporary junta, which is extraordinary in the history of Central America and perhaps the world in that it peacefully devolved power in internationally monitored elections when its mandate terminated. Historians have explained this as resulting from internal factors, like Costa Rica's traditions of yeoman democracy and pacifism, and global connections, such as President Jose Figueres' ability to negotiate a strategic alliance with the USA despite his own, and the constitution's, socialist commitments (Longley, 1997).

Coto Brus is culturally and ethnically diverse. An Italian colony, San Vito, was founded in 1952 through SICA (*Sociedad Italiana de Colonización Agrícola* – Italian Society of Agricultural Colonization), and Costa Ricans from the central and northwestern parts of the country founded their own colonies through ITCO (*Instituto de Tierras y Colonización* – Institute of Lands and Colonization), primarily Sabalito, and informal settlements such as La Libertad. San Vito is locally referred to as *la colonia* (colony) and the settlements efforts in general are described as *colonización* (colonization). These settlements were supported by commodity production, such as coffee and cattle, hunting, and subsistence agriculture based on corn, beans, banana, palm hearts, and other local vegetables (2016, pp. 17, 49). Many people come from Panama to work and visit, and many families, like my own, are part Panamanian. According to my family and Piedad's narrative, many Costa Rican men migrated to the region by themselves, and dances (*bailes*) were set up across the border so that men could meet women.

My grandfather, and many other Costa Rican men, married Panamanian women this way. It is not clear from these stories why men did not marry women from local or indigenous families, but my understanding of the relationships between *mestizo* or *white* Costa Ricans and indigenous Costa Ricans is that they maintain some social distance. One way to interpret these stories is to point out that colonists carried the idea of Costa Rica as a blank slate in their minds, and then acted in a way that reinforced this idea and gave it reality by physical removing indigenous Costa Ricans from colonized spaces and conceptually removing them from Costa Rican history.

The Civil War has been interpreted in many ways. Communists, landowners, urban intellectuals and elites, students, foreign auxiliaries, and mercenaries participated in the conflict, and the ideological lines were not clear even at the end. Figueres Ferrer, popularly known as Don Pepe, was a lifelong friend of the Communist Manuel Mora but outlawed his party (Figueres Ferrer, 1987). The new constitution preserved labor reforms which had been fought for by communists in the first half of the century (*Ibid.*).

In my perspective, the civil war was both genuine class conflict and a result of the ideological fluidity which prevailed at the end of the Second World War. Don Pepe was able to thread the needle in terms of instating social reforms without invoking the name of communism, maintaining the investments of large companies like *bananeras* while drawing concessions for workers, nationalizing banking and utility assets, and instituting a policy of popular land distribution; all without allowing rumors of his Nazi or Communist sympathies to prevent him from collaborating with the US as a key Central American partner. Whether he was an admirable figure is, in my experience, a hugely controversial topic in Costa Rica.

My dad, for example, considers him a popular hero, while others call him a dictator. His political party, the Party of National Liberation (PLN – *Partido de Liberación Nacional*), was the first professional political party in the country, and still exists today.

The relevance of this national history is that decommissioned military vehicles, agricultural infrastructure like trains and ferries, and a program of national development under the new republic all corresponded to make Coto Brus a center of colonization efforts, which were labeled as such by their respective institutions. In Coto Brus, Costa Ricans developed different forms of being *Tico* (Costa Rican) which were not uniform or univocal. These different aesthetic or cultural forms were imprinted on the landscape through the creation of productive lands (*terrenos*) and the construction of buildings and roads.[15] Through relating to the landscape and each other, people in Coto Brus developed new identities, which are now linked to the region, in the timeframe of one generation. There is a conceptual, if not causal, parallel here between the regeneration of tropical forests, which several of my interlocutors stated can become well-established within 30 years, and the rapid rate of identity formation in the region.

Costa Rica maintains a mythology of whiteness populating empty spaces, like the US idea of manifest destiny. Oral histories I reviewed and conversations I had were nearly unanimous in representing the Costa Rican view that the region of Coto Brus was essentially "empty" when colonists began to arrive in the 1940s, when the consolidation of the national state through a civil war and improved transportation technologies made the settlement of the region possible. In reality, many Panamanians had settled in the area since at least the

[15] This is discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

beginning of the 20th century (2016, p. 40), and indigenous people have lived in the area for at least 3000 years (Chapter 5).

Some Panamanians, and many of the first Costa Ricans to arrive, pursued traditional occupations as hunters and (or) artifact looters called *guaceros*. Many *guaceros* were also *sabaneros* and some found natural meadows (*sabanas*) for their cattle in Coto Brus, establishing a settlement called *Potrero Grande* (Big Pasture). Others made a living by establishing productive parcels (*fincas*) and then selling them to arriving families. One man, Beto Vargas, who had initially come to search for artifacts (*guaquear*) remembers paying 4500 colones for thirty hectares of land and then remaining in the area. He paid in four installments of 1500 colones, and he bartered a carbine rifle obtained through service in the civil guard for the first payment (Mendez-Trejos, 2016, p. 43).

Indigenous people from other parts of the country were also pioneers in the settlement of Coto Brus. One village, Kamaquiri, was founded by Cabecar families who fled from a place called China Kicha in a more northern province, Perez Zeledón. Although China Kicha was one of the first places named as an indigenous territory in 1957, the lands were usurped (*usurpadas*) by non-indigenous Costa Ricans, leading some of the inhabitants to migrate to the southwest. One of the indigenous families who settled Kamaquiri were known as the family of Maria, whom a colonist remembered as "a very brave woman." Many indigenous and mestizo families in the area are known by the name of the matriarch. Some of their surnames were Uva, Morales, and Villanueva (*Ibid.*, pp. 68 – 73).

This group included non-indigenous members as well, who "were integrated into the community little by little," such as Gerardo Martinez, whose nickname was Blue Beard,[16] and the brothers Jose Angel and Miguel Umana (*Ibid.*, p. 69). Some members were indigenous people from the region of Coto Brus. One person described them to Mendez Trejos as "the first owners of the place" (*los primeros dueños del lugar*). This mixed group named their settlement Kamaquiri, the name of a historical *cacique*. The community came together and decided to divide lands which were in the hands of individuals communally, such that one person gave land for the school, another for the soccer field, and another for the church. In this way, indigenous people were the first to take steps in the development of Kamaquiri (*Ibid.*).

It is certain that indigenous people have lived in the area for several thousand years. Archaeological evidence to this effect is outlined in the section on Finca Cantaros in Chapter 5. However, the myth of colonization and the creation of *Tico* identity in the area have obscured the presence of these first Costa Ricans. For example, on a map showing settlement timelines (Figure 3), Coto Brus is shown as having been settled after the 1930s. I recognize the importance of indigenous histories and the erasing effect of colonialist ideologies like that practiced in the settlement of Coto Brus. However, for the purposes of maintaining the scope

[16] I've included nicknames because giving nicknames is an important regional practice. Some people are known by their nickname more widely than by their given name. This may be related to short genealogical memories which seem to be common in the area. One of my interlocutors could not remember the name of his parent's village where he was born, and my family struggles to trace our background beyond my grandparents. Piedad and Ismael also had trouble remembering where their grandparents were from, though they did remember their parents' places of origin. Nicknames help people remember distinctive traits about individuals and important events in their lives. They embed people in local society.

of this study, this thesis presents only basic data to this effect. This is a significant omission which further studies should address.

While some colonists arrived through official programs and under national ideologies of colonization, others settled informally. One community now known as *la Libertad* (freedom) is so called because they settled without the help of ITCO. “I was commenting [to the other pioneers] on the freedom (*la libertad*) which we enjoyed (*disfrutábamos*),” a colonist named Arturo Chacon Monge recounted to historian Rafael Mendez Trejos, “[I was saying that] we took the land without any kind of pressures or difficulty, and we buy and sell our produce wherever we want, while the ITCO colonists must buy and sell at a commissary (*un comisariato*) which the administration provided (*que les habían instalado en la administración*).”[17] Thus, they chose the name of the place. Monge goes on to say that the settlers “were like family even though we lived far away,” which is a sentiment repeated by many of the settlers who were interviewed by Trejos (*Ibid.*, pp. 18-20).

Settlers needed to rely on their neighbors and others forms of support, because both coffee and cattle production require time to develop. Coffee bushes mature around 5 years, while cattle raised on ranches need pasturage to be planted in advance and take several years to mature. Colonists used credit, savings, and subsistence strategies to survive while their crops or cattle matured. The urban center of San Vito imported some grains and other necessary goods, while families further from the center grew their own food and relied on the abundance of the forest, in terms of game, food like palm hearts, fuel and building material to

[17] Other accounts in Trejos and which I heard from my interlocutors indicated that commissaries were set up where regional markets were inadequate; one *pionero* remembers requesting a market to be installed so that the local farmers would have access to money and trade goods in exchange for surplus crops. This is the only account I have seen which suggests buying and selling at commissaries was obligatory. (2016, p. 42)

meet their daily needs. People planted corn, squash, beans, sugarcane, yucca, and fruit trees to feed themselves. They raised cattle, pigs, chickens, goats, and stocked fishponds or runs. Fresh water was found at springs, which are common in the area, creeks, or by digging wells. Many people wore patched clothing and went barefoot (*descalzos, con la ropa remendada*) (*Ibid.*, p. 23). My father remembers getting his first pair of shoes around 1970, when he was about ten years old.

Colonists, some of whom had worked as rangers (*guardabosques*) and therefore knew the best parcels, entered the primary forest and marked out pieces of land (*carrilar*) to claim ownership. The state sometimes recognized settlement as right to title, while at other times informal settlers were described as *precaristas* and police intervened to protect public and private property rights.[18] For the most part, clearing land for cattle and agriculture was considered a legitimate way to gain ownership of property, but the reality of this formal policy was uneven and inconsistent, generating winners and losers.

Families used the forest around them as a reservoir of food, water, fuel and building materials. In this sense, the resources of the forest were used as a cheap reserve to fund the development of the rural and urban settlements (Patel & Moore, 2017). Further, although one campesino states that "*aquí no se conseguía un peón*" (here, you could not hire a laborer) (2016, p. 39), large companies like Cotón and Wachón in fact depended on wage laborers to clear their lands. Chapter 5 includes an interview with an individual who engaged in such wage labor, while other oral histories show that wage labor was a common source of employment.

[18] I give an example in the next paragraphs.

Luis Wachón owned an eponymous company which controlled large tracts of forest in Coto Brus. Another company called Cotón also had large holdings. It is possible that they purchased these tracts through deals with the national state; this is how Minor Keith established the United Fruit Company (2007, p. 80). Some settlers organized a movement of people called *precaristas* (squatters) who would enter the uncleared lands of Wachón and Cotón, mark boundaries and begin clearing and planting in an effort to secure title. To prevent this, the company hired wage laborers to clear his lands and maintain title. Meanwhile, the *precarista* movement evolved into a serious conflict, with confrontations between armed police and individuals, one of whom, Jose Manuel Corrales Quirós, displayed a pistol (*escuadra*) and told them that if they wanted to arrest him, they would need the courage to kill him and die doing so (*tenían que tener el valor de matarme y también de morir haciéndolo*) (2016, p. 55). The situation was so serious that national leaders like the head of the communist party, Manuel Mora, student activists and reporters from the Central Valley all got involved. Eventually, some settlers were given title through mediation with the companies, while others were evicted.

One colonist said their family ate mostly mountain game and beans with palm hearts, which are a wild food gathered in the forest (*Ibid.*, p. 24). They only occasionally ate rice, which is so important in Costa Rica that "to find rice" (*buscar arroz*) is synonymous with making a living. Another, Emelida Prendas Prendas, remembers that the only thing her family was only able to grow beans. They mixed in whatever "God provided them," including animals which they killed, "*tepezcuintes, dantas, cabros, cherengas, pizotes, mapachines, pavas y loras que las traían por sacos*" (a variety of local animals, including wild turkeys and parrots which they killed in such numbers that they filled sacks). She goes

on to say, “it’s too bad that all that came to an end – or better stated, that we ended it" (*lástima que todo eso se terminó … o, mejor dicho, lo terminamos*), referring to the way some animal populations were driven to extinction (*Ibid.*, p. 27).

While laborers depended on means other than their wages to reproduce their labor capacities, those who hired them effectively extracted this value as rent. Colonists with their own parcels depended on the labor resources of their families and the consumption of forest reserves as an initial impetus for the development of relative affluence (2017, pp. 44-63, 91-110); in a sense, they drew on the labor reserves of themselves and their families temporarily by living in difficult conditions as well as drawing on the resources of the forest around them. This was seen as an investment in future returns. In Coto Brus, capitalist markets were aided in their establishment by the use of ‘cheap’ reserves and practices, like hunting, which supported the development of capitalism while operating outside or alongside markets.

Women performed many kinds of unwaged labor which also supported the waged work and commodity production of local families. Many women were locally famous for providing hospitality in the form of food, shelter, and medical care. One woman, *(Juana) la Perola*, was mentioned by practically everyone I spoke to in the region because of her enormous influence and impact as a medical practitioner. One of her former neighbors remembered that she cured “half the world” (*medio mundo*) without charging for her services; if she was paid, it was good, or if not, it didn’t matter, because she “cared about people’s health and not money like the doctors of today” (2016, p. 45).

Women also raised children cooperatively; children who could not be fed at home ate at the homes of other families, while orphans and other unattached children were adopted by

women who were raising other children. People traveling through the region were greeted with food and coffee by the *doña* and neighbors slept at each other's properties on long trips. These and other forms of hospitality and domestic work were daily tasks for women. Piedad, my Airbnb host during this fieldwork and the subject of an ethnographic vignette below, described to me how she would wake up at 3 AM – two hours earlier than the men – to prepare a fire, heat water for coffee, cooking, and washing, prepare tortillas and other food for the men and children, milk the cows, and begin cleaning. She was often the last person to stop working in the evening, and she stated that her experience was representative of that of many local women, whose labor was also used as a 'cheap' or 'free' reserve which subsidized the development of the local settlements. I expand on this argument in Chapter 6.

The inhabitants of each village cooperated to create councils in charge of building roads, bridges, a soccer field, a church, and a schoolhouse. In the first decades, teachers were often brought through private agreements and taught in simple structures built by local men; when the settlements were more populous the state built official schools. While the development of San Vito was centralizing and urban, other settlements in Coto Brus created a dispersed spatiality and focused on creating infrastructural links between themselves, the capital, and ultimately global markets. This spatiality was reinforced by a form of solidarity referred to as "being a family," and practiced by individual *pioneros* donating lands for community structures such as schools and churches, working communally to construct those buildings, creating transportation infrastructure, and establishing social economies like the transfer of knowledge through public schools and the provisioning of medical care (*Ibid.*, pp. 29, 34, 41, 71).

In the examples described here, colonists often had a direct relationship with the environment. They drew daily necessities from the reserve of the forests, which were considered free and communal properties until cleared and claimed. Government policies encouraged the clearing and exploitation of land for subsistence activities and the development of commodity agriculture; at which point 'natural spaces' became productive *terrenos* under the private ownership of individuals, usually men. Families and individuals endured difficult conditions in the hopes of future prosperity.

Basic services such as clinics, electricity, indoor plumbing, and phone lines became more common beginning in the 1980s. The 1980s also saw the inflection point of the Forest Transition. As subsistence strategies which depended on direct, no-, or low-cost exploitation of the forest were replaced with social safety nets, effective market infrastructures, and wage labor, the livelihood pressures people were exerting on the resources of the forest also decreased.

The state provided utilities and services like commissariat markets, telephone and electrical services, public schools, and clinics. In general the plan of development for the region could be described as follows: colonists arrive with limited reserves and logistical networks, and initially rely on the "free" or "cheap" resources of the forest as well as their families' labor reserves; they establish productive lands (*terrenos*) and farms *(fincas*) which begin to supply more of their needs; commodity production like cattle and coffee picks up after ~5 years; markets and money replace the forest as the primary means of securing livelihoods. This schema encompassed much of what it meant to be *tico* for several generations that have lived in the area.

In this sense, the Forest Transition – Costa Rica's turn from de- to re-forestation – occurred as a logical consequence of the development plan for southwestern colonies like Coto Brus and the evolving conception of Costa Rican national identity. Because the colonies relied less and less on the forests for direct provisioning of their livelihoods, the pressure they exerted on the landscape was mediated. As the global imaginaries around natural resources underwent a profound transformation after the first UN environmental summit, Costa Rican conceptions of their own values also shifted. Pivoting from its status as a nation which had just fought an extremely modernized and technical war over constitutional distinctions and national suffrage, Costa Rica abolished its army began to shape an identity as a country dedicated to peace, democracy, and the conservation of the environment. The subsistence production, and even commodity production, of families is less and less competitive in national and global markets; combined with rising levels of education and the other factors I have outlined, this means that, since the 1980s, many Costa Ricans no longer gain their living through agriculture.[19]

The establishment of La Amistad International Nature Preserve (PILA – *Parque Internacional La Amistad*) in the region of Coto Brus was met with some local resistance. The park's establishment happened near the same time as the events outlined above and Costa Rica's historic debt default in 1981. Together this set of events helps to distinguish the country's shift from developmentalist to environmentalist and neoliberal governing ontologies.

[19] This change will be described in Section D of this chapter.

At PILA's establishment in 1982 (*Ibid.*, p. 67) many families still relied on hunting in the forests, while others sought to claim land by marking parcels. Some people considered the park as an "enemy of progress," (*enemigo del progreso*). They seem to be referring to the expansion of buildings and productive *terrenos* which I have discussed as a Costa Rican form of development called *colonization.* There were conflicts and arrests, and someone injured a park ranger by gunfire (*Ibid.*, p. 68).

However, after some time and conciliatory measures, including payments for lost lands, people started to change their minds. From three groups – described by one account as the hunters, rangers, and environmentalists[20] – most people of the region, especially the younger generation, united into one group which views the park as an "icon," and a "standard for conservation," which will "attract scientists and tourists from different parts of the world in the near future" (*Ibid.*, pp. 67-68). This is already happening, as in the case of the Wilson Botanical Garden and Tropical Research Station, a local site which attracts students, researchers, and tourists from around the world.

In the case of PILA, the human-environment relationship was not really mediated, but rather eliminated, by state and international actions, since its establishment was negotiated by the Costa Rican and Panamanian national governments among others. While the establishment of the preserve is now perceived in a generally positive light, some Costa Rican conservationists are moving away from the idea of "fortress conservation," which

[20] Hunters can steward the populations they hunt. However, the form of hunting described by *pioneros* in Trejos' book of oral history does not seem like stewardship. Rather, *pioneros* arrived from different parts of the country and without traditional, regional knowledge about the animal populations and forested environments of Coto Brus. They describe killing great numbers of animals at a time, filling sacks, and eliminating what they believed to be the last individuals of particular species. Hunting practices and their effects in the region, especially distinguishing between regenerative and depleting practices, is a question for further study.

removes people from the land and towards integrating populations with landscapes in congruent, appropriate, or sustainable relationships based on values of care and reciprocity. This topic will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Other than PILA, environmental policies and politics are little mentioned in oral history accounts of changing human-environment relationships in the area. Few people I spoke to mentioned any national or local conservation policies other than a requirement to petition MINAE for permission to clear trees. A handful were aware of the *Bandera Azul* water conservation project which Piedad and Ismael take part in. In Chapter 5, I discuss an anecdote about a local official being threatened for attempting to uphold environmental regulations.

Given that the effects of policies are limited by compliance, livelihood, and risk; global, systemic, and structural factors seem to drive changes in Costa Rican land use to a degree which is unresponsive to national policy. Connections to commodity markets historically made cattle and coffee production rational within the logic of *development/economy,* while the consequences of producing these commodities were later integrated and addressed through the logic of *conservation/environment*: both of these conceptual sets operate through global forces.

While international and national mythologies about Costa Rican identity and sustainable development craft a neat narrative about linear progress under increasingly sophisticated technocratic and environmentalist regimes, including an enlightened turn from commodity production to conservation, the local history of Coto Brus as presented in this section and Chapter 5 suggests a more complex picture.

Settlement in the region was accomplished through overlapping and sometimes competing processes, and the deforestation which occurred was caused by particular livelihood strategies, especially clearing land for the raising of commodity crops. Livelihoods in the region were linked closely to the prices of beef and cattle from the 1950s until the crash of the 1980s; after that, shifting market conditions caused people to diversify their strategies. However, conservationists without international support, like Piedad and Ismael who I discuss in Chapter 5, continue to face serious livelihood pressures, and are surrounded by neighbors who view their land-use choice as irrational and inappropriate.

Despite these difficulties, conservation is increasingly understood as a way to earn a living in Coto Brus as well as a societal good. This view comes both from the outside and inside of Costa Rica.[21] Creating a new popular consensus to govern the human-environment relationship in Coto Brus is an exciting opportunity for Costa Rican people to express their values and commitments, and Costa Rica's leadership role in the global conservation movement means that ideas adopted in Costa Rica quickly reach the world stage (Fletcher et al., 2020, pp. 10-12). Costa Ricans have a unique opportunity and responsibility to imagine new, less exploitative, and more socially equitable forms of relating to each other and the landscapes they live with. The narratives in Chapter 5 provide examples of the lived experiences and perspectives of Costa Ricans regarding the area and their relationship with the environment.

[21] Discussed in Chapter 5.

Figure 11: A view of Coto Brus from Finca Cantaros.

The settlement in the foreground is Sabalito.

Figure 12: Cattle pasture in Coto Brus.

The line between forest and pasture is somewhat permeable, and more so in the higher foothills.

Figure 13: A pasture higher in the foothills.

Figure 14: The rural road leading to the finca in Figure 14.

II. Family Connection

I was born in Costa Rica and my first memories are of wandering the forests with my dogs, rubber boots, and machete: I was 4 or 5 years old; I also remember sitting on the dirt on a hillside near my house and eating an entire plant of cilantro. I was probably 3. When I visited Finca Cantaros, I could not clearly remember being there, but it felt familiar. I sent pictures to my dad, and he said we used to visit when I was a toddler. When I was in Coto Brus during 2022, taxi drivers and shopkeepers asked me where I was from and when I told them my family name, they often said they know my aunts, grandmother, and cousins.

Part of the reason I chose Coto Brus was because of its familiarity and my local network. Although I have only visited the region a handful of times since leaving at 5 years old, I consider Sabalito my "hometown." This is probably because of the stories I grew up hearing from my father. When I was old enough to read *Cien Años de Soledad* by Gabriel Garcia Márquez (García Márquez, 2009), my father told me that he, like the characters in the book, remembers the first time he saw a piece of ice – brought, indeed, by traveling merchants. He grew up in a simple home without shoes (*andaba descalzo*); he picked coffee as a child. He remembers walking down the hot road without shoes, carrying coffee while his feet were burning. He and his sisters were able to attend the national university, UCR (Universidad de Costa Rica), and he became an architect. Because of his expertise I sent the section about my interview with one of the earliest colonists, Roldan (in Chapter 5), about the idiosyncrasies of European vs. Costa Rican construction and asked him to write some comments. His responses are presented in Appendix B under his own byline.

My grandfather, Reinaldo Arias, died when my dad was 5 or 6 years old. However, I grew up hearing stories about him and looking at his picture (Figure 18). He was a cowboy or *sabanero* who migrated from the northern part of the country. He took a decade to traverse the distance between Tilaran, where he was from, and Coto Brus. While he traveled, he became a *tinterillo* or informal attorney because he was able to read and write. Roldan, interviewed in Chapter 5, remembered him but initially mistook him for a policeman and teacher – my family said this was because Reinaldo drafted documents and was an enthusiastic promoter of books. Although he didn't read much himself, he would regularly bring any books he could find and purchase to the family *rancho*. My dad, and his siblings – 5 sisters and a brother – read an eclectic variety of things growing up, from American science-fiction to German poetry and Communist propaganda. My family remembers Reinaldo himself as a political radical who managed the village's cooperative store, where he would routinely give away merchandise on credit he knew could never be honored.

He was also known for delivering babies, which was unusual because this was usually performed by midwives. He was a *guacero* who would find and loot archaeological sites; my *tias* and father remember playing with golden artifacts as children. Their mother, my grandmother *mama* Claudia, who is still alive at 95 years old, sold them to keep parts of the family property when my grandfather died. There is a local legend about a piece of property (*terreno*) which my family lost at that time. Other families have not been able to hold on to it after buying it, and it has moved from hand to hand. My family says this is because Reinaldo discovered a treasure there that is supposed to be found by us.

Like many men in the area, he was known as a fighter, but according to my dad's memory, he fought with his fists and not pistols, swords, or machetes like some local men. He could wrestle a bull by the horns and my father told me a story about *don* Reinaldo taking a bull, slitting its throat, catching the blood in a bowl, and then gathering some boys in the shade to drink its warm blood. My dad perceived this as a ritual and secret act – drinking blood is forbidden by the Judaic law in Leviticus, which forms the basis of Judeo-Christian jurisprudence and morality and Hispanic Costa Rican culture.[22] This suggests to me that this act was a custom or ritual drawn from another tradition, whether Iberian, African, or indigenous.

Reinaldo was well known in the area and, to some extent, throughout the country. There is a statue in Liberia which is dedicated to famous cowboys who have passed away (Figures 16, 17). His name heads the list (Figure 17). My curiosity about Reinaldo and men like him was enormous throughout my childhood and has continued to motivate me in my studies. Knowing that my family comes from a small village which has gone from dirt roads to wireless internet in less than 50 years (~1950-2000) fascinates me. I want to understand how the experiences of people like my family – *mestizos* or *morenos,* as we are called in Costa Rica, who lived in small colonies as peasants and cowboys before becoming professionals and academics – relate to and interface with broader regional, national, and international factors. I want to know how the lives of people in Coto Brus, and particularly their relationships with the landscape, are mediated and by what factors.

[22] Therefore I say to the Israelite people: You shall not partake of the blood of any flesh, for the life of all flesh is its blood. Anyone who partakes of it shall be cut off (Leviticus 17:13-14).

Figure 15: Homenaje a Sabaneros Fallecidos

(Homage to Fallen Cowboys - Municipality of Liberia, 4 September 1969, Bicentenary)

Figure 16: Homenaje a Sabaneros Fallecidos, continued.

My grandfather was Reinaldo Arias Porras, from Tilaran. This monument shows the importance of sabaneros, and their semi-nomadic movement around the country, in Costa Rica's historical imagination. The next maps show the distances between Tilaran and Liberia, in the Northwest of the country, and Coto Brus, in the Southwest. Many people who now live in Coto Brus came from the regions of Alajuela, Liberia, Heredia, and San Jose.

Figure 17: My grandfather, Reinaldo Arias Porras.

This photograph was taken at Cañas Gordas, Coto Brus, at the Panamanian border. Around 1960. Family Collection.

D. POLITICAL AND POLICY CONTEXT

I. 1948-1980: Land-to-Tiller Legislation and Deforestation

While the last section focused on personal narratives of the decades between 1950 and 1980, this section will describe changes in the political economy of Costa Rica and its relationship to the global markets of commodities and finance during that period. From 1948 to 1981, Costa Rica's economy was dominated by the state and produced a 'golden age' and a middle class. After defaulting on its debts in 1981, Costa Rica entered a period of neoliberal 'shock therapy' which radically transformed the country. Corruption schemes thrived and tax revenues proved impossible to collect in many cases.

Meanwhile, philosophies of environmental and economic governance began to change throughout the world in the 1970s. This led to a renewed focus on forest conservation and restoration, and the neoliberal policy and ideological environment of Costa Rican politics determined conservation's neoliberal form as market-based programs: PES and Ecomarkets I and II. This is an example the neoliberalization of nature being realized, but these market programs have remained stagnant and their associated commodity form, Environmental Services Certificates (CSAs – *Certificado de Servicios Ambientales*, which represent one hectare of PES protected land) have failed to circulate. Nevertheless, the Costa Rican state and its multinational lenders promote the programs as models of sustainable development.

This section describes and discusses these policies in further detail using historical, policy and economic data to provide a coherent narrative of the development of PES and other environmental policy in terms of political economy.

Costa Rica has a complex relationship with socialist ideas. By the 1940s, both sides of a looming civil war were influenced by socialism, whether Communist, Christian-Socialist, or Democratic-Socialist (Longley, 1997, pp. 1-41) The figure who emerged from this period as the architect of the modern Costa Rican republic, Jose Figueres Ferrer, described his political ideal as utopian socialism. He claimed throughout his life that he never aspired towards political office but was instead interested in developing "a more humane system for organizing agro-industrial enterprise" (Figueres Ferrer, 1987, pp. 61-62).

This background, which meshed tightly with Costa Ricans' conception of themselves as essentially egalitarian and democratic "yeoman farmers" (Fletcher et al., 2020, p. 6) came to shape both Figueres' political career and the nation's future trajectory as an example of socialist democracy and development. Figuerísta policies, along with massive investment by the US State Department, led Costa Rica into its "golden age" during the 1960s (*Ibid.*, p. 8).

The idea of connecting people to land through direct ownership in order to combat inequality was a central goal of the new Costa Rican state. Although it caused deforestation, I would argue that it also had a role in creating a Costa Rican middle class. I group some of the important policies of the period under the title of *land-to-tiller*.

From the 1950s-80s, land in small- to mid-sized agricultural holdings increased in Costa Rica, due to policies which gave "land to the man who tills it" (2020, p. 29). The state subsidized deforestation by granting land titles to those who cleared land and put it to productive uses such as agriculture and cattle ranching (2020, p. 152). The Costa Rican state was an enthusiastic promoter of material progress, creating the Department of Social Security (CCSS) in 1941, Costa Rican Electricity Institute (ICE) in 1948, the National Directorate of

Community Development (DINADECO) in 1967, and the Costa Rican Development Agency (CODESA) in 1972, among numerous other state organs dedicated to development. The rhetoric of progress and development was central to the governing philosophy of Costa Rica's revolutionary government post-1948 (Molina Jiménez & Palmer, 2007, pp. 122-143).

The Costa Rican idea of development was intimately tied to the clearing of land and expansion of the agricultural frontier. In 1961, ITCO was created to "protect forest resources as well as promote agricultural colonization" (Avendaño Flores, 2005, p. 2). However, the Institute favored the development of *campesino* settlements over the protection of forests (*Ibid.*, p. 3). During the 1960s and 70s, the Costa Rican state incentivized deforestation "by subsidizing land clearing directly (through granting land title for so doing) as well as indirectly by subsidizing agriculture and cattle ranching with the aim of increasing production" (Breitling, 2020, p. 152).

Oral history accounts of the settlement of the South-West zone detail the clearing of large tracts of land through settlements, deforestation and hunting (Mendez-Trejos, 2016, pp. 31-37) During this time, Costa Rica experienced a "spectacular wave of growth" linked to the expansion of the global economy following WWII (2007, p. 119). Coffee plantations nearly tripled their production and public investment in schools, roads, hospitals, and other infrastructure was strong (Matulis and Fletcher, 2020, p. 120 – 123).

Because of structural adjustment programs which destroyed protectionist policies for production for local consumption, low-input crops like maize and beans declined in favor of commodity crops like coffee, banana, and pineapple (Galt, 2020, p. 42).

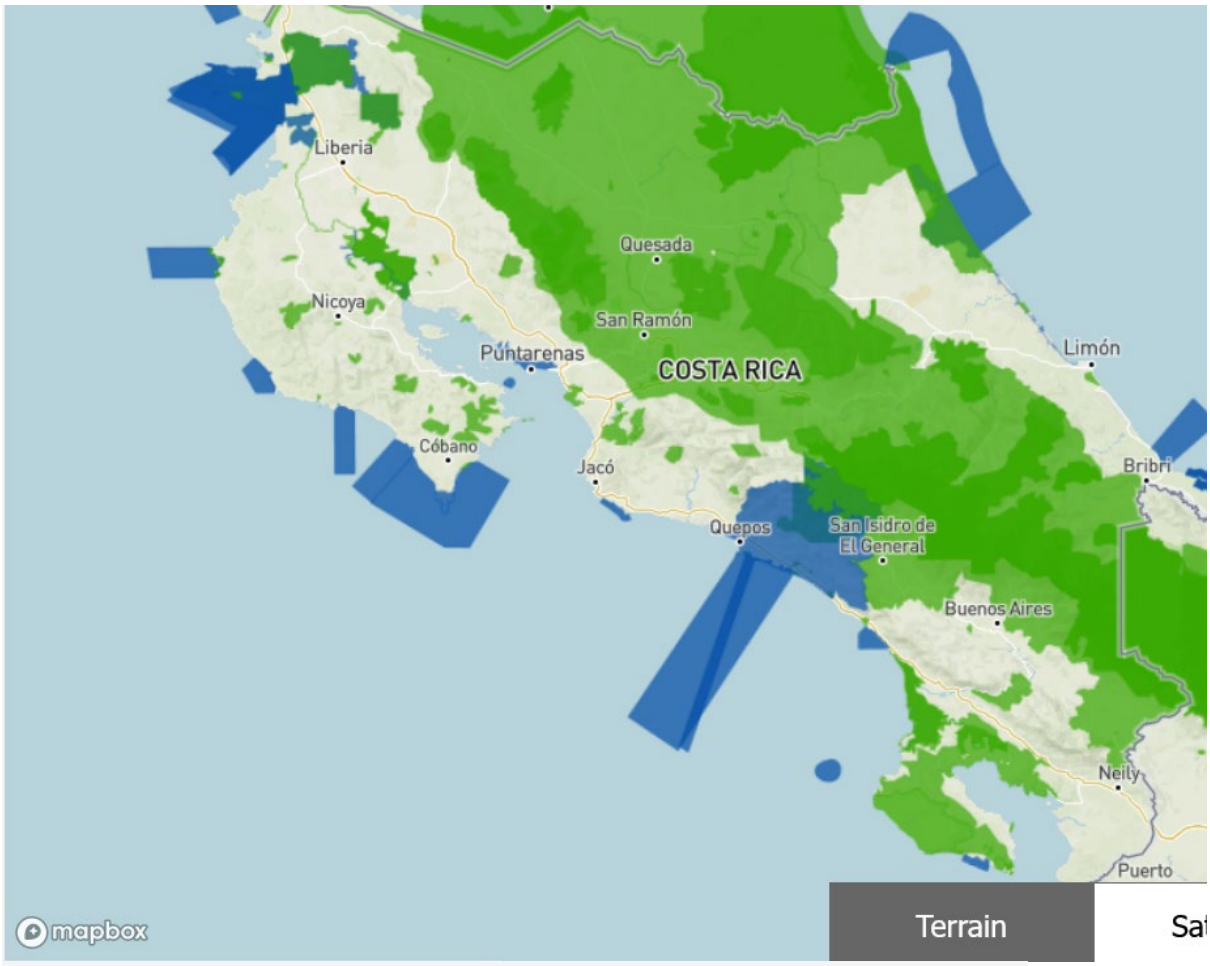
While it is possible for these commodity crops to be grown by traditional and improved techniques which include poly-cropping for shade, nitrogen fixation, and supplemental food production, these techniques have lower productivity than monocropping and have been supplanted by high-yield, high-input methods (Babin, 2020, p. 69). By the late 1980s, "expansion of cattle ranching and other forms of commodity agriculture to augment foreign exchange exacerbated the deforestation already rampant throughout the country" (Fletcher et al., 2020, p. 15).

Although it is likely that the deforestation in Costa Rica was greatly exaggerated at the time, the Costa Rican state responded by implementing Forestry Law 7575 which forbids "land-use change from forest to other uses … throughout the country" (Breitling, 2020, p. 157). This law also implemented Payments for Environmental Services (PES) which are discussed in section E of this chapter. In 1979, the Costa Rican state began to offer "a variety of financial incentives in the form of subsidies and tax breaks" to encourage reforestation and sustainable land management" (*Ibid.*, p. 154).

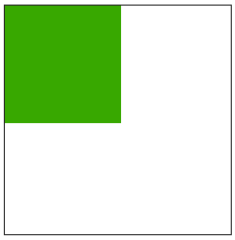
In 1987, the Brundtland Report popularized the concept of "sustainable development." (Avendaño Flores, 2005, p. 7) This was followed by a second UN Environment conference, the so-called "Earth Summit," at Rio de Janeiro in 1992 (*Ibid.*, p. 9). The Western ontology of nature was shifting, and the pragmatism of expansion into internal frontiers was seriously undermined by these conceptual developments. Costa Rica, perhaps because of its newly powerful central state and favorable status with the USA, which allowed it flexibility in determining its socio-political orientation, responded to the changing

global ontology of nature and placed itself at the forefront of a shift towards environmentalism.

About half the national territory was occupied by forests even after the colonization events of the 19th and 20th centuries as seen in Figure 3. The forests on these maps correspond roughly to contemporary protected areas, as seen in Figure 18 – they formed the nucleus of secondary forest recovery. Recovery of forests began during the 1980s, due to the reasons outlined in this chapter and a "reduction of livestock production … collapse of international meat prices and the disappearance of strong state subsidies … new employment opportunities, and a general shift away from an economy based on agriculture and livestock to one based on tourism and services" (Breitling, 2020, pp. 157 – 158).



Terrestrial and inland waters protected area coverage



26.59%
Coverage

13,730km²
Land area covered

51,636km²
Total land area

26%
6th National Report coverage

Figure 18: Terrestrial and Inland Waters Protected Area Coverage (Contemporary)

Costa Rica: Protected Planet. [https://www.protectedplanet.net/country/CRI]

Although environmental protections had been written into Costa Rican law as early as 1828, the first protected areas established in 1969, and incentives for conservation introduced in 1979, environmental issues were not at the center of Costa Rican politics until the passage of Forestry Law 7575 (FL 7575) in 1996 (*Ibid.*, p. 143). Previously to this, the rationale of economic development was central to the Costa Rican state's conception of government; subsequently, this conception shifted towards conservationist management of the environment. FL 7575 centered ecosystem services in Costa Rican economic and legal policy, expanded protected areas, and prohibited land-use change from forest to any other use as well as introducing PES (*Ibid.*, p. 147). In the following years, state-mandated studies would determine that 10-20% of Costa Rican lands were over-utilized, and another 10% were well-utilized but required ecological restoration treatments (2005, p. 13); these studies and others like them allow the state to understand and administer the environmental health of the national territories and represent the realization of a new mode of governance through conservation in Costa Rica.

When placed in the context of Costa Rica's history over the *mid-durée*, it is evident that the expansion of internal frontiers was only secondarily influenced by state programs until further expansion of agricultural frontiers into forested land was prohibited by FL 7575. ITCO and land-to-tiller legislation gave official impetus to a dynamic of internal expansion of agricultural frontiers which had existed since the early 19th century and which was precipitated by the introduction of coffee as an agricultural commodity, on the one hand, and patterns of population dispersion, on the other.

Forest Law 7575's strict prohibition on land use change, in combination with global mediating factors, formalized a shift in Costa Rica's economy from rural production to urban services and tourism, decisively reorienting the country from agricultural commodity production to a more diversified economy. This shift is discussed in the next section.

II. 1980- 2000: Debt Restructuring and Neoliberalism

Costa Rica defaulted on its external debts in 1981, ending the post-war era of state-led development and internal colonization. Between 1948 and 1981, state enterprise including public utilities, healthcare, and education had dominated the economy, making up nearly one fifth of the labor force (Molina Jiménez & Palmer, 2007, pp. 123-148). The governing philosophy insisted "on technical rather than political criteria for the development of the public sector," leveraging state financing to "open new frontiers" – literally and figuratively – "of capital accumulation outside the control of the traditional bourgeoisie," and putting banks, specialists, and information at the disposal of small and medium business ventures. "Human capital" was developed through the training of technicians, professionals, and scholars through the University of Costa Rica (UCR) (*Ibid.*, pp. 123 - 124).

This led to a "significant improvement in people's living conditions" (*Ibid.,* p. 125) and poverty rates fell from 51% to 25% between 1961 and 1977. However, state spending led to rapidly increasing public debt: "From $164 million in 1970 it had risen to just over $1 billion in 1975" (*Ibid.*, p. 143). The Sandinista Revolution in neighboring Nicaragua soon erupted into total war, which "shattered regional trade," severely hampering opportunities for Costa Rica to improve its trade balance and continue paying its debts. The Costa Rican economy collapsed in 1980 under the combined pressure of an oil shock, a crash in coffee prices, rising interest rates, and scaled down support from the USA (*Ibid.,* 143-146).

In this context, a government led by Rodrigo Carazo and dominated by neoliberal ideology began negotiations with the IMF to secure funding and avoid a total collapse of the Costa Rican state. However, the restructuring proposed by the IMF and including

"privatization of state enterprises, reducing public sector employment and social spending, eliminating subsidies on basic foodstuffs, and other measures from the free market playbook … was considered suicidal [by the administration, which feared public backlash]," and the Carazo government subsequently declared a moratorium on payment of all foreign debts (*Ibid.*, p. 146) In 1982, Carazo ended negotiations with the IMF and expelled its representatives from the country. USAID (United States Agency for International Development) stepped in to provide emergency funding, but also required economic restructuring, especially the privatization of state enterprises such as CODESA (*Ibid.*, pp. 148-152).

USAID effectively assumed the role of a "parallel Ministry of Finance," directing economic policy and disbursing funds summing $1.3 billion between 1982 and 1990 – "this disbursement was carried out by private organizations [such as] the Costa Rican Coalition for Development Initiatives (CINDE)" (*Ibid.*, p. 148). Neoliberalism had become the "ascendant governing philosophy" of Costa Rica by 1984, and USAID had assumed non-representative, anti-democratic and quasi-governmental powers (*Ibid.*, p. 152). These interventions led to a stabilization and gradual transformation of the Costa Rican economy. Critically, they intensified a long-term trend which saw peasants making up an ever-smaller proportion of the "Economically Active Population," falling from "14 to 7 percent … between 1984 and 2000" (*Ibid.*). State assistance to those agricultural producers who remained active was slashed by the Arias administration between 1986 and 1990.

The 1990s were a period of economic "shock therapy" contested through strikes and popular mobilizations. Between 1990 and 1992, US aid to Costa Rica fell drastically, from

$78 to $20 million dollars annually. Direct foreign investment increased proportionally: from an average of $55 million annually in 1982-91 to $307 million in 1992-1996. Direct investment and a reduction in foreign aid did not produce prosperity in Costa Rica, contrary to neoliberal development theories such as that put forth by Damibsa Moyo (Moyo, 2011). It also failed to rein in corruption (2007, pp. 154-175).

On the contrary, tax revenues from industry and foreign businesses had proved virtually impossible to collect in the 70s and continued to be so: "[the] Costa Rican industrial sector came to be controlled by foreign capital … converted into an elaborate apparatus for multiplying the value of foreign capital and transferring growing shares of the agricultural sector out of the country … unable to police tax evasion … [the state suffered an] intense decapitalization of the economy" (2007, p. 143). Between 1990 and 2004, the central government was only able to collect taxes at a level similar to that of 1984, about 13% of GDP. State promotion of private enterprise largely consisted of tax exemptions. Currently, major transnationals such as Bank of America and Amazon conduct business in Costa Rica from within tax-exempt free-trade zones – the so-called *zonas libres* which employ large numbers of Costa Ricans (*Ibid.*, pp. 143-175).

Between 1984 and 1999, approximately one billion dollars was transferred by the state to "a variety of companies, including some transnational corporations," in a massive corruption scheme (*Ibid.*, p. 175). This amount is comparable to that disbursed by USAID between 1982 and 1990: $1.3 billion. Corruption and tax evasion "reached unprecedented dimensions starting in the 1980s," making them "an inherent part of the neoliberal transformation" (*Ibid*.). Without the ability to effectively collect taxes, issuing bonds is a

moot point for the Costa Rican state. This combination of factors completely undermines Moyo's hypothesis that cutting aid and encouraging direct investment through the issuing of bonds is a path to prosperity for the Global South (2011, pp. 77-97). The weakness of Costa Rica's regulatory and tax environment suggests that environmental policies are difficult to enforce in the country, an idea which is supported by the narratives I represent in Chapter 5.

The economic collapse and restructuring of the 1980s-2000s suggest that the expansion into internal frontiers which was the cause of deforestation in the preceding decades began to slow at this time. There were reductions in direct state assistance to agriculturalists and the proportion of Costa Ricans "employed in the primary sector (mostly agriculture) dropped from over 27 to 15 percent" between 1985 and 2004. Tourism, services, and professions have largely replaced agricultural work as Costa Ricans' primary occupations, with 7% of the GDP in 2004 drawn from tourist revenues: some $1.3 billion dollars (2007, pp. 159-162).

I argue that these factors ended the dynamic of internal frontier expansion in Costa Rica and allowed for secondary forest regeneration. Considering the changes in *mid-durée* patterns of population dispersion and occupation as well as national and global markets, Costa Rica's Forest Transition can be seen to result from these changes and decisive state legislation in the form of Forestry Law 7575's (FL 7575) ban on land use change.

As well as banning land change from forest to other uses, FL7575 established PES. These payments are funded though "national gasoline and water taxes as well as by loans and grants from the World Bank and other bilateral and multilateral organizations" (Breitling, 2020, p. 155). The payments are not made by a determination of cost-of-living or other

human-oriented standard but based on “the lost opportunity cost … of an alternative land use, which in the 1990s was identified as … cattle ranching” (*Ibid*.).

The development of PES is a manifestation of the neoliberalization of nature and the meeting of economic and environmental ontologies. It is also related to the self-interested motivation of a quasi-governmental body made up of private- and public-sector representatives, FONAFIFO (Figure 19), to protect its funding sources and attempts by the World Bank to reintroduce itself into the governing apparatus of Costa Rica through funding obligations.

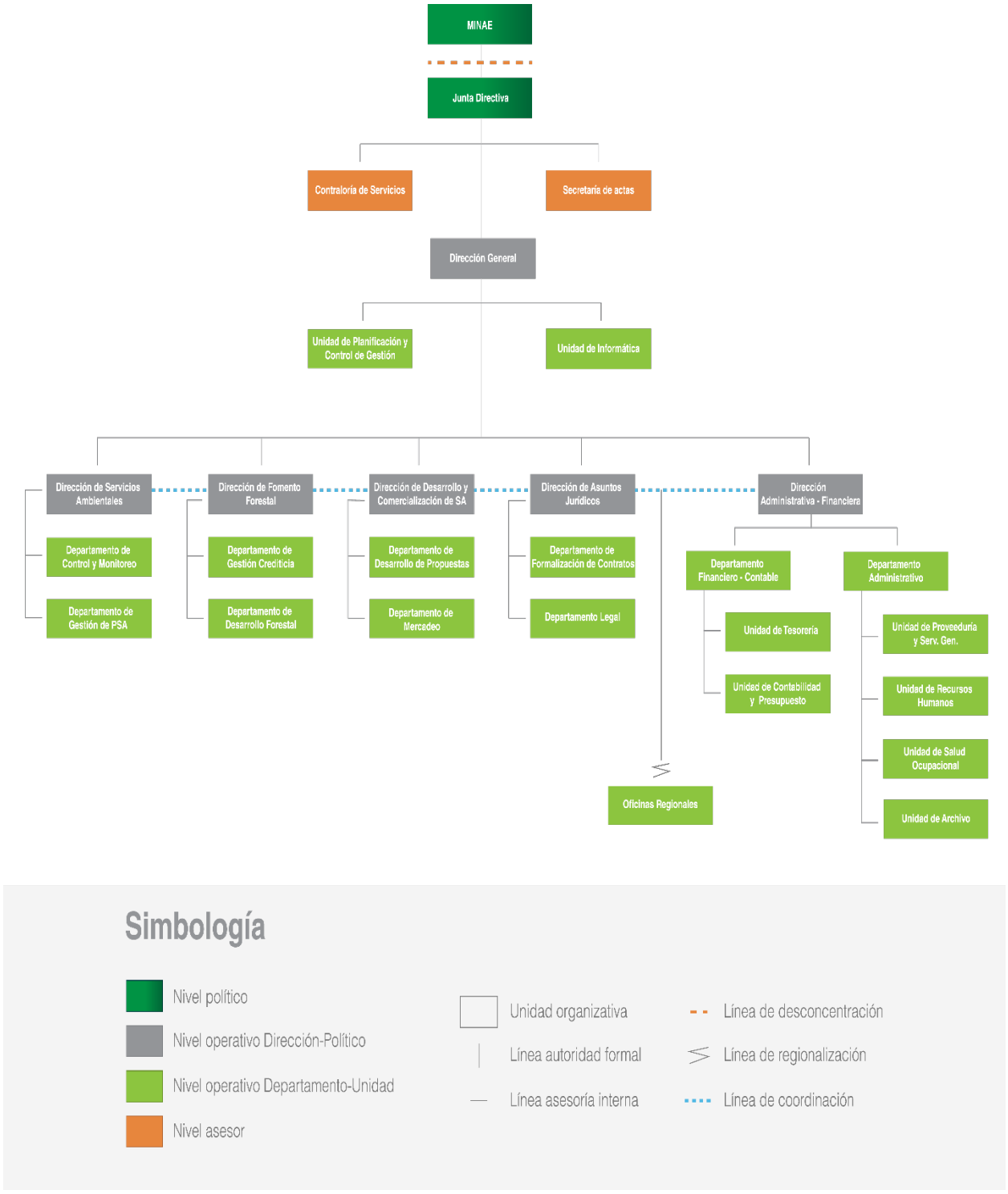


Figure 19: FONAFIFO Organizational Diagram.

From: https://www.fonafifo.go.cr/es/conozcanos/organigrama/

E. FOREST LAW 7575: PES

Costa Rica's PES program was conceptualized in an ideological environment dominated by neoliberalism. Plans for PES were couched in the "language of finance," to make them attractive to government ministries and the World Bank and hinged on the remaking of nature into a resource to be bought and sold – the "economic value of nature" (Matulis and Fletcher, 2020, p. 139) FONAFIFO, the agency created by FL 7575 to direct PES, was designed under a "maximum decentralization model," with a mission to "make conservation the 'economically rational' management option by increasing direct financial benefit," and directing the Costa Rican economy "toward a form of profitable, competitive land use based on sound business principles" (*Ibid.*, pp. 134-136).

This ideological orientation is expressed and realized by the making of a specific form of resource-commodity: the *Certificado de Servicios Ambientales* (CSA) which represents "one hectare of PSA[PES]-protected forested … [and] may … be traded … [acting as] the mechanism by which abstracted 'service commodities,' [so-called ecosystem services such as production of clean air and water] can be circulated in markets." The fact that these certificates failed to circulate, and the PES program has continued to rely on large infusions of cash in the form of external debt and grants, mirrors the reliance of supposedly free-market actors on direct and indirect state subsidies, such as tax breaks and development of infrastructure, more generally. If PES functions at all, it is as a financial incentive and despite its failure to act as a market-based mechanism; this "raises important questions about the benefits … [of] even grander market-based approaches … to save the forests of the world" (*Ibid.*, pp. 136-137).

Although FONAFIFO was initially financed by taxes on the domestic sale fossil fuels, its structure was designed to obligate the agency to secure a portion of its own funding through diverse mechanisms, including "securities, grants, loans, trust funds, short term investments, and the sale of ecosystem services," such that it has a "vital interest in identifying and developing new sources of funding." The agency's design means that it is "bound to the profit motive." FONAFIFO has failed to develop any significant market in ecosystem services, with "market-based sources of revenue … [only] amounting to .5 percent of operations since the start of payments." The agency has not achieved its goal – a manifestation of the neoliberalization of nature – which was to develop a "conservation program … based on private financing and carried out in open markets," and thus any effect Forestry Law 7575 has had on reforestation cannot be attributed to market-based conservation strategies (*Ibid.*, 134-136).

Another significant question raised by PES's performance is the role of external debt in the financing of domestic conservation programs. The most significant sources of funding secured by FONAFIFO have been "grants and loans from international development banks and 'donor organizations'" Due to its need to continually seek new sources of private funding, FONAFIFO approached the World Bank (WB) and Global Environment Facility (GEF), reaching an agreement in 2007. This agreement totaled $80 million dollars across two projects, "Ecomarkets," and "Mainstreaming Market-Based Instruments for Environmental Management," known as "Ecomarkets II." Eighty percent of the funds allocated by WB and GEF came in the form of loans – loans which even the World Bank representative in the negotiations believed Costa Rica did not really need (*Ibid.*, pp 136 – 137).

Given that WB and GEF loans were not necessary for Costa Rica's financial stability, the production of other effects must be examined as the motivation for these loans. First, FONAFIFO required a stable source of funding, as discussed above. The ratification of Ecomarkets I and II by the Legislative Assembly mandated the issuing of funds by the Ministry of Finance to FONAFIFO to guarantee its contribution to the project as required by the lenders; this acted as a "mandate for budgetary allocations from the Ministry of Finance" (*Ibid.*, p. 139). Second, the Ministry of Finance saw the loans as a way to replace internal debt with external debt at a lower interest rate – 1.5% rather than 10%. Third, the State perceived PES as an amelioration of the potential hardship caused by Forestry Law 7575's prohibition on land use change – those who suffered opportunity costs could be at least partially compensated through conservation payments (*Ibid.*, 140 – 157).

Last, the World Bank saw the programs as means to re-enter Costa Rican politics and exert policy influence predicated on its interest as a program partner. Ecomarkets I and II are flagships that allow WB to promote its new Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP) based on sustainable development. The Bank and GEF's role in these programs gives them domestic legal standing under Forestry Law 7575 as partners in FONAFIFO's programs and as "buyer[s] of biodiversity services" (*Ibid.*, pp 137 – 142).

Conceptually, the loans were described by Costa Rica's negotiator, Franz Tattenbach, as "[not a] loan;" Tattenbach insisted on the discursive and interpretive possibility of considering the loans as a "'purchase' of biodiversity by global 'service users.'" By reframing loans as purchases, Tattenbach, the WB and GEF are able to represent the Ecomarkets programs as neoliberal market mechanisms rather than what they really are:

loans with strings attached, which undermine Costa Rica's sovereignty in determining domestic conservation policy. Franz Tattenbach went on to become President and CEO of the International Institute for Sustainable Development, a prestigious think tank based in Canada[23] (*Ibid.*, pp. 141 – 146).

In an initial proof-of-concept, the WB exerted its decisive influence as funding partner to shift a proposed tax on water pollution to a tariff more closely resembling a usage fee paid by consumers of the resource (clean water) to the provider (the Costa Rican state). By issuing loans, the WB was thus able to affect policy as well as extract a portion of revenue collected by the Costa Rican state in return for ecosystem services. In other words, WB used loans that were *not really loans* to create a mechanism for extracting economic rents from the Costa Rican state economy in the form of long-term debt payments. It "renormalized a dependency on foreign lending to advance domestic programs" (*Ibid.*, pp. 143 – 146).

The WB has touted PES as being responsible for the success of Costa Rican forest and biodiversity conservation and labeled Costa Rica a "development success story."[24] It has been able to reframe its role as creditor into that of a trusted and paternalistic advisor, stating that the true reason Costa Rica accepted its loans was due to childish desires for reassurance, with its task team leader stating that "they [the Costa Rican State] wanted stability … they wanted oversight … they wanted to bring in … ideas from our side" (*Ibid.*, p. 138).

[23] https://www.iisd.org/people/franz-tattenbach
[24] https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/costarica/overview

Costa Rica's acceptance of loans and policy influence by the WB was not unilateral; that is, the WB had no ability to impose loans due to any specific financial crisis, as the IMF attempted in 1981. Rather, the decentralized and market-based design of FONAFIFO led it to continuously seek new sources of funding, and the Ministry of Finance needed lower interest rates on national debts; GEF and WB were positioned to meet these needs.

The ability of WB to provide low interest rates made external loans more attractive to the Costa Rican Ministry of Finance than internal sources of credit. The predominance of neoliberal ideologies since the 1980s encouraged Costa Rican bureaucrats to frame the loans as purchases and thus make them seem more attractive to other bureaucrats wary of anything resembling state debt or financing. These events did not occur due to any grand narrative or conspiracy; rather, the internal structures and governing ideologies of Costa Rican institutions, and economic forces acting on the state at the national level, led to the adoption of WB and GEF financing to serve a diverse array of actors, ends and means. The history of PES is an example of economic and environmental ontologies of governance meeting and co-producing each other.

F. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This chapter has described some of the global and national forces which have mediated the human-environment relationship in Costa Rica since 1948. During the 1950s, official and unofficial colonization movements established the current settlements of Coto Brus. These movements deployed a modern concept of *development* and local desires for *improvement* in transforming the populations and landscapes of the area. However, they were not ideologically, ethnically, or culturally uniform and used a mix of (pre-, and post-) capitalist strategies to survive. Later, the effects of colonization were interpreted according to a new ontology of environmentalism. National and local relationships between people and environments were transformed through policy and practice. The most important conservation policies in Costa Rica were established through Forestry Law 7575, which prohibited changing forest to other land uses and established PES.

The market components of PES, deployed as a way to mediate resource exchanges which are not well defined in the current ontologies of environment and economy was not successful, as shown by the failure of CSAs to circulate. This aspect of PES was driven by ideology and the perennial need of the Costa Rican state to restructure its internal and external debts. This means that the realization of PES as an active market-based program, and the realization of the conservation it represents as a commodity in the form of CSAs, has little to do with the complex motivations, needs, and desires which drive Costa Rican people to engage in deforestation, conservation, or reforestation. Rather, it manifests conceptual turns which I described in Chapter 2 as development (colonization), conservation, and the neoliberalization of nature; the co-production of contemporary ontologies I described as

economy and ecology; and the institutional characteristics of FONAFIFO which were influenced by all of these factors.

CHAPTER 4. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH: INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDY OF SOCIO-ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE

A. INTRODUCTION TO METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This thesis uses a multidisciplinary methodology combining historical analysis and ethnographic field methods in order to describe dynamic human-environment relationships in Costa Rican and the canton of Coto Brus. The objects of this study include the historically evolving and dynamic links between the space of Coto Brus and national and global practices and ontologies of governance, nature, and economy. In Chapter 3, I used historical data and the method of incorporated comparison described by historical sociologist Phillip McMichael (McMichael, 1990, 2019) to show how abstract transnational forms – development, conservation, nature, and neoliberalism – were co-produced as realities in Costa Rica by interactions between government and non-government institutions, social groups, and nature. By describing the encounter between nature and political economy in Coto Brus, I historicize the region's human-environment interactions in relation to the history of world capitalism in Chapter 3 and through the ethnographic vignettes in Chapter 5.

I also employed ethnographic methods drawn from anthropology. I visited Coto Brus in the summer of 2022, interviewed and conversed with people of different ages and backgrounds, went to conservation sites, and observed the social, material, and ecological environments of the region. I used a semi-structured and open-ended interview format called *platica* which is based on a relaxed exchange of views, feelings, and life stories through conversation, usually held outdoors (Montiel et al., 2009). I selected interlocutors by contacting local conservation NGOs and businesses and asking if I could interview a

representative about their organization's history and current practices. I asked people I met this way to introduce me to older Coto Bruseños who could tell me about the history of the region from their own perspectives. I met a local historian, Rafael Mendez Trejos, who published a book of oral history from the region (Mendez-Trejos, 2016), which I used to supplement the oral histories and personal narratives I collected.

My choice of methodologies is informed by decolonizing philosophies and my own biography and positionality. I discuss my own presence as author and researcher in this text, and my experience studying a region I am personally connected to, by drawing on the reflexive strain of anthropology represented by autoethnographic work like that of Dawn McIntosh and Shinsuke Eguchi (Eguchi, 2020; McIntosh & Eguchi, 2020). In the last section of this chapter, I relate my choice of methodologies to aesthetic and normative concerns in my work and to the methods of *writing globalectically* described by literary critic and novelist, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (Ngũgĩ wa, 2014); and *writing out loud* described by Roland Barthes (Barthes, 1973).

B. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH: HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

I. McMichael: Incorporated Comparison

Phillip McMichael proposed the method of incorporated comparison for studying the articulation of abstract processes in specific times and places (1990). He defines the method as such: "an emergent form of 'historical-comparative' inquiry [which] parallels the rise of world-system theory … systemic phenomena are compared without assuming an all-encompassing world system … it progressively *constructs* a whole as a methodological procedure by giving context to historical phenomena … the 'whole' emerges via comparative analysis of 'parts' as moments in a self-forming whole" (*Ibid.*, p. 386).

Incorporated comparison was originally a response to the limits of comparative methods and world-systems theory for historical analysis, and in recent years McMichael has argued that it is also an appropriate methodology for studying encounters between differing ontologies and epistemologies (2019). This section will describe the limits of comparative and world-systems analysis which McMichael sought to address, describe the methodology of *incorporated comparison* as it relates to this study, and outline McMichael's recent proposal to use incorporated comparison to study moments of encounter between the ontologies of 'economy,' and 'environment;' these concepts relate directly to those of development, conservation, and neoliberalization of nature discussed in Chapter 2.

For McMichael, one of the conceptual risks in social science is the reification of units like society, nation-state, or economy (1990, p. 385). Thinking of nation-states as whole entities which develop individually, for example, "assumes unique cultural configurations in

societies unconnected in time and space," obscuring the fact that "nation-states are partial institutions of a broader, singular, global economy" (*Ibid.*, p. 390). This flaw is characteristic of comparative methods which take "[reified] evolving national societies (each independently replicating a common systemic process)" as objects of comparison (*Ibid.*).

World-system theory (Wallerstein, 1974) addresses this issue by "positing the encompassing world system as the unit of analysis," recognizing that "the world system is not merely the *site* of social change, it is more the fundamental *source* of social change" (1990, p. 390). However, McMichael writes that world-system theory is formally flawed — by arguing the all-encompassing and determinant role of "the worldwide division of labor," for example, world system theory equates its unit and object of analysis and risks becoming tautological; it "has no choice but to prefigure history" (*Ibid.*, p. 391).

To address the shortcomings of both methods, McMichael proposes *incorporated comparison*, which is practiced by analyzing "comparable social phenomena as differentiated *outcomes* or *moments* of an historically integrated process" (*Ibid.*, p.392), "in which interrelated instances are integral to, and define, the general historical process … the particulars directly realize the general" (*Ibid.*, p.389). This form of analysis does not presuppose a whole but describes particularities in order to understand where and how world-spanning processes like development are articulated. Understanding the realization of these processes locally then allows "the whole [to be] discovered through analysis of the mutual conditioning of parts" (*Ibid.*, p. 391). For example, using this principle helped me to understand that I am not studying an essential form of 'Costa Rican human-environment

relationships,' but rather the way these relationships are constructed and transformed dynamically over time.

To further ground this in the current study, my object of analysis is not "Costa Rica," as a socio-political 'whole,' rather, I am studying transnational processes and concepts as they have been constructed and transformed over time and in this specific place: Coto Brus; and then examining how relationships between people and landscapes in the region are mediated by these factors.

For example, the personal and historical narratives presented in this thesis show that Coto Brus' colonization in the 1950s was the result of an integrated modern world, a space formed by practices and technologies which bridge space and create connections between rural areas global markets. Markets strongly influenced land use and economic fortunes in Coto Brus. Later, the results of Coto Brus' colonization, which I describe as a development project, created the conditions which are responded to by conservation.

Recently, McMichael has proposed the continued relevance of studies using *incorporated comparison* through examining what he calls 'ontological encounters,' where different conceptions of reality and values meet in conflict, negotiation, and co-production (2019, p. 217). After the centrality of political economy in world-system theory and other conceptualizations of social change in the 20th century, the overlapping crises of environment and economy have clarified "modernity['s] … ecological underpinnings" (*Ibid*.) These crises have spurred both increased "clarifying" and "subordinating" of nature under economic rationalisms as these two ontologies "come to condition one another in the modern world, establishing an unmistakable relational conjuncture" (*Ibid.*).

This relational conjuncture is realized in the practices of neoliberalization of nature, including 'sustainable development,' and 'green capitalism.' However, Historicizing the encounter between economic and environmental ontologies shows that these concepts and world-systems — economy and ecology — "are not only comparable but … only understandable through their relation to one another" (*Ibid.*, p. 234).

This thesis pursues goals of incorporated comparison as outlined by McMichael: to reveal the "interdependence of … two ontologies [economic and environmental] … [and to invoke] a different, ecological calculus, as a more robust answer to the material crisis the world is facing" (*Ibid.*, p. 216). It describes the ways that economic and environmental ontologies interact in Coto Brus.

C. ETHNOGRAPHIC METHODS

I. Conducting Interviews and Constructing Narratives

This thesis is a work of synthesis and an ethnographic survey, which marks out areas for further study just as *pioneros* in Coto Brus used to mark out parcels in the forest. I recorded interviews and visited conservation sites in order to offer oral history narratives from several perspectives and describe the social and ecological environments which historical change has produced in the region. I discuss this aggregative and prospective form of historical sociology as *writing globalectically* and *writing out loud* in Section D of this chapter.

I interviewed people living in Coto Brus, who have had different relationships with the landscape: farmers, wage laborers, conservationists, and people who combined all or some of these pursuits. I conducted 6 extended interviews, of which 5 are presented in this thesis for reasons of clarity and length. These included: Roldan, age 75, one of the earliest mid-century colonists in the region, who became an influential, wealthy land-owner and municipal official; Melchor, age 86, another early colonist who grew coffee on his small farm; Gil, age 80, an early colonist who worked as a wage laborer; Piedad and Ismael, 55 and 56, who run an AirBnB and conservation site on Piedad's inherited land; and Silvio, perhaps in his 30s, an ecologist from the first conservation NGO founded in Coto Brus by Coto Bruseños, Finca Cantaros.

The selection of these interview subjects was collaborative and also semi-structured. To begin my selection process, I contacted organizations involved in conservation in Coto

Brus at various scales: the Wilson Botanical Garden / Las Cruces Tropical Research Station, the largest in Central America; Finca Cantaros, a medium-sized conservation site founded by a US biologist but now run by a local NGO; and Finca Maquique, an agroecology site and AirBnB where I stayed during my study. Of these, Wilson and Cantaros selected representatives to talk to me. At Maquique, I interviewed the couple who live on and run the property, Piedad and Ismael. They put me in contact with Roldan, whom many other people in the region also named as an important person to talk to, and Gil and Melchor, whom they knew as acquaintances.

My interview style is informal. I adopt the *platica* practice described by Chicano authors Montiel, Atencio, and Mares, which is an interview method based on the Latino cultural practice of long, slow, and sometimes meandering conversations (Montiel et al., 2009). This allows speakers to digress from and return to points, for example, in ways that can enrich meaning by showing the complex ways thoughts are related and recounted.

I wanted to follow the topics and memories they considered important and see what kinds of histories they wanted recorded. I started the interviews by telling my informants that I am interested in the history of the canton and especially the ways people have interacted with the environment. I then followed up with prompts like, “what was the landscape like when you arrived here,” and “how has it changed?” I asked how people felt about the changes, and how those feelings evolved. I also asked, “what was a typical workday like for you,” and “what were the roads like when you were growing up?” I wanted to get a holistic sense of the way things have changed in the canton, how people have affected and interpreted

these changes, how they feel about them, and what they think about the future. I drew from a list of questions which can be found in Appendix A.

As part of the ethnographic interview methods used in this study, I allowed my interlocutors to express views and relate stories without interrupting or challenging them – this leads to interview subjects being more comfortable and expressing themselves more fully than in an interview they perceive as rigid, formal, or adversarial. This method is known as the art of "ethnographic seduction," (Huggins et al., 2002, p. 50) which both subject and interviewer engage in, attempting to negotiate a terrain of confidence on which they can unfold their questions and narratives. While anthropologists engaged in excavating secrets or other sensitive information may see ethnographic seduction as a diversionary tactic used by their subjects and which they must penetrate, such diversions are useful to my study because they show feelings, concepts, or values contextualized within life stories.

I analyzed these interviews and compiled them into narratives using manual and machine transcription of the audio recordings, direct quotes from repeated listenings, and my notes of unrecorded conversations. I drew details from conversations with each interlocutor to create a representation of the historical narrative each of them presented, being attentive to ways that each speaker expressed their motivations, values, and feelings. I tried to "be interested in what people are interested in," and follow the "kinky" ways people form their viewpoints in sympathy with one another or relate concepts and situations to each other (Rutherford, 2015, pp. 112, 105).

Rather than treat narratives as individual performances, my analytical methodology recognizes the inter-relationality of bodily sensations, ideas, viewpoints, material and

environmental cultures. In my analysis, I deploy two concepts coined by David Hume and discussed by anthropologist Daniela Rutherford: **(1)** circumstances and **(2)** sympathy. Rutherford uses her notion of *kinky empiricism* – an empiricism which is comfortable with the weird relationship whereby evidence and interpretation fold back on each other and become imbricated in complex ways, and which also disrupts and reorganizes social and intellectual relations in the way kink rearranges sexual, emotional, and bodily affects – to show how Hume's concepts remain relevant to anthropological analysis (*Ibid.*, pp. 105-109). This is "an empiricism which takes seriously the situated nature of what all thinkers do" (*Ibid.*, p. 106).

Rutherford's kinky empiricism revolves around two of Hume's concepts. **(1)** Circumstances, which have to do with the interpretive practice of inference. Inference forms a basis of reasoning and "reads the unfolding of events as signs of what once was and what is to come" (*Ibid.*, p. 110). Inference "moves along grooves established by previous encounters with the world," and Hume calls the "aggregated effect of these encounters … circumstances [which] … make it more or less probable that a certain person will have certain experiences … [they] lead particular people to read a particular cause or effect off of a particular event" (*Ibid.*).

Circumstances can influence the ways people encounter and interpret evidence, and the notion of evidence rests on the assumption that the way things happened in the past can tell us something about the way they will happen in the future; Hume calls the habit of believing our senses and experience a "custom" (*Ibid.*, p. 211). Employing Hume's argument about evidence as a custom, Rutherford writes that "passion [is] at the heart of reason" and

that "rational thought draws on the same organic forces that drive hunger, lust, and the beating of hearts … [like] fellow-feeling, reason is less sublime than lizard-brained" (*Ibid*.). This means that it is important to be reflexive when considering the ways that custom and emotions can affect our perceptions of what is valid, reasonable, and in evidence.

For example, Rutherford states that when interpreting anthropological data, it is "not that anything goes," but "that what does go is … 'historically locatable [;]' interpretations follow grooves laid in the imaginations of individuals and institutions by virtue of their pathways through space and time" (*Ibid*.). By describing the embodiment of concepts like development and conservation in Coto Brus, this thesis' analysis is attentive to the *circumstances* which have shaped the ways people in the canton think, feel, and act.

It is also attentive to the way these values and performances are shaped by relationships between people, which Rutherford discusses through **(2)** Hume's concept of *sympathy*.

This is another useful concept in anthropological analysis of narratives. For Hume, Rutherford argues, sympathy "is not empathy [or] pity … rather it is the embodied outcome of proximity … that leads people to share perspectives and passions … sympathy is a source of both power and compassion [;] it is an instrument of governance" (*Ibid.*, p. 112).[25] My

[25] Martin Heidegger used his term *dwelling* in a similar way, and architect Paolo Soleri argued that the city is a technology for producing what he called *the urban effect*; an effect which ties people together with bonds (*religio*) and produces creative power through the proximity of people and things. For Soleri, the urban effect is a generative cosmological principle whose opposite is *segregation*.

Heidegger, M. (1971). Dwelling, Building, Thinking. In *Poetry, Language, Thought*. Harper Colophon Books. http://faculty.arch.utah.edu/miller/4270heidegger.pdf , Soleri, P. (1981). *The Omega seed : an eschatological hypothesis* (1st ed.). Anchor Press/Doubleday. , Soleri, P. (1993). *Arcosanti: an Urban Laboratory?* Cosanti Press.

analysis discusses sympathy as a force which produces consensus and participation in projects of transformation such as the settling of Coto Brus and its shift from commodity agriculture towards agroecology and tourism. It is also a force which motivates people to adopt ideas, values, and perspectives which are shared by their neighbors because of mutual circumstances which form their particular forms of reasoning and inference. Feelings of sympathy can determine what people believe they "ought to do," and I discussed the management of such beliefs as a form of governance in Chapter 2.

II. McIntosh and Eguchi: Reflexivity and the Body

Costa Rica could be described as a country specialized in communication. It has been a space of movement and exchange since ancient times, as I will discuss in Chapter 4. Since WWII, its geopolitical standing as an important US and UN ally has been managed by Costa Rican state officials through careful performances of rhetoric and friendship (Longley, 1997); at the same time, "the Post-WWII development of global connectivity necessitated foreign service training [on the US side] which sought to control Others through communicative tactics," (McIntosh & Eguchi, 2020). Tourism, which generates large revenues in the country, is an industry based on the performance and communication of culture and the maintenance and sharing of extraordinary spaces; this can lead to preservation or exploitation of regional cultures, and usually some combination of both (Desmond, 1997; Trask, 2016).

These productions and communications are intertwined and sometimes conflictive in the sense that spaces and cultures are manifestations of regional human-environment

ontologies and the diverse values and desires which drive exchange between groups and regions. Ecotourism, for example, expresses an ontology of conservation which both recognizes the value of natural environments and puts them at risk by increasing demand for infrastructure, services, and transportation – this is an economy which is shot through with contradictions, perhaps because it is based on individual sensations and shared sympathies which dynamically transform each other as much or more so than it is based on material exchange (Rutherford, 2015). Tourism workers mediate between differing perspectives and realities.

In other words, many Costa Ricans are specialists in performance and communication because they are involved in professions which require those skills. One example of a Costa Rican cultural performance is acting 'well educated.' Someone who is good at speaking and acting 'well' is valorized as being '*bien educado.*' This means they have an appropriate appearance, and seem well educated, polite, and cultured. My interview methodology took these factors into account by trusting my interlocutors to develop their own narratives and arguments with limited interventions and being sensitive to the ways they may want to portray themselves (as *bien educados*, for instance).

I use a reflexive perspective in this thesis. This section will discuss reflexivity through the autoethnographic work of Intercultural Performance and Communication scholars Dawn McIntosh and Shinsuke Eguchi (McIntosh & Eguchi, 2020).

They argue that performance studies are rooted in the study of oratory practices, – these are discussed in the next section as *orature* – that performances such as speech are important objects of study, and that they are an entry point to the study of cultures. Further,

the "'performance turn' in studying culture ethically challenges scholarship towards reflective and reflexive acts" (2020, p. 7). They define reflexivity as "a methodological process of accounting for the way researchers question, critique, and shift implications of their own ideas, beliefs, and values in shaping their productions of scholarship in and across historical and ideological contexts;" they argue that "the researcher's body is a subjective site of knowledge and analysis and shapes a process of research that always-already requires critical interrogation" (*Ibid*.).

McIntosh and Eguchi's article "dares scholars to (re)turn to the body … approach culture in the mundane spaces, the everyday happenings, and overall, examine the intricacies of enfleshment as culture" (2020, p. 10). When I designed this thesis, I imagined that I would be able to ask people questions about their feelings towards the landscape – in other words, their embodied or enfleshed relationship with the land. However, during the fieldwork, I felt that I was not discussing the topic effectively. Instead, I felt that my conversations ended up centering on questions of values, development, economy, and politics. At first, I was discouraged, but on further reflection, I realized that these questions also center the body: by asking about the ways societies design and maintain particular sets of relationships amongst people and between people and the landscape. I also revisited the recordings and realized that all of my interlocutors did, in fact, address my questions about feelings, and that, perhaps, I was simply caught up in my own experience of negotiating the interview as a two-way exchange and did not recognize their substantive responses until transcribing the interviews later.

I also speculated about way my interviews with people in Coto Brus were structured. I generally started by asking my interlocutors for background information like their age and how long they had lived in Coto Brus. Then I would ask two connected questions, "how has the landscape changed," and "how do you feel about it?" I analyze and discuss the answers I was given in Chapter 5, but here I will discuss some factors which, I believe, shaped people's responses to my questions. These were: **(1)** my position as a US researcher interested in the environment, **(2)** my position as the émigré son of a villager, **(3)** my own body and performances.

(1) The relationship between myself and colonists and conservationists in Coto Brus was influenced by my position as a US researcher asking questions about the environment. I introduced myself as a graduate student researching the social and environmental history of the region. I spoke to 3 people involved in the early years of colonization and 4 who are currently involved in conservation work. It seems obvious that the conservation workers would want to focus on the success of their programs, which they did, but they also discussed challenges in a way that expressed local interests; for example, they all stressed the importance of securing local livelihoods in order to promote conservation. The *pioneros* or colonists seemed to have more complex motivations, which are tied to my next point. Some of their statements recognized and explained the deforestation which occurred and argued that local people have changed their practices and adopted conservationist values. Others focused on the rationality or necessity of the colonists' practices and the goods that resulted.

I believe both sets of statements were influenced by **(2)** my position as the émigré son of a villager. My grandfather was one of the early *pioneros* in the area, and my father was born in a village named Sabalito, within the canton of Coto Brus (my family history will be described in more detail in

Chapter 4). While getting to know people in the area, they would ask where I was from and what I was doing in the canton, since visitors are not very common, and tourists usually look less similar to people in the canton than I do. I think that my appearance, and my accented Spanish made people curious. I would tell them my family's name and explain that we are from the area, but that I left as a young child. Many would then say they knew my grandfather, grandmother, my dad, and aunts. Because of this, I think that the *pioneros* and conservationists wanted to express to me that the older generation, including my grandparents, were good people who happened to make some mistakes. They talked about Coto Brus with pride and also with hopeful expectation for the future. I believe they wanted to impress upon me their sense of importance of the hometown they share with my father and the fact that it needs improvement in various ways. These motivations influenced who chose to speak to me and who they recommended I speak to next.

Finally, **(3)** my own body and performance shaped the way people talked to me. I think people were curious about me as someone who looks like a villager but acts like an outsider. Taxi drivers, especially, wanted to know where I was from and what I was doing, and several said they were very excited and proud to hear that I had come home to research 'our' histories. People told me local stories and jokes, maybe to make me feel more like an insider and reacquaint me with my village. Because I am a cis-presenting man who often wears jeans and leather boots, and who is comfortable on a farm or in the countryside, men in Coto Brus treated me in a stereotypically masculine way: they talked to me about buildings, animals, machines, family, and money. One of my interlocutors, Melchor, seemed confused and hesitant when I asked about his feelings. However, the other men I spoke to were more willing to talk about feelings and even show tender emotions like nostalgia. To me, this somewhat surprising combination of rural toughness and open sensitivity is a character trait of men from this region which I recognize in my father and in several of my interlocutors.

I believe my gendered body performance also influenced who I spoke to. The only woman I interviewed in Coto Brus was Piedad. When I visited Roldan and Melchor's homes to talk with them, I was not introduced to any women in the house; Gil's daughter-in-law arranged my interview with him over WhatsApp, but once I arrived, she introduced herself, sat me down with Gil in a nice spot in the yard, and left. I believe this reflects regional gender conventions which consider it more appropriate and relevant for men to speak to men, and women to women. The exception was Piedad, who I will discuss in detail in Chapter 5. Piedad's position as a female head of household and landowner is somewhat unusual but not unique in the area. Many women were important figures in the community from the 1950s to the present, and indigenous societies in the area are matrilineal and matrilocal if not necessarily matriarchal. My family, for example, is headed by my grandmother, who took over control of our lands and resources in the canton when my grandfather died around 1965. This was seen as unfortunate because her husband had died, but not unusual.

Piedad and her husband, Ismael, were more willing to discuss the feelings and bodily effects of changing relationships with the landscape than my other interlocutors; I believe this has to do with their practice of traditional medicine, which places the body in relation to the landscape in order to heal and improve it, and with their emotional and intellectual flexibility. Piedad teaches her son the medicine practices which she learned through a feminine line of transmission; although this is not usual, she says she sees no problem with it because he wants to learn and someone needs to embody, practice, and transmit this knowledge.

My attention to reflexivity and the role of embodiment in historical and environmental relationships works throughout this thesis. It is also reflected in my analysis and conclusions, where I extend my attention to the embodied experiences of people to the related way they express their identities, motivations, needs, and life histories through transformations of the landscape. I will discuss this point throughout Chapters 5 and 6.

D. RELEVANCE: WRITING GLOBALECTICALLY THROUGH THESE METHODS

The Gikuyu scholar and novelist Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o notes that "what Aristotle said of poetry, that it was finer and more philosophical than history since poetry expresses the universal and history only the particular, is probably truer of the novel" (Ngũgĩ wa, 2014, p. 18). Here I argue that ethnography and orature can produce a form of anthropological text I call *writing globalectically*, falling between history, poetry, and the novel, and useful as data for incorporated comparison.

Ethnography based on interviews has the potential to meet wa Thiong'o's characterization. Like the music of Steve Reich,[26] who cut, looped, and orchestrated recordings of people speaking to create a new aesthetic form and became an influential composer of the 20th century; transcribed interviews record and translate the human voice and experience into a different medium, introducing the oral aesthetic into writing and "leading to a multidisciplinary outlook with links to literature ... sociology, anthropology, history, psychology … and philosophy," because these are some of the themes expressed in conversation (*Ibid.*, p. 73).

Placing the words of individuals outside of academia in conversation with academic and political themes "allow[s] [the interview's] content and themes [to] form a free conversation with other texts of one's time and place … to allow it to speak to our own

[26] E.g. Reich, S. *The Cave*. Act I: Who is Ishmael? (1993, 2006). Nonesuch. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IGhV2hNwVfA]

cultural present even as we speak to it from our own cultural present. It is to read a text with the eyes of the world; it is to see the world with the eyes of the text" (*Ibid.*, p. 60).

As a performance of presence, the recorded and transcribed interview can contribute to an anthropological form of *writing globalectically*, and is perhaps the closest thing to what literary critic Roland Barthes imagined as the "aesthetic of textual pleasure … *writing aloud* … a text where we can hear the grain of the throat … the articulation of the body" (Barthes, 1973, pp. 66-67). The ethnographic transcription is complementary and sometimes preferable to film in the sense that it is more accessibly produced: the only equipment required is an audio recording device, usually a smart phone, which can also be used for transcription. The presence of the recorder is less prominent than a camera and does not require elaborate framing or other preparations. Recording an audio with a smartphone face down on the table eliminates technological distractions and helps produce the relaxed atmosphere of *platica*.

Similarly, the pleasure and interest in reading a narrative drawn from an interview is also more relaxed than that of watching a filmed interview: texts can be put down, pondered, and picked back up, and a reader can scan a page or read out of order. Reading happens at the pace of the reader, while film produces a precipitous flow rather than a rhythm (1973, p. 12).

These concerns are practical, normative, and ethical. Because anthropology is based on work with human subjects and studies require Internal Review Board ethics approvals, anthropologists must carefully consider how we represent the people we converse with. Thiong'o encourages us to address oral expressions, *orature*, with the same seriousness as Aristotle addressed poetry. Ethnography, interview, and oral history are methods which can address universal as well as particular themes through the study of orature and history, as

suggested by McMichael's method of *incorporated comparison*, while centering the voice and expression of the interlocutor. *Writing globalectically and aloud* according to wa Thiong'o and Barthes' aesthetic can produce interdisciplinary texts which respect the human voice and vernacular expression, while also being engaging as works of literature.

In relation to *writing globalectically*, wa Thiong'o uses a concept explored through my work, and which informed my choice of methodologies, that of *desire*. One of my research questions, rephrased, could read: 'what is it that people desire of the landscape?' This question needs to be addressed on individual and collective scales to untangle the complex motivations which drive deforestation, conservation, and reforestation.

If desire is the affective link between local production and globalized consumption that constitutes coloniality, as much in the (post)colonial world as in antiquity (Dietler et al., 2010), modern capitalism is based on desire and not rational exchange; it is a "turbulent system … it dissolves rigid structures of authority and hierarchy … generates new and transgressive desires, and presides over radical forms of … 'deterritorialization,' … uprooting people from the land" (Shatz, 2010). In contrast to deterritorialized desires for the consumption of exotic goods and therefore the transformation of distant lands, my work proposes the subjective significance of territorialized desire – belonging – or, in Heideggerian terms, dwelling (Heidegger, 1971).

While the desire of the cosmopole seeks to (re)move people, products, minerals, and water from the land in a mobile flow towards itself, localized production and consumption instead capture and reterritorialize these social flows in pools, diverting the extractive flows of global capital. The management of these social flows is concerned with the appropriation

of resources from nature and the management of relations among people and is one form of governance or political power as discussed in Chapter 2.

Postcolonial spaces, as places which have been formed by the desire of metropoles, are struck through both by

> the old wants, satisfied by the production of the country … [and] new wants, requiring for their satisfaction the products of distant lands and climes[;] in place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal inter-dependence of nations (2014, p. 46).

By performing an *incorporated comparison* of Coto Brus over the past 70 years, my thesis shows how interconnected desires and exchange shaped this rural space as a model of development and conservation according to global concepts, practices, and structures of power.

Costa Rica's international image is based on a mythology of ecoparadise. Google searches for Costa Rica highlight its environment, biodiversity, rain and cloud forests, and wildlife. About one quarter of the national territory is under conservation protection. This, combined with its peacefulness and stability, make Costa Rica an ideal place to study and practice new environmental ontologies. My work seeks to bring subjectivities and life histories of Costa Ricans into the discussion.

Orature and writing globalectically fill in the gaps of traditional history and orient the reader towards the present and future. Memories of landscapes, and memories inscribed in landscapes, for example, can reveal operations of power: transformation and standardization of the environment, the creation of economic dependence, techniques and patterns of production enforced through regulation or as conditions tied to aid and development funding. Subjectivity, emotion, and desire can be expressed and recorded through interview and oral history, as well as being interpolated or extrapolated from historical texts. In this way, orature, literature, and history can serve as complementary tools for understanding human societies and the way they relate to natural environments.

The following narratives are the result of, as wa Thiongo suggests, putting people into conversation with global discourses. My method makes the perspectives of Coto Brusenos more accessible to researchers producing knowledge about development and conservation in the Global South, many of whom are from and in the Global North. This is an effective way to uncover and share what Chicano philosophers call *oro del barrio* [neighborhood gold] (Montiel et al., 2009). Another term for *oro del barrio* is *subjugated knowledge.* Both indicate ways of knowing which are obscured by dominant discourses, and one aim of this thesis' methodology is to record and transmit such knowledge.

I have an anecdote to illustrate this point. Piedad, Ismael, and I became quite friendly while I stayed at their cabin. One day, as she was working in the garden, she offered me a cacao fruit, and we ate together and chatted. She said to me, "If we [her and Ismael] had gone to college, I would have been a doctor, and Ismael would have been an ecologist." I responded, "Piedad, I don't think you need a degree to do those things [*no creo que le hace*

falta el título]; in fact," I said, "I think ecologists and doctors should come and learn from you."

For me personally, the purpose of this study is to share conversations with people in Coto Brus with scholars who study the processes of development and conservation which have shaped it. For example, Piedad, who practices what I consider to be a beautiful form of nurturing and reciprocal human-environment relationship, has much to teach planners and ecologists about the realities and possibilities of the forest. I believe that the perspectives of *Coto Bruseños* like her are significant contributions to academic conversations about deforestation, conservation, and reforestation, and will contribute to a new political ontology of nature with the capacity to liberate people, plants, soil, water, and animals.

CHAPTER 5. VIGNETTES AND ANALYSIS: DECISION MAKING IN CONSERVATION

De mi tierra sale el sol

Y por la noche la luna

Y no existe lengua alguna

Que me niegue la razón

Que tengo el alma de aguas claras

Y mano curtida de cuero ...

-Ruben Blades. Descarga Caliente[27]

[27] "The sun rises from my land,
And the moon at night:
No tongue
Can contradict me.
My soul is clear waters,
My hands cured leather."

(My translation)

Ruben Blades is a Panamanian singer-songwriter who took part in the salsa explosion of 1980s New York, and a member of the Fania All-Stars. He is a family favorite and his themes, vocabulary, singing and instrumentation are all evocative of Southern Costa Rica for me personally.

A. INTRODUCTION TO VIGNETTES

I spent 4 weeks in Coto Brus during June and July of 2022. During that time, I stayed at an agroecology AirBnB called Finca Maquique and run by two of my interlocutors, Piedad and Ismael. This chapter represents the narrative they communicated to me about their lives, family histories, and agroecology project in one vignette. While I was there, I contacted two more conservation projects in the area: Finca Cantaros, a local NGO which practices reforestation, and the Wilson Botanical Garden / Las Cruces Tropical Research Station, the largest tropical research station in Central America. I asked these two organizations for interviews, and one of those interviews, with Silvio from Finca Cantaros, is in this chapter. The other is not included in the interest of space and relevance.

I asked Piedad and Ismael, Silvio, and the representative at Wilson / Las Cruces if they knew anyone I could interview about the early years of the canton's colonization. All of them suggested talking to Roldan, and Piedad and Ismael suggested Gil and Melchor. Piedad and Ismael put me in contact with Roldan, Gil, and Melchor, early settlers in the region who shared their memories with me. Their stories and views are also represented through narrative vignettes in this chapter.

Through these 5 interviews, I gathered qualitative and historical data to address this thesis' research questions:

1) How are relationships between people in Coto Brus and the land mediated by social, political, and economic forces?

2) How are personal and collective identities expressed through relationship with the landscape?

The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format which I described as *platica* in Chapter 4. The list of questions I drew from is presented in the Appendix. When I performed the interviews, I set up a framework of questions and let my interlocutors know what the goals of my investigation were, however, I tried to follow their interests as well and collaborate with them in expressing what they find important and interesting. I began the interviews by asking questions, and I tried to follow the interests of my interlocutor and bring out what they thought was important through active listening. I rephrased what I understood from what they were telling me, and asked if they could say more. I ended interviews by asking my interlocutor if there was anything they wanted to talk about that we didn't get to, or if they had concluding remarks. With Piedad and Ismael, I had the presence of mind to ask them if we could go over what I thought were the key points they had made, to see if we agreed.

After performing the interviews, I created transcripts, edited them, and used them as sources to construct these historical and ethnographic vignettes. In these vignettes, I represent my interlocutors' voice, perspective, and memory. I practice incorporated analysis and writing globalectically by performing my analysis in relation to and together with these narratives.

As I discussed through wa Thiong'o's work in Chapter 4, people in Coto Brus engage with global processes and ideas regularly through conversation, because these global elements have daily impact on their lives. I borrow his term and call this *orature,* arguing that orature should be treated with the same seriousness as literature. Therefore, I feel it is important to analyze the narratives in a dialogic style. In the text, I refer to a point made by my interlocutor and then expand on it or respond to it according to my own perspective and frameworks. This is a method by literary critics in the analysis of texts – for example, Roland Barthes uses this method in *A Lover's Discourse* (Barthes, 2010). My construction and analysis of each narrative is slightly different in form and substance because each of my interlocutors spoke to me in a different style and emphasized different themes, concerns, or events in their narrations.

I discuss my interlocutors' narratives in conversation with themes from my theoretical and methodological framework. I discuss the links between identity and landscape in Coto Brus, and how colonists expressed their life histories and world views by modifying the landscape. I argue that the settlement and development of Coto Brus from the 1950s to the present is best described as *colonization*, which has a specific historical and ontological meaning in the region; I describe Coto Brus as a site where the concepts *colonization/development/economy* and *conservation/reforestation/environment* are daily realities which people take part in shaping locally and which also express globalized needs and desires; and I discuss what my interlocutors said about including local people's histories, perspectives, values, and visions in development and conservation practices and research.

I focus on important themes and set the stage for contributions based on my findings – principally avenues for further research – which I present in Chapter 6.

The narratives are presented in the following order: early settlers Roldan, Gil, and Melchor; then local conservationists Piedad and Ismael, who are presented together; and then Silvio, who works for a local NGO.

I. EARLY SETTLERS: ROLDAN, GIL, MELCHOR

A. Roldan's Narrative: Urban Landowner

For Roldan, one of the earliest colonists, development is about production and construction. He thinks of improvement in terms of constructing buildings and developing productive uses of the land, whether through agriculture or tourism. He privileges change so deeply that he criticizes European capitals for always remaining the same. His own lifetime has encompassed significant changes in the area: from cooking with wood, for example, to induction stovetops.

Roldan's hotel sits in the literal and figurative center of San Vito, the municipal capital of the *Coto Brus* region. Its balconies overlook the *Calle de Comerció*, or Commerce Street, and small shops occupy the facade. Roldan arrived in San Vito in April of 1958, when he was 11 years old. At the time of our interview, Roldan was 75 years old.

Figure 20: Roldan's building on Commerce Street, at the center of San Vito.

His house is in the courtyard, which is visible as a brightly lit patch under the words "Hotel Rino." My collection.

To me, the ways he presents himself, his taste, the habits, and manners he keeps are meant to display wealth, prestige, and status. They are meant to communicate exclusivity and importance; he thinks of himself as an elite figure. When I arrive to look for him, there is an imposing young man at the entrance who tells me *Don* Roldan has just left, asks me what my business is, and tells me to come back in half an hour. When I come back, Roldan has arrived. He is dressed in beige slacks and a cotton shirt with a collar, tucked in at the waist and bound with a thin, black leather belt. He directs me to a large table situated on a tiled, roofed veranda at the side of his house, which is itself situated at the far end of a central courtyard formed by the surrounding structure of the hotel.

The hotel is two stories, and the house is a one-story building, with a veranda on two sides and a dark, seemingly spacious interior. I am not invited inside, but Roldan offers me some coffee; I tell him that I just had a cup while waiting for him in a café across the street. We begin our interview. As he speaks, Roldan strikes his broad, gold wedding ring on the table with his open palm. The sound accentuates and times Roldan's speech and I think to myself, *that is an aristocratic affectation*. Producing this sound requires both golden ring and a fine, solid table. His watch shakes only slightly as he strikes the table, showing the elegantly loose fit of the band. According to his surroundings and these small details of his appearance and presentation, and with my background as an émigré Costa Rican with family from the countryside, I interpret all of these things as placing Roldan in the upper class of Coto Brus.

This is also apparent from his diction and choice of words. Roldan speaks more slowly than most rural Costa Ricans, but his accent is distinctly provincial. Rather than roll

his *rr*'s he sillibates, making a *sh* sound that I haven't heard anywhere outside of Costa Rica. Although his accent is provincial, his vocabulary is modern and oriented towards improvement and production. This reflects what I perceive to be an internal conflict for Roldan, who straddles an identity between Italianized and what he calls "authentic" Costa Rican. When he mentions places, he talks about their "constructions," (*construcciones*) as a cypher of quality. This word comes up again and again in our conversation. Other words he uses frequently are "produce, production," (*producir, producción*), "development," (*desarrollo*), and "lands," or "properties," (*tierras, terrenos, propiedades*).

When he arrived in San Vito, the town was primarily an Italian colony. The Italians had arrived in 1953 due to an agreement between the President of the Republic, Jose Figueres Ferrer, an influential landholder of the southwest region, Vito Sansoneti, and the post-war Italian government. The Italians who came to Coto Brus, according to Roldan and others in the area, were in many cases soldiers who had fought in the Second World War – Roldan describes them as "*guerillas*."[28] The colonization agreement extended land titles and credit for the establishment of coffee farms; the Italians brought heavy machinery including the region's lumber mill.

[28] This is an example of a statement which represents my interlocutors' understanding of their surroundings and history. Other studies show that most of the Italian immigrants to San Vito were farmers and peasants; however, the founder of SICA, Vito Sansonetti, was a soldier and political science graduate. It is possible that these memories reflect an identification of the Italians as a group with Sansonetti's profession; on the other hand, Roldan was not alone in characterizing many of the Italians as soldiers. It is also possible that some had served but did not identify themselves as soldiers; that they were members of irregular forces; and/or that records do not accurately reflect the make-up of the Italian immigrants. This is discussed in (Castro-Prieto, A. (2021) Italian emigration and Italian Language in Costa Rica. Intersedes, vol. xxii, no. 45, pp. 263 – 279). The development of San Vito and Sansonetti's agreement with Figueres is described in detail and from an Italian perspective in (Sansonetti, V. (1995). Quemé mis naves en estas montañas: La colonización de la altiplanicie de Coto Brus y la fundación de San Vito de Java. San José: Jiménez y Tanzi). The first Italian presence in Costa Rica was that of Colombus, who arrived in 1502.

Roldan explained that there were four or five Costa Rican families (*familias ticas*) and two Panamanian families who had stayed in the area after it was ceded to Costa Rica from Panama in the pact of Cana Jerez. Of the Panamanian families, he clarifies, one was of the "large indigenous families," (*una familia grande indígena*); the other was headed by a man he calls Tico-Panameño, by which he means that the man was Costa Rican and had married a Panamanian wife. As discussed in Chapter 4, this was a common practice in the 1950s.

Roldan described one man who had come from the capital, San Jose, where he owned a large plot of land in an affluent neighborhood, contiguous to a large park and the city's cathedral. This man was able to purchase an area of land – "I'm not going to tell you exactly what he bought," – he said, but called it "enormous – enough land for an entire village." That man divided the land and sold it as parcels, "*haciendo pueblo, haciendo pueblo, haciendo pueblo,*" (founding villages, founding villages, founding villages). Roldan shrouds many of the land acquisitions he mentions in an air of mystery. His motivations for this are unclear to me, but he seems to consider land purchases a sensitive subject. It is possible that they were informal, contested, illegal, or otherwise a source of controversy. I noticed that other people in the region, such as Melchor, were also hesitant to talk about details of land acquisitions, sales, and purchases.

He said that some men were able to leverage agreements with governmental and quasi-governmental organizations like ITCO and SICA or political figures to receive or purchase land, chose good parcels because they arrived before other settlers or knew the area well, or simply relied on boldness to enter areas of the forest and stake claims over lands

where ownership was contested or unenforceable. According to Roldan, one man was able to claim private ownership over public pasture lands through a process which Roldan does not describe clearly other than to say it was "by luck" (*por suerte a él le toco la pastrera del pueblo*).

Here I will introduce the main themes raised by Roldan, which will be expanded in more detail below. He described what he perceives of as competition between what he calls the "*Italian* and *Tico (Costa Rican) idiosyncrasies of construction (idiosincrasias de construcciones)*." As I understand his concept, this encompasses differing uses and development of space, landscape, and constructions according to distinct aesthetic and productive schemes of value. This is an example of identity, in the form of personal and collective values and aesthetics, shaping space and landscapes.

Then, he discusses the tension between development and the health of lands and populations. This is an example of the way development as a concept realizes itself through improvement projects, creating new conditions with their own sets of benefits, problems, and reactions. In this case, Roldan clearly links the actions of the early settlers to the need for conservation, even though he valorizes urban constructions and commodity agriculture. His perspective shows that concepts like development and conservation are not interpreted or realized uniformly, and they do not function as linear, progressive improvements. Making these concepts real is a political and aesthetic practice built through interactions.

At the beginning of the colonization project in the 1950s until the coffee crash in the 1980s, development was conceptualized by Roldan and his peers in terms of clearing land, planting coffee fields, and constructing permanent settlements. The colonization and

development of Coto Brus was made possible by coffee's value as a commodity crop and technologies anthropologist James Scott describes as space-destroying: off-road traction vehicles and all-weather roads, airplanes capable of take-off and landing on small strips and under difficult conditions, radio and other long-range communications, and sophisticated supply chains integrated with systems of credit and accounting.[29]

According to Roldan, after the coffee crash in the 1980s, people in Coto Brus started to diversify their economic strategies, and began to hear ideas about conservation from foreign NGOs and expatriates. Roldan ascribes the local turn towards conservation to what he calls a *European inheritance*. He states that the initial deforestation was caused through livelihood pressures and a lack of knowledge, but that he and others quickly grasped the importance of conservation and accepted reforestation measures as a positive change. His narrative makes it seem as if conservation and reforestation were imported ideas; the other narratives I present in this chapter complicate this view.

Finally, he raises the point that, in addition to technologies which bridge space, agricultural production increasingly relies on technologies which disrupt temporal cycles. The new cash crop, pineapple, relies on water pumps, irrigation, and high yield fertilizers to stay in continual production. However, this disruption of wet and dry cycles in the local climate creates soil and water pollution.

B. Idiosyncrasies of Construction: Productive and Aesthetic Uses of Space

[29] Scott's concept is described in Chapter 2.

I. Terrenos

Before addressing Roldan's concept of *idiosincrasias de construcciones,* it will be helpful to understand the space where constructions are built, which in this context is the *terreno. Terrenos* must be marked out with clear boundaries, often of cornplant stalks (*Dracaena reflexa spp.)* or other fast-growing plants which take root and continue to grow, creating a living fence. Before chainsaws were common, they were cleared with machetes and axes – *a hacha y machete* – and with the help of small fires. This is described as *swidden agriculture* in anthropological literature. I have heard the terms *hacer huerta*, *hacer hortal,* used by Piedad and others in the region and Costa Rican historians have described this as *chacara* agriculture. I spoke to Maya agriculturalists in Belize who described a similar method of traditional farming. This method preserved old trees, and when the plots were left fallow, they would regenerate forest quickly.

Apart from being subject to the technical practices of clearing the terrain – *chapear*, or *voltear* as they call it here – *terrenos* also have the quality of being owned by a specific person. There is one mention of communally owned land in Roldan's account; he mentions the community pasture to say that it was converted to private ownership. It is not clear what kind of community ownership Roldan is referring to, and he did not expand on the point. It is worth noting that colonial and modern states had limited influence in the Costa Rican countryside until the 1940s, as described in Chapter 3. Many land titles and forms of land ownership were informal; my grandfather, as also noted above, practiced a common profession wherein he drew up land titles with dubious legality. According to my family, this served more to represent agreements between families than to record official tenure. For

example, my aunt, who is a lawyer, says there is currently a push to formalize land title in the area; my family and others are involved in legal processes to do so.

However, by the 1950s, communal land was the exception, and places were often – and are still – known and referred to by the name of the family or individual who owned or owns them. In my interpretation, this represents the shift from unclear and fragmentary authority of the state in the countryside, with communities arranging land ownership with limited reference to the centralized state, to a decisive expansion of the state administration of land and titles following the 1948 civil war.

Mendez-Trejos' book (2016), discussed in Chapter 3, describes families being brought into Coto Brus on decommissioned military vehicles capable of managing the difficult terrain and being dropped off at parcels of land that had been assigned to them by ITCO. The roads leading to ITCO parcels were, by Roldan's and others' descriptions, of *piedra natural* or common stones (see figure 14) and often became impassable even for ITCO's trucks. The families' project, once they arrived at the parcel, would be to transform the natural terrain into a cultural and productive *terreno*. Families combined subsistence and market farming with waged and informal work to survive, and many stayed in or near the parcels they were assigned.

The transformation of the *selva* or forest which dominated Coto Brus in the imagination of Costa Ricans, if not entirely in fact, before the 1950s into productive *terrenos* is what made the village of San Vito and surrounding settlements possible. People came to Coto Brus to plant coffee or, once fields were established, to follow the harvest. Roldan describes many people (*muchísima gente*) immigrating from other areas of Costa Rica and

Central America "because the Italians had planted coffee, and it was an epoch of good prices for coffee."

Terrenos, therefore, produce crops for either subsistence or market sale. They are also building sites. The relationship between landscape, *terreno*, and constructions is an important aspect of the distinction Roldan describes as *idiosyncrasy of construction* which is, in his language, either more Italian or "legitimately" Costa Rican. Variations and combinations of these elements – landscape, *terreno*, construction – also determine appropriate land use; for example, Roldan considers excluding production and constructions from La Paz nature preserve (PILA) as bad land management, because in this case there is no "population which produces" (*no hay población que produzca*). The circularity of this reasoning shows that it is based on a value: land should house a productive population. In my interpretation, Roldan represents a Costa Rican who valorizes modern ideas of production and profit. He privileges urban spaces and European styles of construction and spatiality, and he emphasizes the need to build and produce in order to achieve what he considers *improvement*.

II. Idiosyncrasies of Construction

'Idiosyncrasies of Construction:' I was struck by this phrase, which Roldan used to describe what he perceives as the differences between European, specifically Italian, and Costa Rican modes of dwelling and building. One of the differences he points out is the proximity of structures – in the Italian model, buildings are expanded vertically and built close together, usually sharing walls. This has created the dense, urban environment of

central San Vito. In contrast, Roldan says that the "legitimate," or "authentic," (*legitimo, autentico*) Costa Rican model of building places structures far apart, favoring one-level dwellings with small floor plans and minimal structural reinforcements.

While Roldan says that the Italians "taught us how to build," (*los italianos nos enseñaron a los ticos a construir*) he acknowledges that the European model of development extending from construction to the use of land and integration into global markets, has also caused many problems, which he describes as "the land and people being poisoned," [*las tierras y la gente se van envenenando*]. He identifies as a Costa Rican who has adopted many Italian customs, without losing a critical and subjective perspective. He personally prefers the aesthetic of Italian construction and dwelling, but he makes space in his dialogue to describe and consider the Costa Rican customs, using the word *nosotros* (us) to refer to Costa Ricans who follow a more regionally traditional way of life and method of building.

His personality is contradictory but, in the short time I spoke to him, didn't seem cynical to me. Rather, within the framework of this study, I would describe Roldan as someone who has lived in proximity to (at least) two different styles of life, and his sympathies and reasoning have been shaped by both. He talks about himself, San Vito, and Coto Brus in relation to what he perceives as governing concepts in the world more broadly: modernity, construction, wealth, change, and development. He is quick to note that the people of his community, like himself, are well educated and willing to adopt new concepts and values like conservation and environmentalism.

For me, he represents many of the tensions of the region: between local and cosmopolitan identities, rural and urban forms and aesthetics, tradition and modernity,

economy and environment. Having grown up in a small village his whole life, he also represents himself as having a pulse on global and local history, concepts, and change. For Roldan, these contradictions are realized through the built environment; what he called *idiosyncrasies of construction*. I broaden his concept to include *idiosyncrasies of identity* more generally.

a. The Italian Idiosyncrasy

Roldan says that when the Italians arrived, they were well organized and had access to capital. They constructed an airport within the year. From there, planes were able to transport 50 sacks of dry coffee to the capital at a time; this was the only reliable physical communication which existed. The planes brought people as well as supplies on their frequent flights. The Italians brought a lumber mill and began to produce uniform lengths of lumber for construction. They built their first houses with this wood, which Roldan describes as *maderas propias*, meaning wood that comes from the same location in which it is used for building. The constructions at this time were uniform tract houses.

They built the only roads which extended northwards to connect to regional transportation networks. Two electrical power plants were installed by the Italians and a company formed to administrate the local electrical grid. These infrastructural supports made colonization by Costa Rican families more accessible. Roldan says that "*nosotros detrás de ellos construimos nuestras casas y compramos propiedades ... hay que reconocer que ellos eran muy valientes para trabajar*," (we came behind them, building our houses and buying properties … you have to recognize that they were very brave workers).

Roldan represents the ethnic history of San Vito like this: although there was initially a strong separation between Italians and Costa Ricans, this distinction was later softened. In the first years of the colony, Italians would host parties which excluded Costa Ricans and Panamanians; the economic differences created by Italian and Costa Rican governmental support were further marked by social distinctions which divided the populations. After a boom-and-bust cycle in coffee prices in the 1970s, about half the Italian families migrated away from San Vito, and Roldan says that their flight left behind the foundation of the district ("*Repito: se fueron ayuntando del cantón, y el cantón quedo todo lo que era la fundación que habían hecho los italianos*").

This foundation, as Roldan describes it, was made up of the "great properties of the center," ("los grandes propiedades del centro") where hotels and other elegant buildings ("construcciones elegantes") of two stories were built. The Italians who stayed behind after the bust became increasingly powerful economically ("se fortalecieron económicamente, todos construyeron casas de dos plantas … se hicieron grandes").[30] They built plumbing infrastructure for their buildings, and together this assemblage – electric light, two-story buildings, indoor plumbing, roads and air communication, centralized economic power, productive terrains separated from the urban center – constituted what Roldan considers the Italian idiosyncrasy of construction. In other words, Roldan equates Italian aesthetics with the urban effect; I will discuss the urban effect in the context of Coto Brus in my conclusions in Chapter 6.

[30] Figure 20 shows a street view of Roldan's hotel property. It is one of the large or great properties of the center which Roldan is referring to in his narrative – a large, two story construction with an inner courtyard and a façade of small commercial rentals.

At this point in his narrative, when half of the original Italian families had left the region, the Italian and Costa Rican families began to mix ("*se fue mezclando la población*"). According to him and my own observations, some families still speak Italian, but the ethnic distinction has lost much of its rigidity. What remains, however, is the marked difference in construction styles and the aesthetic of development which marked this distinction from the 1950s-1970s. Additionally, the civic culture which grew up around this municipal center, as described by Roldan, is one of order, peace, and tranquility (*orden, paz, tranquilidad*) which Roldan contrasts with other Costa Rican towns where the buildings are not as dense or imposing, and where there are more people with bad customs (*malas costumbres*). These seem to be Italian values, or what he understands to be Italian values and interpretations, which Roldan has adopted as his own.

Roldan's term, *idiosyncrasies of construction*, expresses material marks of cultural difference well. In other terms, this distinction could be described as differing modes of *building and dwelling*, or *aesthetogenesis*, which I will return to in Chapter 6. All of these terms indicate both the individual agency and collective collaboration and negotiation involved in choosing and developing different styles of living and construction in relation to landscapes.

b. The Costa Rican Idiosyncrasy

Roldan opposes the Italian idiosyncrasy to a Costa Rican idiosyncrasy which favors open, productive *terrenos* housing small structures. Roldan refers to the next village over,

Sabalito, to illustrate the difference. Sabalito, where my family lives, is more dispersed than San Vito. The houses do not share walls and are generally set back into yards or larger pieces of land. Most buildings are of a single story, and the village meanders along several dispersed roads rather than a tight, centralized grid. Productive plots and houses are interspersed rather than separated into distinct zones. To further demonstrate his idea, Roldan tells an anecdote about his father and his old house:

> I hadn't been to Sabalito for three years. And then I returned and what I enjoyed was seeing how they have built, how the people have grown. That was – is – one of those little villages which had been made with Tico, or Costa Rican idiosyncrasies. It's not like us, here, where we build with European idiosyncrasies. [For example,] My father didn't want to build anything. I had to wait until he died to build here. He didn't want to build, and much less anything expensive. He wanted us [Roldan and his family] to live in a wooden house like the old one, an old house like he had. He didn't like to make reinforced constructions [of concrete and re-bar, for example].
>
> I asked him – what about money [what will we do with our money?] And he answered – "Money? As much as you can. Never spend." Money didn't add anything to his day [he didn't care about money beyond saving against emergencies]. And when he died, I asked an Italian friend, Armando, who is dead now, "what do you think about my house?" And that man said, "Your house?!? Knock it down and BUILD! BUILD, I tell you. [Here Roldan strikes his ring against the table with strength and energy.] You're getting married soon and we will build it at a good price. In thirty years, I'll be dead, but you'll remember me, and the advice I gave you."

> Well, that man was right because I built at one price, and now it's worth triple. And so, you see, here we construct buildings like these: elegant, with two stories. Sabalito is like those little villages in Alajuela [a largely rural province where his family is from] or good parts of Heredia [where I lived for many years] where the people build in a humbler style. It was a different system … [31]

Roldan's assessment of his house's value – and his friend Armando's prediction about it – is not based simply on the material reality of a building in a landscape. It is tied up in a global system of finance and property law; this is what allows a building like Roldan's to triple in value. This is an important element which distinguishes the Costa Rican and Italian idiosyncrasies Roldan is discussing – his father, for example, does not seem to have considered the idea that a structure should increase in value over time, and thought of cash as something to be saved for emergencies rather than invested for future profit.

---

[31] Bueno, lo que me da gracia, es que yo dejo tres años sin ir a Sabalito, y el otro ano voy y veo cómo ha cambiado, como han ido construyendo, como va la gente creciendo. Y era -- es -- uno de los pueblitos que se habían hecho con idiosincrasias ticas, o sea, costarricenses. No es como nosotros que construimos con idiosincrasia europea – que ellos nos ensenaron. Yo espere que papa se muriera para construir aquí. Él no quería ni que construyera – mucho menos una construcción cara. Él quería que hiciéramos una casita de madera como la que tenía antes – una casa vieja como tenía. Hacer la refuerza no se gustaba.

¿Y yo le decía papa, y la plática? Plata la que puedas. Nunca gastas. Eso no daba nada al día de él. Y yo iba hablando con un italiano aquí ya murió, Armando: esa casa mía, esta vieja. ¿Como la ve? Y dice: ¡Esa casa tuya, botela! Y CONSTRUYE. ¡CONSTRUYA! Ahora usted se casa y la construye a buen precio. Que en treinta años yo no voy a estar. Pero usted se recordará de mí. Que el consejo que le di. Y me pongo yo a pensar que la construí en ese tiempo con 5 millones, y ahora me iban a dar 15.

Entonces tenía el razón. Entonces si usted ve todas esas construcciones – de dos pisos, elegantes – ellos nos enseñaron. Agua buena y sabalito eran pueblitos como ir a San Mateo de Alajuela o buenas partes de Heredia donde la gente construye humildemente. Era otro sistema.

Roldan went on to say that the traditional Costa Rican dwellings were built near a spring of water, and the spring with the structure was called the *finca (Las casas las construyeron – ellos – en una fuente de agua que era la finca*). These dwellings often lacked indoor plumbing. Water was carried for cooking and people bathed in creeks or rivers. They cooked with dry wood, often stalks of coffee bushes, and Roldan says, they lived well (*así se vivía bien*). Some entered deep into the forest to stake claims and sell parcels as the wave of colonization advanced, an action of dubious legality and which is seen by Roldan and others in ambiguous terms. Describing someone who has done this recently, Roldan used the word "parasite," (*parasito*), but this seems to be because this practice is no longer accepted; in the past, it was sometimes a legitimate way to claim land (Mendez-Trejos 2016). I will return to this example below.

The distance between houses and productive parcels meant that there was a patchwork of virgin forest. Beginning the day at 3 AM, one would walk to the river for a bath and see a herd of white forest pigs numbering 200 – they would sometimes surround or charge people. Roldan imitates their sounds and movements, "Ra! Ra!," (*había que ir a bañarse al río a recoger agua, para las 3, ibas a pasar vos por lo del 200 cerdos blancos. Ra! Ra! majaron a la gente. Una manada*). Most of the older people I talk to around Coto Brus have a story about climbing a tree to escape these curious, intelligent, and sometimes aggressive animals. People would also spot the various felines which live in the area.

For Roldan, this way of life was more or less static. He notes that many villages he visits change slowly. Although this provides an acceptable quality of life (*se vive bien*), the settlement does not grow, build, or develop at a rate he considers appropriate. However,

Roldan never insists that others should adopt his own preference for Italian idiosyncrasies of building and development; in fact, as noted above, he speaks of the traditional Costa Rican way of life as "legitimate," or "authentic." For him, the Costa Rican system, otherwise in balance, is disrupted by ambition, the demands of exploitation on the people and landscape, and the rhythmical boom and bust cycles of commodity prices, particularly coffee.

> People thought that they would become powerful by growing a lot of coffee, and it wasn't like that, so that's what hurt me … What's the bad part? That one came to the village imagining they would reach heaven with their hands, and then to say to yourself, "*ay papa*, I'll have to do it later," because with the busts [in coffee prices] people were impoverished.[32]

The rise and fall of coffee prices affected everyone throughout the region, because they either grew coffee or depended on its production indirectly. Roldan described a boom-and-bust cycle which affected both San Vito, where people followed Italian idiosyncrasies, and the surrounding populations, who followed Costa Rican idiosyncrasies.

For Roldan and others, coffee was the only thing that could produce development, understood as constructions and standards of living which change and improve rapidly, because it was the only commodity that produced significant booms (*era lo único que dio*

[32] "La gente creyó que "están dando mucho café," y van a ser poderosos y no fue así -- entonces eso es lo que a mí me dolió ... Entonces, que es lo malo? Que uno se vino a un pueblo, creyendo agarrar el cielo con las manos, y estar, 'ay papa, tendre que hacer las cosas despues.' Porque con tanta quiebre, el pueblo se empobrecio."

auge). When I asked if conditions in the region were linked (*ligadas*) to the price of coffee, Roldan responded without missing a beat: "totally," and when I asked again – "totally?" – he repeated himself, "Totally" (*totalmente*). The boom cycles allowed rapid and expensive constructions, but also took increasing tolls on the landscape. The next section will describe Roldan's perspective on the forest transition and the tensions between livelihoods, development, and human and ecological health.

Figure 21: A traditional adobe structure in San Ramon, Heredia.

San Ramon is famous for its historic buildings. Many people in Coto Brus came from the regions of Heredia, Alajuela, and San Jose.

Figure 22: Another perspective.

This photograph allows the viewer to see how the building was constructed. This adobe had rattan stalks for better structural integrity.

Figure 23: A traditional structure in San Ramon.

Notice the broad walled courtyard with banana trees and tall double-gate for the entry of oxen-carts.

Figure 24: A traditional dwelling seen on the road to Coto Brus.

It is built on stilts; the visible part with windows is its second story. The walls are made with lengths of wood like those described by Roldan.

Figure 25: Ismael's contemporary take on traditional regional architecture.

Although it is two stories it is built on a slope, so it has ground access to the kitchen, below, and habitation, above. Some of the balcony's pillars are living trees.

Figure 26: A "rancho" structure which was part of my family's first dwelling in the area.

It is built of wood and covers ~140 sq. ft.

C. Forest Transition: Livelihood, Development and Conservation

I. European Inheritance

According to Roldan, although the Europeans taught Costa Ricans many things during the early decades of the colony (1950-1970), they did not arrive with an appreciation for the local forests. The market conditions and global networks of transportation and finance which made the colony possible also encouraged the rapid deforestation of the area to plant coffee and pasture cattle. Within the European *idiosyncrasy,* no practice of selecting trees or plots for selective clearing survives in Roldan's memory or other accounts that I have accessed. Many plots which remained forested were either inaccessible or of poor agricultural quality. The European idiosyncrasy, in this study's terms, was to perceive nature through an ontology of economics.

While the center of San Vito was quickly cleared and surrounded by coffee fields, Roldan remembers the surrounding areas preserving, for a period, what many in the region call *selva virgen* (primary forest). He says that the landscapes when he arrived in the 1950s were "extremely beautiful, something I would not like to forget" (*lindísimo, lindísimo, algo que no quisiera yo olvidármelo*).

However, this preservation was not necessarily intentional. Roldan says he also enjoyed going to watch people "clear [or turn over] the mountain [the forest and soil]" (*voltear el monte*). He also says that once, while working for SICA, he saw twenty men form a hunting party and kill ten of the white pigs he described earlier with rifles. "It filled me

with pity," he says, "to see how people went around killing monkeys, killing tigers, killing dantas, killing – destroying, destroying, destroying, all because of a lack of education."[33] Roldan is presenting a different perspective about hunting than those presented in Chapter 3 through the oral history work of Mendez-Trejos (2016), and which is limited by his viewpoint and possibly filtered through intervening decades of conservationist discourse. Roldan states that, while they taught Costa Ricans many things, the Italian colonists did not teach Costa Ricans to "take care of the forest, or the environment," (*cuidar la forestación, el medio ambiente*). Roldan is describing a local shift from economic to ecological or environmental ontologies, relating this change to what he understands as historical conditions, and making value judgements concerning what should be considered *improvement* and how its effects should be evaluated and responded to.

Roldan tells me more about the man who entered the forest to claim and sell lands as mentioned above. He had called this man a "parasite," even though this practice was common in preceding decades. It is in the context of changing attitudes towards conserving forested land that Roldan made this, by his own admission, harsh (*brusco*) assessment. I say that these days, Costa Ricans do talk a lot about conserving land; he explains the change as follows.

> Even though you may not believe me, a *European inheritance* arrived at a good moment [the 1980s] and those from la Paz [PILA], and other organizations. And they

[33] "A mí me daba mucha pena ver como la gente andaba con rifles, matando monos, matando tigres, matando danta matando -- destruyendo, destruyendo, destruyendo, y todo por falta de educación."

> began to teach and teach us; you can see that every American, every Canadian, every Spanish person who buys property here, the first thing they do is say, 'there's 50 hectares; I'm going to work 5 or 10 hectares and the rest: conservation. Conservation.[34]

With this "new European inheritance," of environmental philosophy, according to Roldan's schema, Costa Ricans began to concern themselves with conservation. MINAE (the Ministry of Environment and Energy – *Ministerio de Ambiente y Energía*) took authority over forested lands, and Roldan says that, during his time as a municipal official, he found it amusing that he had to ask permission from MINAE to cut some trees to build a road on the municipality's land. [35] Roldan seems to be conflating the perspective and actions of the Costa Rican government, including MINAE, and what he is calling the *European inheritance* or *idiosyncrasy*. Perhaps this suggests that Roldan sees the national government, administrated in the central valley by Costa Ricans from the urban center, as part of the European idiosyncrasy itself.

---

[34] Llego un buen momento en que hubo, aunque a usted le quepa duda una injerencia europea y vinieron los de la Paz y vinieron grupos vinieron organizaciones que nos comenzaron a enseñar y enseñar usted ve de que cada americano cada canadiense cada español que viene compra una tierra y lo primero que hace, que dice: "son 50 ha; voy a trabajar 5 o 10 hectáreas y el resto: conservación, conservación."

[35] Entonces a mí me hizo una gracia que cuando fuimos que hacer un arreglo en el camino para llegar a camino y la institución opuesta era el MINAE que era el que se encargaba de cuidar los bosques tengo que pedir siendo el gobierno local que mandaba el pueblo, tuve que ir a pedir permiso al MINAE para cortar unos árboles que estaban.

Roldan also points out that Costa Rica has reached an agreement to conserve 20,000 hectares of forested land with Panama, in the la Paz international nature preserve (PILA). “So,” he says,

> “it’s not just that Costa Rica talks a lot about this, but we care [for the forests]. That’s it. That’s it. Costa Rica has an enormous quantity of land in conservation because we have sought out [appropriate areas to protect]. We have the kids and a piece of land, and we tell them: all the parts bordering the river and [other important areas] we will conserve. The people are taking care of the original [foundation] of the village.”[36]

Roldan has told me that he was a municipal official during his career, and when he says this, I see him, momentarily, as a formidable rural politician.

However, it also seems strange and politically inconsistent to me that Roldan is immediately arguing against his former point about an European inheritance of conservation, now saying that conservation is uniquely Costa Rican. According to Roldan, the government, people, and culture play roles in conservation (*el gobierno tiene un rol, el pueblo y la cultura*). Schools teach children about water systems; how potable water is produced and

[36] Y entonces sí habla mucho de eso y no solo se habla, sino que se cuida. Ya. Ya. Costa Rica tiene una enorme cantidad de conservación porque se ha ido buscando. Nosotros tenemos los hijos y tenemos una propiedad y decimos a los hijos: todas las partes del rio y esto lo conservamos. La gente va cuidando lo original del pueblo.

where it comes from. The culture of the village has changed (*ahora ha cambiado la cultura del pueblo*).

Considering the framework and history of co-production of identities and ontologies outlined in Chapters 2-4, I would argue that Roldan's perspective is not as contradictory as it seems. Global and local concepts take shape and are exchanged in Coto Brus, forming people's embodied reasoning, which I described as *inference* and *sympathy*. For Roldan, a colonist who worked for SICA and then became a wealthy municipal official, both Italian and Costa Rican forms of reasoning felt close to his identity.

II. Livelihood and Market Pressures

Currently in Coto Brus, land is being placed and maintained under conservation by the choice of private landowners, as described by Roldan. It is also conserved through public consolidation of state and international holdings like PILA and legislation like Forest Law 7575. However, agricultural lands are facing exploitation which is increasingly rigorous, with concurrent, successive growing seasons achieved through energy intensive methods of clearing and planting, high yield chemical fertilizers, and pumping of river water for irrigation. While the development of San Vito and Coto Brus was achieved through space-destroying technologies, the spatial range of agricultural production has now been restricted by FL 7575 and the establishment of extensive PAs. Roldan's narrative suggests that spatial expansion has been replaced or supplemented by the extension of productive cycles.

With coffee prices stagnant, cattle pasturage already occupying extensive tracts of deteriorating land, and the lower elevation zones (*zonas bajas*) dominated by banana production, middle elevation areas like Coto Brus are attractive to producers of niche cash crops, such as the newest, pineapple. According to Roldan's narrative, this is being grown in the region by foreign companies. In my experience, pineapple is a seasonal fruit in Costa Rica and not as common as vegetables, avocados, mangos, or citrus. I have seen it grown in large plantations on the east coast, and my aunt planted a patch on her farm which she considers an experiment, but I do not believe it is a garden or horticultural crop. According to Roldan, the new push in pineapple production is neither local nor sustainable.

Based on what Roldan tells me, rather than bridging space, new methods of pineapple production seek to eliminate the rhythmic cycle of wet and dry, and thus productive and unproductive, seasons of the year in Coto Brus. Roldan describes how they use pumps to draw water from rivers and mineral nutrient solutions to maintain the fertility of the soil; when this water returns to the rivers it is carrying all the pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizer used in the production cycle. According to Roldan, this destroys the terrain and damages people's health (*no solo va dañando la salud de la gente sino también destruyendo la tierra*).

Roldan perceives competing rationales at work in this arrangement. He points out that companies provide livelihoods to people, which is necessary, and encourages the state to come to agreements with them. Perhaps this allows pineapple growers to evade or negotiate compliance with the Forestry Law which prohibits land use change from forest to any other

use – Roldan says that they have bought and cleared large tracts of land in a place called Buenos Aires.[37]

On the companies' side, Roldan says he met someone who worked for pineapple growers, and that their rationale had no room for local concerns.

> They [the company] don't care how much water they waste or how much damage they do to the terrain – on the contrary, the pineapples they produce in the Summer [dry season] sell for ten times more than those grown in the regular rainy season. [Because] if we sell a pineapple for 100 colones, in the summer we must sell it for 1 [to maintain his original ratio, he probably meant 10] colon[es]. You sell it like that – that is the price [negotiated, presumably, as a commodity option], and that's it – it's business. Then if it sells at 100 colones, it produces much more profit [even if the demand was static and the retail sale made at regular wholesale prices]. [This system only works because] they don't account for the damage they do to the terrain and the rivers.[38]

This is a key point in Roldan's contradictory discussion of development and environment. Here he is stating clearly that he believes intensive strategies for achieving profit cause

[37] It is not clear what companies Roldan is referring to specifically. Whether and how they are evading environmental regulations such as FL 7575 is a question for further study. The weak regulatory environment described in Chapter 4 and in other narratives in this chapter suggests that avoiding compliance with the law is not especially problematic in Costa Rica.

[38] Que ellos – la compañía – no les importaba cuánta agua gastaban ni cuanto daño hicieran a la tierra – sino que la pina que producían en verano se vendía diez veces más cara de los que producen en el invierno. Nosotros vendemos una pina en cien colones, en verano tenemos que venderla en un colon. Se vende con eso y ya – ya es negocio. Si vende en cien millones, produce mucho más. Sin importar el daño que se haga al terreno, a los ríos.

damage to people and places; he argues that these forms of profitable production create value by avoiding responsibility.

Roldan says that these things have helped the development of the village (*han ayudado al desarrollo*) but they have envenomed the earth (*las tierras se van envenenando*). As an alternative to this kind of ill-considered production and also the fortress-conservation of parks like la Paz, where there is no productive population (*no hay población que produzca*), Roldan gives the example of Monteverde. People there are not subjected to as many environmental toxins because appropriate laws have been created to protect the populace; Roldan says this is an important goal for legislation (*las leyes – se ha ido creando leyes que nos defiende. Y de eso se trata*). At the same time, tourism creates employment and a good standard of life.

On the personal scale of employment, Roldan says that more and more people are leaving agriculture as a profession, by which he seems to mean that the younger generations are no longer working on the farms of the elders. This is due to market forces as well as increasing levels of education, as described in Chapter 3. While Roldan says the population has become enriched and everyone lives well (*la población se ha enriquecido, todo el mundo vive bien*), it's difficult for me, personally, to imagine how the next generation will make their livelihoods in an area dominated by large agricultural concerns and where arable land is limited geographically and by law.

And while Roldan tells a compelling, single voice narrative about the colonization of San Vito, other voices indicate that the canton of Coto Brus housed many distinct realities in the decades between 1950 and 1980. The rest of this chapter will relate other colonist's

stories and experiences, beginning with Gil, a mobile wage-laborer who spent part of his life in Coto Brus. His narrative focuses on movement in contrast to Roldan's narrative of dwelling.

However, I would like to include some of Roldan's concluding remarks here. In the process of tapering out, our conversation was interrupted by someone delivering something to *Don* Roldan. "Pablito!" he shouted to the delivery man – many people in Coto Brus are named Pablo, so they often call me Alonso – and got up, saying that he enjoyed the interview and encouraging me to come back with any other questions. He knew my grandfather, as we discovered during our conversation, so I say that maybe I will come back to hear some stories.

What Roldan was saying when the other Pablo arrived was this:

> I'm going to tell you the good part because I was young. And my dad managed, he went out to find our rice [livelihood] – and what pleased me was that people lived in peace. This small quantity of people – because we weren't many – lived in peace … The Italians taught us to live in peace … and it pleased me because I said to myself, this town is pleasant, because it's very calm … and well! I fell in love with the village. This place has hardened me like the ocean does the shells, and I don't want to leave. ***Me – Here*****. I'm staying here**.[39]

[39] Le voy a contar lo divertido. Porque yo era joven. Y mi papa, el se ingeniaba, se fue a buscar el arroz y – pero lo que me hacia gracia era que esa poquita cantidad de gente, porque no eran muchos, se vivía en paz. ... se vivía en paz. Los italianos nos ensenaron a vivir en paz. ... a mi me hacia gracia porque yo me decía, que es bonito, porque es muy tranquilo ... y, *diay*, yo me enamore del pueblo. De

A. GIL'S NARRATIVE: MOBILE WAGE-LABORER

I. Themes

In contrast to Roldan, Gil's story was not one of development and construction, but a personal tale defined by movement. While Gil's story does not contradict Roldan's, it shows a different perspective. Many people I talk to in Coto Brus, including Roldan and Silvio, state that the story of Italian colonization gets more attention in regional histories and that this obscures other things that happened; Roldan, living in proximity and sympathy with the Italian colony, represents a Costa Rican colonist who worked and lived alongside Italian SICA *pioneros*. It is useful to present his perspective first to then compare it to the others to show how many different realities were taking shape and conceptual orientations being given form in Coto Brus.

Rather than a dream of riches, Gil's migration to Coto Brus was motivated by a desire to escape his subjected condition at home. Gil said that his oldest brother acted as an overseer (*mandador*) amongst his own family (*entre nosotros mismos*). When his middle brother was given a small amount of money and told to seek his fortune in the South, Gil snuck up on him in his sleep and, waking him in the dark, convinced his brother to allow Gil to accompany him. They made a voyage to Coto Brus via land and ferry. At the time of the interview in 2022, Gil was 80 years old, and he said that these events happened when he was about 10

---

aquí yo me ha endurecido como la mar a las conchas y aqui de aqui no quiero irme. ***Yo – aquí.*** **Aqui me quedo.**

years old. Thus, Gil arrived in Coto Brus during the early 1950s, in the first years of the Italian and Costa Rican colonies.

Roldan mentioned airplanes and decommissioned military vehicles; Gil arrived by train, ferry, and on foot. He later acquired a horse, which he said was so large that it made him look like a doll riding astride it, but he walked great distances throughout his life. The characters in Roldan's story acquired land through government connections and large-scale purchases, in some cases privatizing public land, while Gil describes himself as part of a mobile population which followed harvests and used flight as a means to escape landed ties. Gil describes working on a family farm twice, and both times he considered his condition as something like peonage: for him, the South was a frontier zone to flee to, where individual lives were less structurally conditioned.

However, this frontier zone is not as idyllic as Roldan's city of *orden, paz, tranquilidad* (order, peace, tranquility). This is no story of sure investments in *cafetales* and real estate, where social segregation was the strongest degree of violence inflicted by neighbors upon one another. While Roldan describes San Vito as a place ruled by *buenas costumbres* – a city of open doors, as it were, and without security bars on the windows – Gil says that the region was so violent that, more than once, he saw dead bodies on the side of the road. And in a telling distinction, in Gil's tale, he becomes notorious for trying to make a small purchase with a coin worth 500 colones: Roldan routinely speaks of millions. What Roldan described as continual construction and improvement comes through in Gil's tale as an uneven process which included inequality, violence, and competition.

If Roldan represents a dominant and semi-official view of the events which brought Costa Ricans into relationship with the *terrenos* and environments of Coto Brus, focusing on development in terms of constructions and the accumulation of wealth, Gil represents a more plebian experience of the time. Like my grandfather and Roldan's father, Gil never thought to realize his relationship with the landscape by extensive building. In fact, he is so attached to his old wooden house that his daughter and son-in-law have constructed a new, concrete structure around the old one to preserve it (Figures 27, 28). While Gil and I talk, my other interlocutor, Ismael, is checking on a hive of native bees which have temporarily housed themselves in the cinderblock of the ongoing construction. Gil's piece of land is open, planted with fruit trees and some gardens. There is no paving on the driveway. Gil's dwelling in Coto Brus has not altered the landscape as radically as the official colonies; his arrival and style of living was precipitated by personal and historical factors but not an ethic of national development.

Although they dress similarly, his personal style is different from Roldan's. Gil likes to joke and laugh, and we laugh together at many points in the recording where he makes a sly joke or a funny play on words. Where Roldan has gravity, which I sense he has worked hard to cultivate, Gil has working-class charisma. In my perspective, Gil and Roldan expressed their differing characters and values by their different forms of living, dwelling, and constructing on the landscape. Roldan is surrounded by city structures; Gil by trees, insects, and animals. In the audio recording of our conversation, loud crickets are constantly audible in the background.

Figure 27: Gil at his home in Coto Brus.

The concrete structure is a new home being built above and around his old wooden house, which is in the traditional "Tico" style.

Figure 28: A view of Gil's traditional home under the awning of his children's new house.

Here the Tico and European idiosyncracies of building coexist.

Gil's story is important because it demonstrates the dynamic of internal expansion, which is described in Chapter 4, and shows that this expansion was not always carried out by clearing land for ownership and raising crops. Gil's narrative comes from a wage laborer's perspective which shows that people were also following opportunities to engage in agricultural waged work. Understanding that many settlers worked on land they did not own, and much of which was owned by large companies or landowners, shifts the onus of deforestation from exploitation for direct livelihood (subsistence and small marketing) to exploitation for commodity production (in Gil's narrative, banana, and coffee) and clearing to maintain title on large tracts. Gil's story shows that large companies, with their economic rationales, contributed to the conditions which demanded a response in the form of conservation; however, the logic of capitalist production which drives commodity agriculture is not challenged by programs like PES which, instead, realize the neoliberalization of nature and attempt to integrate economy and ecology.

Roldan and Gil's narratives dovetail on the next point. The larger landowners and corporate agriculture concerns are important elements in the local society because they provide employment and thus livelihood; they are manifestations of economic ontologies in the region. Their strategies for making profit from the environment are dictated by global market forces and thus can be locally harmful as well as beneficial. Individuals involved in settling Coto Brus were not only peasant agriculturalists, and deforestation is not solely attributable to colonization efforts.

When I ask him to describe Coto Brus on his arrival in the 1950s, Gil insists that the way for him to do this is through a lengthy narrative. I told him I was happy to listen to him

describe the area in any way he found appropriate. Rather than taking part in a series of questions and answers, Gil told a story about his arrival in the area when he was about 10 years old, then, he described his comings and goings between Coto Brus, a nearby city called Corredores or Neilly, and Alajuela, a province of the Central Valley.

This story raised important themes. First, Gil described many people coming to Coto Brus for waged labor, whether on banana or coffee plantations or engaged in clearing land – which Gil described as *volando cuchillo, volando machete*, or *chapeando* (slashing with a knife or machete to cut brush). Gil's main occupation was clearing land for large landowners. He also engaged in the illegal production of sugarcane liquor called *guaro*. In the local vernacular, producing and distributing this alcohol is described as being involved in *sacas de guaro*. Mendez Trejos' book describes this as a common occupation in the area (2016).

Next, Gil does not describe a peaceful place, and even disputes the idea that San Vito, the Italian colony, was the original settlement in the area. Others, including Roldan, raise this idea, which is a pet polemic in the region. Rather, Gil says that Sabalito, the smaller and more culturally Costa Rican settlement, was the first colony. When people arrived in the region asking for the *colonia*, they arrived at Sabalito. Outside of San Vito, violence was common and fierce.

Finally, the pattern of settlement Gil describes is very different from Roldan's. In keeping with Roldan's theme of Costa Rican and Italian *idiosyncrasies of construction*, the areas around Sabalito which Gil describes are more sparsely populated, with large tracts of land inhabited by a single family being the norm rather than close-set structures. He emphasizes that most of the constructions he was familiar with were not *casas* but *ranchos* –

simple structures built by the inhabitants from native and minimally processed materials. These usually had earth floors and no indoor plumbing. Sabalito's more dispersed pattern of settlement represents a different way of relating to the landscape which is more traditionally Costa Rican than Italian or European.

II. Narrative

Gil came to Coto Brus and lived there on the strength of his wits, daring, and a taste for benevolent chaos, like the classic Picaresque character of Spanish literature, Lazarillo de Tormes. When he was a child, he lived in Alajuela, in a village whose name he can't recall. He says that he didn't like it very much (*casi no me gustaba*). His older brother headed the household and Gil experienced this as a petty and unbearable tyranny. When another brother was offered 500 colones to leave the family parcel and move to Coto Brus, Gil hatched a plan. He snuck up on his middle brother in the night and woke him with his hand over his mouth. He said that he was going with him to Coto Brus, and when the brother objected, said that their mother had given him permission to go. When they took the middle brother to the train in the morning, Gil slipped away and boarded the train before anyone realized he was missing. Thus, Gil joined his brother on a trip to the Southwest.

They traveled by train and ferry. Gil says that the ferry carried coffee, corn, chickens, cows, people, cars – "*que no llevaba ese barco?*" (What wasn't on that ship?). These ferries were part of the agricultural commodity infrastructure of the area, which shipped bananas and coffee from the ports of Quepos and Puntarenas. When Gil and his brother arrived in

Coto Brus, there were about 30 families. Most lived in *ranchos* as described above, and neighbors protected their territories with threats of violence. On the other hand, Gil talked about his own extended kin network in the area and described the ways others were embedded in similarly complex networks. Life in rural Coto Brus was a balancing act of solidarity, territoriality, and competition.

In the lowlands to the west of Coto Brus, extending towards the coast and the ports, there used to be widespread banana production. Gil describes how the banana workers would run in a line, with other workers severing the banana stalk such that it fell on their shoulders, and they could continue running, without pause, to deposit it in its place. Workers would keep up this rhythm for the whole day. Gil says he didn't do this work, but rather engaged in land clearing by machete. Like the banana and coffee workers, he followed the availability of work, meaning that he was highly mobile. The habitable space of Coto Brus where he lived was bounded by the properties of large landowners where he worked. Individuals and corporations claimed ownership over tracts of forest in the mountains, banana plantations in the lowlands, and cattle and coffee cultivation in the foothills. Land for subsistence was limited.

Gil's brother had a small parcel of land, and Gil described the relationships between neighbors. He said that people were much more violent at the time of the colonization than presently. Men would threaten trespassers with rifles, swords, or violent dogs (*perros bravos*). Other oral history sources, discussed in Chapter 3, suggest that this territoriality was motivated at least in part by the precarity and informality of many families' land tenure. In addition to fights over territory, men would engage in skirmishes on foot or horseback and

with swords called *cruciatas*, a kind of thin machete or cutlass with a hand guard. When I ask him if this is a tool or exclusively a weapon, Gil says, "Tool? No, it's only to get yourself killed" (*es para matarse usted mismo*). Some of these fights were between groups or bands of laborers Gil describes as *indios*, a term used regionally to refer to indigenous people. He says they would line up in opposing fronts and then clash in a *melee*, leaving some dead and trampled by the horses. Gil's comments suggest that indigenous and mestizo populations shared the custom of sword duels and skirmishes; other parts of Gil's narrative show that he distinguishes ethnicity by a complex determination involving profession, skin color, and geography.

Gil also says some fights were duels between individual men, who framed the contest as a competition over a woman. *"La palabra correcta*," says Gil "*era de ver quien era más hombre para irse con la mujer*" (to put it clearly, it was to see who was more manly, so he could go with the woman). However, he says, these fights did not prove masculinity but rather who was more skilled in wielding the sword (*quien era mejor para levantar [esgrimir] la cruciata*). Many people died or were injured in these duels, and Gil says he was once challenged. "But I was the brave one," he says, "who was courageous enough to run away. You think I'll fight for a woman? Never. There's plenty. The woman who wants to marry me, she can let me know, and done (*listo*). *Hasta que se termine el arroz* (until the rice runs out)."

There were few services in the area. Gil says that when his brother fell ill, he was attended by a woman called *la Perola*, who was a local medicine worker. I mentioned her earlier, because she is talked about by people all over Coto Brus when asked about the history of the region. She was responsible for caring for many people and their relatives.

People say she cured routine illnesses as well as injuries received through rural work or interpersonal violence. Some of these, like machete or axe wounds or burns from processing sugarcane syrup, are difficult enough to treat in a hospital setting; *la Perola* used traditional remedies and as much modern medical technology and knowledge as she had access to through a small pharmacy.

After living in Coto Brus for some time, Gil was called back to Alajuela by his family. While he was engaged in some kind of agricultural work, and presumably living in workers' dormitories described by other sources, he received a telegram. He didn't read well, so he asked a *compañero* to read it to him. It said that his grandmother had died and left him a watch and a bicycle. "Well," he said, "I didn't need a watch or a bicycle. But I did miss my mother." So, he took all of the money he had – a 500 colon coin, which is currently worth about 1$ -- and set off for Alajuela. Because he didn't want to get lost, he went back the same way he had come. He caused a small scandal in the nearest city, Ciudad Neily (at that time called *Corredores* or *Villa Neily*) by trying to buy a set of plates for his mother with the coin. "*Muchacho*, (boy,)" said the store-keep, "how is it that you have so much money, and why are you traveling all alone?" Gil blustered saying that he was a worker going to see his mother and he didn't need questions, but only his change. The store-keep counseled him to keep his money well-hidden and not to show that he was carrying so much. He tells me he stored the change in his suitcase and didn't let it out of his sight after that. He also painted a mustache on his upper lip to look older.

On his way to see his mother and on the way back, Gil's story spins out into tales about drinking contraband *guaro*. He was mistaken for an undercover cop at one point and at

another talked his way into an illegal cantina. Police questioned him about his identity and destination and warned him against engaging in the drinking culture. It's not clear in his narrative how long he stayed in Alajuela, but he mentions raising rice crops on a family farm in the area. When he returned to Coto Brus, he felt that he had become a man. He built his house and painted it a color he liked. He was married twice. He says that his favorite memory of this time is living alone in his house, with open land around him, and looking up at the moon. "God," he would say, "you are so powerful, and the world is so beautiful. I'm here alone, but I'm not alone, because I'm here with you."

This memory is from the same piece of land we are recording the interview on. In the audio recording, even in the middle of the day, the sound of insects singing in the background never stops. We are sitting under a large water-apple (*manzana de agua*) tree, one of my favorites, and a small puppy runs and barks around us. This, in my own perspective, is the Costa Rican *idiosyncrasy of construction* or dwelling, and it leaves open space for plants, animals, and people to enjoy. It is easy to imagine having a nocturnal spiritual experience in a setting like this.

The last thing Gil wants to talk about is another picaresque story. Like many others before the creation of the La Paz nature preserve [PILA], Gil walked from Coto Brus to the Atlantic coast city of Limon as a kind of rite of passage or adventure. "What I wanted," he said, "is to marry a black woman." He doesn't say why, beyond joking that he had already married blonde women in the past, but through telling the story he discusses the racial and geographic divisions which existed in the region at the time – possibly the 1960s or 1970s. Throughout his story, Gil's own ethnic identification seems fluid. At one point he describes

some young men he is drinking with as "*moreno como tu*" (dark like you) and says that they did not trust him because he "looked different."

He clearly distinguishes himself from the "*indios"* who worked in the banana plantations, and says that he did not work with them, but at the point in the narrative when he receives the telegram from his mother, it seems like he was in fact working at the plantation. He also describes the way they lined up for their pay, drank guaro, and fought duels as if he saw these activities. Even if he was working alongside, and not with these men, his hesitancy makes sense, as many people in the region consider banana work as less prestigious than other forms of agricultural labor and mostly done by indigenous and black men. Like many prejudices, it is difficult to untangle why different ethnicities, and the professions they fill, seemed less favorable to Gil; at the same time, his comments about marrying a black woman indicate that he did not necessarily respect social divisions. It is likely that the prejudice against banana workers in Costa Rica is tied to the industry's historic links to the Caribbean and black and indigenous working populations. Gil's tricky way of discussing race and ethnicity does not produce clear answers, but it does point a critical gaze towards the articulations and contradictions of race and racism in Costa Rica.

To this point, Gil's attempt to court a black woman was a controversial proposal at the time. Although not prohibited by law, many black and non-black Costa Ricans thought it was. He tells me that when he tried to flirt with a woman at the cantina, she said, "are you crazy? How could I marry a white boy (*machito*) like you?" and he responded "White?! I'm not white! I look like a piece of cardboard (*cartón*)! It's just that you look like charcoal (*carbon*)!" And then he puts his arm beside mine, "see? dark (*ves? morenos*)." The black men

in the cantina laughed with him and the woman, telling him his idea was crazy and leaving him to finish his drink alone. Another woman approached him, but because she was a blonde woman (*macha*) he escaped her advances through a comical series of mild deceptions, *repartee*, and a sudden flight (*fuga*).

Gil's last story points out that ethnic distinctions in Coto Brus and the surrounding regions were much more complex than Roldan's opposition of Costa Rican / Italian. The region is and was also home to indigenous, black, Panamanian, and mestizo populations who do not always fit neatly into ethnic categories. Identifying with one group or another seemed to cause some anxiety with Gil, which I perceive as someone who does not fit neatly into the racial identity categories which are often deployed in the US, for example, or in US academic discussion about Latin American ethnicities. For example, in the case of Costa Rica, *mestizaje* has not been a state program as in Mexico or Argentina, but it does approximate the way many people, including Gil and myself, experience our uncertain place in the ethnic and racialized schemes of the colonial imagination; even so, *mestizo* is not the term usually used in the region. *Moreno* is more common.

III. Analysis

Gil's story provides a valuable counterpoint to Roldan's, which is framed by the discourses of development and construction. Roldan describes the experience of Costa Ricans and Italians who were able to purchase significant parcels of land, build an urban

center, and organize commodity production of coffee. Because coffee takes 3-5 years to become productive, this undertaking required complex systems of credit and logistical support. In contrast, Gil, and workers like him moved through the landscape in less organized ways, taking advantage of agricultural and shipping infrastructure such as trains and ferries for transport and working for daily or hourly wages. They did not use credit or buy properties for development on a significant scale. They worked for a wage rather than engaging in a direct relationship of production with the landscape. They were integrated into local, regional, and global economies in a way which was more fluid and precarious than landowners such as Roldan, or the next individual whose narrative I will present, Melchor.

Wage laborers' dispersed pattern of settlement and movement meant that workers like Gil produced limited impacts on the landscape. Rather than large and dense constructions, Gil and others describe simple buildings made with local and low impact materials, or dormitories constructed by landowners for laborers to occupy communally. While he now has more neighbors and a new asphalt road connecting his area to Sabalito, and communal structures have largely disappeared, the landscape around him has not changed so much. There are patches of forest near his plot, and the houses are still far apart.

While the dominant narrative says that campesino families spread throughout Costa Rica and deforested through their livelihood activities, Gil's story brings attention to another way that deforestation was occurring as the result of agro-industrial processes that relied on a mobile, landless class of waged laborers. Some large landowners needed to keep their land clear to maintain title and prevent squatters from taking over parcels, and this was part of the

work Gil engaged in. In these cases, the land was not used for exploitation but held as real estate and cleared as a matter of formalizing ownership.

While it is important to provide a way for people to maintain a livelihood while engaging in conservation, as PES aims to do, this strategy only targets landowners at a certain scale. Those with small parcels cannot engage profitably in the kinds of conservation services covered under PES, and it would do nothing to help those who depend on waged labor like Gil. Conservation strategies need to take the lived experiences of people like Gil, who experienced the forest transition as a laborer with very small, landed resources, into account to be effective. PES does not target two major factors which contribute to land use change, and which are highlighted in Gil's story: **(1)** the pressures of landless populations which seek to gain land or engage in waged work, and **(2)** the activity of large agricultural or capital concerns which provide wages to laborers by engaging in deforestation. It highlights the way that, as suggested by Roldan, profit-driven enterprises make labor, things, and environments cheap in order to externalize costs. This point will be pursued in my conclusions in Chapter 6.

B. MELCHOR: SMALLHOLD FARMER

I. Narrative

Unlike Roldan and Gil, Melchor had an experience which I consider more representative of the stereotype of a Costa Rican yeoman. Melchor was 86 at the time of the interview. He was born in 1935 and arrived in Coto Brus in 1969, when he was 34 years old. He has been in Coto Brus for 52 years, making his living as a small-hold coffee farmer and member of the local coffee co-operative.

When Melchor arrived in the area, about 20 years after Roldan and Gil, there was still little access via paved roads. He said that, to go from the municipal center of San Vito to the surrounding areas, one had to travel by foot or on horseback. At the time, there were only three businesses, of which Roldan's was one. Travelers hitched their horses to posts when they visited businesses, just as in movies about the US American Old West.

Melchor came to Coto Brus with his family and two other families in a cattle truck. He had bought a piece of land from another farmer before coming to the area, and he settled down on that land and planted coffee. Because the coffee bushes take 3-5 years to mature, he and other coffee farmers needed to use savings or credit to subsist for that time. Melchor himself had some savings and said that others, who needed credit, received it from the coffee cooperative Coopesabalito.

In those years, the cooperative produced 125,000 *quintals* or *fanegas* of coffee each year. Producers in the region sold their coffee collectively through the cooperative, which ensured a better price and allowed the cooperative to extend credits and other agricultural

services. Coffee production was simple: land was cleared, bushes planted in uniform rows, and then the land was kept free of weeds or other debris and the bushes pruned regularly. Labor responsibilities were more or less equal among the men who worked each field.

By this time, forest land and the land of the agricultural colonies was distinctly divided. What locals call *montaña* (forested foothills) had been cleared, such that new growth on fallow lands was all of an equal age. This produces a type of terrain called *tacotal*, which is defined by the trees being of equal height and narrow trunk width. No permission was required to clear land, so people did so without municipal or other coordination.

In the last year of the 1960s, most houses around Melchor's neighborhood did not have electric light or water pumps. Municipal electrical service was established around 1983 or 1984, according to Melchor's memory, which means that many people lived without electricity in their homes for 30 years. This aligns with other recollections I have heard in the area. Melchor and other farmers who had the ability bought electrical generators and used them to provide light and pump water. Many others relied on creeks or wells for their needs, and Melchor said that the scarcity of water was one of the main limiting factors in the development of the area. Coffee and other crops in the region do not always require irrigation but many fields are irrigated to improve production. As outlined in Chapter 3, water was usually drawn from wells, springs, or running bodies like creeks.

Melchor described a typical day for him, which he said was representative of many of his neighbors as well. One would wake early in the morning to milk the cows if the family's plot was large enough to sustain them. Some families had other livestock, like goats or pigs, to attend to. After that, men would work all day in the coffee fields, maintaining the area

clean and free of weeds and pests. Families also grew subsistence crops like corn, yucca and beans, and prepared cheese and sour cream from milk. People bought salt and cooking oil as well as other small necessities from local markets, which would also purchase produce from the small farms. Rice was not grown in the area but available through national markets.

This system does not exist anymore. Domestic market protections for subsistence foods like beans and corn were ended in the 1980s, and some of the local markets which used to purchase food were subsidized by the state. When these protections and subsidies ended, it became more difficult for growers to sell their produce locally. When I was there in 2022, Piedad and Ismael encouraged me to buy produce from their neighbors, and the supermarkets sold local produce. My family grows avocados, lemons, chayote, and other foods on their lands, and I believe this is a common practice in the region. However, Melchor says that the daily cost of living is much higher now than it was in the 1970s when he arrived in the area, and that possibilities for selling produce are more limited. This topic requires further study.

When I ask what role the Costa Rican social safety net has played in his life, Melchor says that beyond providing schools, he is not aware of services that the government provides to campesinos. The way I phrase my question is whether the state has an obligation (*deber*) to provide education, healthcare, or other social goods to Costa Ricans. I mention that Costa Rica is famous for its schools and bring up a common phrase which says that every Costa Rican village, no matter how small, has a school, Melchor responds by saying that if there is some form of contract (*contrato*) between the state and the populace, peasants (*campesinos*) are not aware of it.

He says that while the Italian colonists and indigenous people received or receive support from the government, other Costa Ricans had to fend for themselves (*tenían que venir por su cuenta*). While this may have been Melchor's experience in the 1970s, ITCO and other institutions did help Costa Ricans from other areas settle in Coto Brus, so Melchor's perspective on this issue has its limitations. It does, however, represent a common complaint in the area: that Italians received great amounts of aid from both the Italian and Costa Rican governments, while other Costa Ricans received less. Melchor also states that he considers the treatment of indigenous people in Costa Rica to be unequal — not because they are given less benefits, but more. "*Somos ticos tanto el Indio como el blanco,"* (We're Costa Ricans, whether indigenous or white,) he says, but while he has only started to receive a pension at the age of 86, he says that indigenous people are given subsidies for their daily needs.

Like Melchor's perception of the unequal treatment between Italians and Costa Ricans, this view may not be correct but does represent a sentiment I have heard from other people in the area. Apart from the factuality of Melchor's perspective, his statements show how concepts about identity, national belonging, and economic rights shape people's worldviews according to whom they perceive as proximate, and with whom they experience sympathy, or as other and separate. The practice of clearing land and establishing private ownership over parcels of land limits the possibilities for contact and encounter, as shown by Gil's mentions of territorial violence, and people's perceptions about fair distribution of common resources likewise causes distance between social groups, like Melchor's complaints about unequal treatment. Legal and economic realities, interacting with

environments in the form of ownership and land use, are generative of social and affective difference.

The only environmental regulations or programs Melchor discusses in our conversation is the prohibition on cutting trees without permission from MINAE, which is the regulation which comes up most frequently in conversations with local people. Other than that, Melchor's perception is that the state has played very little role in his life, whether through environmental regulations or social services. I discussed this topic with Ismael, before my conversation with Melchor, and Ismael said that he thinks most people around him feel this way. However, he said, considering the life histories and economic situation of laborers who come to Costa Rica from Panama or Nicaragua puts the services and rights provided by the Costa Rican state into perspective. The role of the state in providing social services and financial assistance is a controversial topic in Costa Rica.

In terms of the environment, Melchor's experience of the Forest Transition was immediate: he noticed the changes in the landscape, but it was not an issue that he seemed interested in discussing much. For him, the important realities of life in Coto Brus were the daily concerns of shelter, fuel, food, and money for necessities. His decision to plant coffee was not really an individual choice: it was simply what everyone in the region did. It was considered the appropriate way to make a living. In this sense, Melchor's relationship with the environment was mediated by global markets and local customs to such a deep extent that the mediation became invisible to him; it was hegemonic or ideological. He decided what to do with his land based on prevailing conditions. This is an example of the form of governance discussed through Tania Li's work in Chapter 2; whereby governors shape

conditions in such a way that people will choose what they 'ought to.' It is also an example of the way individual reasoning is shaped by collective conditions and proximity; I have used the terms *circumstances* and *sympathy* to describe this relationship.

Melchor says that fewer people engage in agriculture now, compared to 50 years ago, because of rising education and a denser population. This perception matches data presented in Chapter 3. He notes that houses are now much closer together, saying they are "almost touching each other" (*las casas están casi pegadas*). In contrast to San Vito, where the houses really do touch each other, in Melchor's neighborhood this means that houses are built within 50-100 meters of each other, when the distance used to be closer to 500 meters or a kilometer.

When I ask if there is anything he would like to add to the interview, perhaps a nice memory that he has or an event that has stayed in his mind, he says that as far as nice things (*lo bonito*), everything is nice (*lo bonito es todo*). He says that the lives of his family, and perhaps his neighbors (*nosotros*) have become something very pleasant (*ya se ha hecho algo muy bonito*). While we are talking, Ismael, who is the subject of a later vignette, is picking oranges from some trees in the yard and hands a few to us. We are seated on an uncovered patio behind Melchor's house, at a long table, and we are surrounded by fruit trees and other plants. At one point in the conversation Melchor's great-grandchild arrives from school and we both greet him. Melchor uses a Costa Rican phrase of endearment which I think is very beautiful, saying "*diay muchacho, como me le va?"* (Hey, kid, taking care of yourself for me?).

II. Analysis

For Melchor, the important changes in the area have to do with the quality of life that is accessible to an average family. He notes the changes in domestic technology which have occurred very quickly — from no paved roads or electric light to wireless internet in 50 years. He says that the local markets and cooperative made his livelihood possible, although he also notes that the cooperative has had its ups and downs. “When it works,” he says, “it works, and when it doesn’t, it doesn’t.” He notes that the cooperative has recently had financial troubles, “*de ultima, de ultima, hace ocho años, se quiebro”* (Most recently, 8 years ago, it broke [went into bankruptcy]).

Melchor fits more neatly into the Costa Rican archetype of the yeoman farmer than Roldan or Gil. He owns his own piece of land and plants crops for sale as agricultural commodities. He discussed change in Coto Brus in a way that seemed less ideological to me than Roldan’s style. His concerns with development were closer to what Tania Li described as ‘commonsense’ ‘improvement.’ The changes which caught his attention were those which improved daily life for him and his family: running water, electricity, and communications.

In my interpretation, Melchor’s human-environment relationship has been influenced by the existence of an established marketing system, and the ease of growing coffee in the climate of Coto Brus. While it may seem that his relationship with the landscape is the least mediated, I would argue that Melchor’s human-environment relationship has been, to some extent, overdetermined by existing conditions such that clearing land and planting coffee was considered the appropriate and expected thing to do. Like Gil, he seemed relatively

uninterested in the regional turn towards conservation. His relationship with the landscape, as I interpreted it, was direct and business-like.

Roldan, Gil, and Melchor were three early settlers in the region of Coto Brus who expressed different, but somewhat overlapping, ideas about the environment and their own relationship to it. Provisioning a livelihood, and to some extent wealth, was an important role of the environment for all of them. Roldan spoke the most about the ontological turn from economy to environment, or in other words, development to conservation. Each of them was clear in stating that certain changes, like the introduction of electricity and communications, were important improvements, but together, they do not represent anything like a uniform peasant experience of colonization in the region.

C. ISMAEL AND PIEDAD: FINCA MAQUIQUE

I. Introduction

I met Piedad and Ismael through Airbnb. Before arriving in Costa Rica, I found a cabin to rent for the month – I chose Finca Maquique, their farm, because it is an agroecological project with extensive gardens and forest, which is what I enjoy. When I arrived, Piedad was doing some work in the herb garden. I introduced myself and told her a little bit about my project. She immediately offered a tour of the area and showed me a great number of plants, fungi, insects, and birds. She took me to the springs which are located on the property and which she stewards. At one point she tasted a mushroom she found while trying to remember its name, and she said, "my children always tell me to stop doing that. They are afraid I will be poisoned." She offers to put me in contact with some of the elderly in the area who are well enough to give an interview about local history. She puts me in touch with Roldan, Gil, and Melchor, and Ismael offers to help by giving me a ride to the interviews on his motorcycle and charging me a good rate.

Finca Maquique is an agroecological project and ecotourism site with a cabin and trails. It is located on two hectares of forested land, which used to be a pasture. Piedad inherited it from her father, who raised cattle. She says her mother and father met during a holiday week around 1960 [*semana de fiestas*], got married, and boarded a plane to come to the area. She thinks her parents were from Guanacaste, but she is not sure. She was born just across the street and has spent her whole life here. She is 55 years old.

Ismael is 56 and arrived from the other end of this province, which is Puntarenas, in a county named Monte de Oro. He came to Las Brisas – the area of Coto Brus where Finca Maquique is located – in 1982. He has worked in construction and cattle ranching, and he built the cabin which I am renting.

The couple describe Finca Maquique as a "tourist and agroecology center dedicated to love of nature; everything here works for love of nature – we protect animals here, and we don't kill any kind of animal." Piedad repeats that her father gave her this land as her inheritance, and she has "protected it ever since." They say that they don't receive payments for conservation, and that their farm is too small to benefit from such payments effectively because, as Piedad understands it, PES is paid per hectare and her farm is only two hectares. If they were to receive a monthly payment, Piedad says that would help them enormously:

> We aren't going to cut trees whether or not we are paid. But if something were to come to us monthly [a payment], the benefit would be enormous. But we don't receive anything like that. Many people ask us – do you receive money for that? – and we say – no, never. We do this because we love nature.

Three years ago they were awarded the Bandera Azul prize, which is a national program to recognize good stewardship practices. It is a recognition but not a financial award. They say it was a significant bureaucratic process and involved commissioning a study of their property. They agreed with the investigators to undertake certain practices, such as composting, and rejecting the use of insecticides or herbicides. They agreed not to burn trash or parcels of land. They explain that burning brush is an agricultural practice in the

region and is sometimes permitted, if the soil needs carbon, for example. Burning trash is a common practice with no environmental value and which causes significant harm.

As part of the agreement, they also protect watersheds [*cantarillas*] which traverse their property. They keep these clean and prevent contamination of the water as it flows through the farm. The water moves in a series of ditches which wind along and under the trails (figure 29). At a low point of the terrain, it joins water from the property's springs and runs off the property.

Figure 29: A cantarilla (watershed) at Finca Maquique,

Given that Bandera Azul was a bureaucratic burden with limited benefits and PES payments do not serve Piedad and Ismael, it seems that a middle solution must be found. In Chapter 3 I discussed the weak enforcement environment in Costa Rica and the failure of PES in Costa Rica to work as a market-based instrument, despite its stated goals. This means a solution needs to work with minimal administration and enforcement, and because decentered neoliberal models such as FONAFIFO have operated according to economic rather than environmental rationales, a new model should be found which can serve landowners in Costa Rica at this middle capacity. This is a topic for further study.

Piedad started planting trees after she and Ismael had their first children. She says that that was about 30 years ago, and that the land and community have changed significantly throughout the period. They planted many species from the region, such as Guapilon, and from other regions of Costa Rica, such as Ceiba and Guanacaste. Ceiba is a slow-growing tree which can become very large in ~100 years, and Costa Ricans often refer to it as a symbolic and practical center of communities. For example, Piedad told me a story about a fire in the neighborhood; all the neighbors gathered at the ceiba tree, which was also where children were taught classes, to count themselves and to plan to save their buildings.

"When I decided to plant this land with many different species," says Piedad, "it was for my children more than anything. I said: my children are not going to know a huge number of species. So, we have them, there is many." She says they have sago trees on the property, which are small, slow-growing trees resembling palms. They are sold as a prized specimen plant in US nurseries. Piedad says that this is a very ancient plant, and that people used to use it to make *atole*.

I decided to interview Piedad and Ismael because I loved their *finca*. It also struck me that the project was created and headed by Piedad without support from government or other entities. The collaboration between Piedad and Ismael, who raise bees, trees, and crops in addition to renting the cabin and restoring the forest, struck me as unique and important. It represents a conservation project motivated by distinctly Costa Rican and specifically regional conceptions about the importance of nature, contradicting a narrative adopted by Roldan and others, which suggests that conservation in Costa Rica is some form of "European inheritance." It demonstrates motivations which encourage people to conserve even when making conservation real is hard work which yields limited profits.

Figure 30: The cabin and forest at Finca Maquique.

Figure 31: A ceiba tree in Sabalito.

For many people in the region, the Ceiba is a symbol of communities and used to serve as a place to gather. A billboard advertising construction services and a car yard are in the foreground.

II. Motivations

A. Traditional Medicine

I prompt Piedad that she has shared with me some of her knowledge of traditional medicine and ask her how she learned about that. This is an important part of her relationship with the landscape and part of what motivated her to plant so many different species and engage in conservation. “It’s a family inheritance,” she says, “I grew up curing myself with plants at my house, with my grandmothers, and my mom.” Since then, she has continued to learn through books, workshops, and her own experimentation. “For example,” she tells me, “I told you the other day that a plant [*Lantana spp.*] is good for headaches; it’s also good for other pains. So, if I know it’s good for one thing, I can learn it’s good for another.”

On another occasion, outside of the interview, I asked both Ismael and Piedad more about this, because I caught a fever and they have been helping me treat it. Ismael tells me that for every illness, there is a cure in the forest. “It’s not that nature doesn’t have it,” he says, “it’s that people are ignorant and don’t have knowledge.” Piedad tells me that part of her practice is based on inspiration. For example, she told me a story about a cousin who was ill with stomachaches. Piedad tried many things that did not work. One morning, she went out to the patio and saw a bird drop a passionflower [*Passiflora spp.*] in front of her. She decided to try to make tea out of it and give it to the ill cousin; it worked. She says that she believes in inspiration which comes through God and nature, but she also says that she researched this with her daughter after the event. Together, they found many articles online saying that passionflower is good for treating stomach ailments.

Piedad says that she has continued to learn together with people in the region. There is no official organization, but the Wilson station and Finca Cantaros (featured in Silvio's vignette) both host workshops which are well attended. She meets other people there and stays in touch with them. She is also teaching her son this knowledge. Traditionally, she says, it is practiced by women more frequently, but this is not a rigid rule. I tell her that I was treated by a male traditional healer when I was a child, and she wonders if she knew him; unfortunately, I don't remember his name, but she agrees that there are also male practitioners.

She teaches her son the techniques she knows, and he is especially interested in making curative baths and rubs. Ismael has a nerve condition that they have not been able to get diagnosed and Piedad and her son prepare baths for his pain. Piedad also prepares herbs for me to use in my baths while I am sick. At the end of the summer, she gives me a salvia leaf to make tea before I leave the farm; she says it will help me relax, reflect, and think. I steep it in four or five cups of hot water and drink tea throughout the evening.

B. Agroecology is Traditional

Piedad says she wants to make an important point regarding agroecology. "I wanted to say that there are people who grow coffee in an ecological way," she tells me, "And the government supports them to plant polycultures, with trees in their fields and things like that. *Esta en paso* [it's in process.]" She continues:

> So, we are working that way because it's a 'green country,' right? But in reality, this is only the beginning. The government is only beginning a road, to try to make people understand, because we see ourselves as a green country, right? But it is also because we need the soil. We need it to produce food for our daily lives. So, when people learn that the mountain [*monte*], or what people call *maleza* [*badness*, weeds or bad terrain] is not – that it is *bueneza* [goodness] – then I believe that, if the government continues to work through the institutions, as it should do and as it is obligated to do [*tiene el deber*], then I believe that in 20 years, there will be very few people working with what they call *conventional agriculture.*

Piedad mentions institutions and does not specify which she is referring to. Many people in the area refer to MINAE as the environmental institution they are familiar with. Costa Rica's mandatory civic education places a strong emphasis both on civil society and government institutions, especially the public education, health, and environmental ministries, as I experienced in high school. There is a banner at the bus stop in front of Piedad's property and the local preschool announcing the work of Costa Rica's ministry for children (PANI – *Patronato Nacional de la Infancia*) – this is typical of Costa Rican government communications. I interpreted Piedad's remark as a reference to the way she understands government (i.e., it operates through institutions) more than an endorsement of any institution specifically.

She says that conservation is not a novelty or foreign imposition. Piedad's father and the other people of his generation, Piedad says, worked in a traditionally sustainable way. "He cleared small parcels by machete [*a pura machete*]," she says, "and planted beans and

corn. Where he planted corn, he mixed in lettuce, cabbage, beans, turnips, *ayote, ñampi, yucca*. And when they took their harvests, they let the soil rest for a year. That's how they worked." This method is described as *swidden agriculture* in anthropological literature, and in this region it is currently called *hacer huerta* or *hortal*.

Piedad says that this changed with the introduction of chemical agriculture; she calls this *el maldito don* [the cursed gift]. She says that chemical agriculture only hurts soil, and creates sterility, in contrast with traditional techniques which create fertility without chemical inputs. She says that people "have the belief – and it is only a belief, because it is not a reality," that these chemicals work, but she disagrees.

"So," I ask, "agroecology is not new, but has roots in tradition?" And Piedad responds, "*ah si*, what we did is return [*regresar*] to them." "What we did," Ismael adds, "as human beings, is regress [*como seres humanos, hemos retrocedido*]." He says that indigenous people and campesinos throughout the last century used superior techniques – "they used to do everything my wife mentioned, letting the soil rest and things like that. Now they depend on chemicals and fertilizers."

I terms of this thesis' theoretical framework, I interpret Piedad's argument to mean that the practice of agriculture has been disconnected from the reality (ontology) of the environment and replaced with a different ontology in which the proper form of reasoning is economic. She said, "it [the efficacy of chemical inputs and controls] is only a belief, because it is not a reality," which indicates that she believes there is a different, preferable, or more real reality which traditional agriculture conforms to: Ismael said, "we regressed (*retrocedimos*)," so we had "to return (*regresar*)." An important question raised by Piedad

and Ismael's analysis is whether practices like letting the soil rest for a year after a harvest are compatible with environmentalist rationales which seek to come to terms with capitalist logics under conceptual schemes like *neoliberalization of nature*. I will return to this point in Chapter 6.

Figure 32: A toucan eating from an Hoja Santa tree at Finca Maquique.

Corn is growing in the background on a traditional hortal or milpa field.

II. Changes over their Lifetimes

A. Changes on the Property: *El Lechon* (*Maquique)*

I prompt Piedad to repeat a story she told me earlier, saying, "you told me a very interesting story, about a tree called the *lechon*," and she responds, "*quieres que le cuente la historia del lechón? Ah, okay. Bueno. Es así:"*[40]

When they received the Bandera Azul prize, they hadn't yet named the farm. However, the paperwork required a name. So, Piedad was walking the trails, and she thought about this type of tree, and how they have multiplied here over the years in an impressive way. She says that she investigated the tree with her children and found that the trunk is used in Mexico to make crafts and, as a material, is called *maquique*.

"This is a primitive tree," she says, "its seed, which is actually spores, can wait up to 500 years for the proper conditions. So, when we realized that there are some 300 trees here, which were born by themselves – they weren't planted [*nacieron solos, porque no se sembraron*] – we chose the name." I respond that this is something very striking, because "it's as if the tree chose this place and moment to be born."

She answers "yes, it's very interesting," and goes on to explain her theory. She says that there were always a few in the area [*uno por otro*], but never very many. "I don't know if you've noticed," she says, "but when it rains for a few days straight, the soils here are saturated and form puddles." This prompts Ismael to jump in and add that the area used to be full of lagoons.

[40] "So, you want me to tell you the story of the *lechon*? Okay, well, it's like this:"

In fact, he says, when he arrived in 1982 there was a beautiful lagoon near the center of the community. This was drained and built over for the community's plaza. He says they made it disappear ["*lo desaparecieron"*]. He notes that this was an act which flouted the law, because even at that time it was not allowed. However, conservation was not a priority and there were no consequences.

"So," Piedad, circles back to the multiplication of the *lechon*, "I reasoned this way." She says that by planting so many trees, they slowed down the water cycles and caused more rain to fall. The trees also hold moisture in their canopies and shade the ground. Because they create these conditions, and the soil stays cool and saturated, "perhaps this is one of the characteristics that these plants [the *lechon*] prefer. It's very possible [*es muy possible*]."

This story is striking to me, as I told Piedad and Ismael, because the spores chose a time and place to become active and develop into trees. This couple's actions, combined with the unique geographical characteristics of the Finca, created a reality which allowed different kinds of life to flourish in relationship: this is what I discussed as *negentropy* in conversation with Leff's work in Chapter 2. I would also argue it is a form of *sympathy*. The feelings which existed in Piedad and Ismael's family caused them to start reforesting, and their actions created an environment in which the *lechon* felt it could live. This is an example of an ontology of and for nature and people together, which was able to create itself alongside, if not outside of, the logics of capitalism, and provides an example of what is possible even with limited resources and in a small space.

I would also argue that the political environment in Costa Rica, a (nominally) pacifist democracy, is instrumental in making projects like Piedad's, and the flourishing of the *lechon*

on her land, possible. Silvio, another of my interlocutors, discusses this point in the next vignette. Drawing from the framework of political ecology, I am using the term *political ontologies* to describe this tangle of relations between governance, structural elements like relative prosperity and land ownership, individual choice, and nature (as the conceptual other of governance). I pursue this argument in Chapter 6.

B. Changes in the Community

Piedad says the community has changed a lot in 30 years. She grew up on dirt roads, and she remembers that they used to become so muddy that they were impossible to traverse; people would get stuck in the mud with their carts and teams of oxen, which they used to transport coffee and other goods. Piedad's father had a small *pulperia* or neighborhood store, and her parents would let people sleep there at night. Piedad says her parents would give the travelers food and lodging without charge, because the region needed exchange. The travelers would rest for the night and, in the morning, reload their carts and finish their journey.

"It was very interesting," she says, "my mother remembered that one day some men came from inside the forest [*dentro de la montaña*] carrying a child – its parents had died there inside [*allí adentro*]." Her mother called people from all around to come and give the men and the child fruit juice and things to eat. "And it was like that," she says, "really, I don't know how they had enough food."

However, she says, they bought very little. People planted heavily [*sembraba mucho, mucho*] and traded. “They lived by exchange,” she says. For example, she describes how people used to preserve meat to trade. They would put the meat in a barrel with the fat from the same animal, and the meat could be preserved for many months with this technique and exchanged.

She remembers a related story with both sad and happy sides. She told it like this:

> I remember that my dad had two young oxen tied together. They [people] did that to train them to work as a team – to pull a cart or plow. My dad picked two of the calves, the prettiest, white calves – they were very beautiful – and they probably weighed 500kg each. They put them out to pasture, and unfortunately, they must have gone looking for water; because my father hadn’t left water out for them, but there was water above [up the hill]. They must have slipped and gotten caught on something, because my family found them later, and they had choked. It was very sad. However, there was an enormous amount of meat, and people preserved it. My parents invited people to come and smoke the meat, roast it, and take it – they filled huge sacks. So, they were able to share it [*repartir*] with the neighborhood. It was like a party.

Anyway, she says, the population has grown enormously since that time. She remembers that, when she was growing up, there were maybe 30 families. Now she and Ismael estimate that there are around 300. Ismael says that there were two very distinct periods – by the time he arrived in 1982, people were saying that the population had already expanded greatly, marking the early 80s as a time of transition. Currently, there are still

unpaved roads, but many of the villages of Coto Brus are connected by bus service, which even reaches Panama. Oxen and carts have been replaced by trucks and trailers.

III. How will the Community and Landscapes Change in the Future?

I ask Piedad and Ismael how they think the community and landscapes will change in the future, and if projects like theirs will become more common, or if they are already becoming more common. She responds, “Look, in my community, I don’t think so; and I don’t say that to speak well about myself, but because the community doesn’t have that kind of awareness [*concientización*]." For example, she continues, "There was an old man that had kept a piece of mountain on his property forested, and as soon as he died, his relatives cleared it immediately. It’s all because of money.”

A. Development and Ecology

This comment of Piedad’s gives Ismael an opportunity to pivot to another theme: the tension between future development and local environments. “The theme of money which *doña* Piedad just raised,” he told me, “Is very strong. Look – there is an element of human nature, or a great tendency, which says that human beings must build. They call that development [*lo llaman desarrollo*].” This evokes my conversation with Roldan, which opened this chapter. He continued:

That is what government entities and those businesses dedicated to tearing apart the forests to build houses for people say. They call it development. That is development for humanity in general. Come with tractors, lift up trees, make roads, make houses, fill with cement, with concrete – because they are not even environmentally friendly houses [*viviendas amigables*] but made of concrete and cement – that is what they call development. So, this advance, this giant change that is coming around the corner, it's like a global tendency [*es como una tendencia global*] – we have to build more houses because every day there are more people, even if some say there are less, every day there are more.

Therefore, because we need these bubbles to survive in [*esas burbujas para sobrevivir*], we go cutting down forests, limiting the spaces which belong to the forest and other species … so every day there is less possibility to conserve. Because we need to build businesses, churches for the different denominations – it's all constructions – and it doesn't allow environments [to thrive]. For example, a pasture is only good for the cattle and the owner – and the cattle are only good for the owner. Or people say, wow, what a pretty *cafetal*, it's going to bloom and fill up with flowers and attract bees. That's a lie, because as soon as the blossoms set, the owner will come with poison and spray everything to protect the crop. So, it's only good for the owner. So, all that is coming to an end [*todo eso se está terminando*].

There's enormous tension – and we have to, as the *campesinos* say, buckle our belts [*ammararnos los cinturones*], so that these projects, which are just being born and will continue to be born in the future, are not ended [prematurely]. Because our children

could come and say, 'Well, Mr. Ismael isn't here anymore' [*ese señor ya no esta*]. We want pasturage. And that's as far as we got [*y hasta allí llegamos*].

B. Markets vs. Policy: Lack of Popular Will

Ismael continues on this theme and introduces another point. "My wife said something correct, which is logical, and which has significant reality: there are policies … what is lacking is will [*no hay voluntad*]." Ismael argues that producers understand market logic which says that each tree you grow removes space for pasture and profit, and that you have to use pesticides and insecticides to protect your crop. In other words, people shape the landscape in ways that conform to the needs or desires that an economic ontology imprints on the environment; the human-environment relationship is not determined by an environmental ontology or rationality, but one which is fundamentally economic and incompatible with nature. Where conservation policies and economic reality conflict, the stronger rationale of money and necessity means that there is limited popular will to comply with environmental policies.

Piedad adds that "Costa Rica has very strong policies." She says that, for example, PILA is an international park. However, she continues, it is not only a Costa Rican initiative, "but Costa Rica has an obligation to produce oxygen for the large countries which pay for it." This is an example of diverse actors, which exist at multiple scales of community and politics, shaping the landscape in Coto Brus.

Ismael adds that the country recently passed a strict water law and carbon neutral plans because of international obligations. “I’m going to repeat [*vuelvo y repito*]” he says, “[despite policy,] what is lacking is will among people. There is no willingness.” Piedad provides another example. She says that people build up to the banks of creeks and rivers even though it is prohibited by law. They do this because space is very valuable. However, the river often rises beyond its banks and sometimes washes away structures, causing the owners to complain to the government. “But they don’t understand,” she says, “that the river is a living being [*es un ser viviente*] and you have to respect it. It has its own nature, and it is natural for it to wash away the banks. People don’t understand this.”

1. Example: Apiculture

Piedad and Ismael continue to explain what they perceive as a lack of popular collaboration with conservation programs in relation to a productive activity they and others in the region pursue – apiculture, which is the raising of bees for honey. Specifically, Piedad and Ismael raise native bees [*mariola*] which produce a superior and more expensive honey than that of regular bees [*melifera*]. Ismael says that, while normal honey sells for 5000 colones, or about 10$, the superior wild honey sells for 40,000, or about 80$.

“It’s a significant difference,” Ismael says, “so people feed honey from domestic bees, which are fed sugar and water in order to produce their honey, to the wild bees.” He explains that wild bees visit many different species of flower for their honey, so that the honey produced by domestic bees does not provide them with the nutrition they need. The health of

the populations, Ismael says, deteriorates steadily. “So, the owner of the money,” he continues, “who believes he is the most intelligent being on the planet – he enslaves the bees. He enslaves them and makes them work for him.”

Piedad illustrates further with an analogy. “I’ll put it very clearly to you,” she says, “You work for your needs, right? What if I come to your house, steal all your food, and I leave …” (Ismael interjects: a bread roll) “a bread roll. *O sea, que coma pan!* [“eat bread!”] That’s it, just bread, all the time, every day. That is what happens here.” She shows me a box which they use to raise wild bees. It has various sections. One section houses the queen, while the bees produce honey in the others. There are two sections for honey, which can be removed separately in order extract the honey. “The bees create a reserve in these sections,” says Piedad, “they are intelligent – like people.” However, once they have filled both sections, the cultivator removes them and takes the honey for himself. “Notice how ungrateful we are, as human beings,” she tells me, “He could have left one! The bees need a reserve, and the cultivator could have left one. She continues like this:

> *Pero somos tan animales – no, perdón, animales, porque no estoy usando la palabra correcta – en este caso somos tan inconscientes como personas [Ismael: eso] que llevamos las dos* (We are such animals – no, sorry, animals, because I am not using the correct word – in this case we are so inconsiderate as people [Ismael: that’s it!] that we take both). It would be possible to leave one section for the bees. Instead, the cultivator leaves a little box of honey – honey from other bees of lower quality. So, the bees have to feed themselves from this honey, which is not theirs [and which is made from water and sugar].

> And pay attention to what I'm going to say, because God made everything well: even if that honey was made from flowers, some bees collect pollen from flowers that grow nearer to the ground, shrubs, and small plants. And others collect honey from a higher zone, from trees and vines. So, even if the honey was made from flowers, it's not the correct flowers. Their digestion is not prepared.
>
> So, there are many threads to cut in this situation. **Unfortunately, it's a question of conscience.** If you look at the box itself – somebody sprayed insecticide and it drifted to the box and killed the bees. That's why we're cleaning it. This happens a lot. **So, it's a question of consciousness and understanding**.

According to our conversation, the pressure to make money by cultivating native bees pushes people to enslave the bees and adopt methods which are exploitative and inhumane, and this is combined with the perception people hold which says that insecticides and herbicides must be used to protect crops to damage the health of bee populations. In my understanding, this combination of factors is what Piedad was referring to by saying that the problem is a question of conscience and understanding.

I took notes about another conversation I had with Ismael about bees, outside of this interview. He told me that biologists come from other places to study the local bees, and sometimes they meet him because he cultivates honey. They are often impressed with his knowledge of native bees, and they ask him where he learned and who taught him. "Who

taught me?" he responds, "Why, the bees!" He says they laugh, but not in a friendly way. They ask him what he means, and when he answers that he likes to lay down and watch the bees all day, they seem to stop taking him seriously. However, he says, this is why biologists have so many misunderstandings.

Ismael and Piedad have many native beehives on the property, sometimes accompanied by signs which say, "NO TOCAR" (DON'T TOUCH) in red paint. The exception is a hive which bees have constructed inside a box which is built into the cabin's balcony. "Don't worry about them," Piedad tells me one day, "they don't sting – they are very calm [*son muy tranquillos*]." The bees' calmness – *tranquilidad* – is a prized Costa Rican value. I spend many mornings reading on the balcony in a hammock, watching the bees go in and out of their box, while toucans land on the large *hoja santa* tree in front of me.

Figure 33: A hive for native bees at Finca Maquique.

It is located near a cluster of springs which Maquique's forest protects.

Figure 34: A flower at Finca Maquique with a native bee foraging inside.

The two white spots under the flower's anther are accretions of pollen on the bee's hind legs.

Figure 35: Orchid with ants and other insects at Finca Maquique.

The plants in this region are beings-in-themselves, but they are also the spaces where other lives unfold. What is the effect of pesticides on a space like this?

IV. Conclusion: How do you Feel about Changes?

To conclude our interview, I asked the couple how they feel about the changes they have made to the landscape. "How do I feel personally?" Piedad responds, "Pablo, I feel super proud [*super orgullosa*]." She tells me that she remembers when even her children would tell her, "*Ay mami*, but what are you going to be able to do with pure forest [*pura montaña*]? How can you think like that [*cómo se le ocurre*]?" But she replied to them that *Finca Maquique* is an oasis, and that "it's going to make the difference."

She is grateful that they do not need to think in purely economic terms at this moment, and that they were able to follow their intentions, which were based on protecting the water and planting species which are in danger of disappearing.[41] "*O sea*, *para mí, para mí, me siento super orgullosa, super realizada* [In my case, personally, I feel very proud, very individually realized]" Piedad tells me, and continues, "I don't know what will happen after I die; but while I'm alive, and with God's help, this is what there is, and not only that, but we're going to continue!"

Ismael responds to my question by telling me that they receive many criticisms. "To me personally," he tells me, "They said I was crazy." He said that neighbors were in disbelief to hear that Piedad, being the owner of a pasture, which could be used as a source of income, would rather plant trees. "Are you going to eat the trees?" they would ask him. "You are such idiots [*son tan idiotas*] that you don't realize you will never be given permission to cut

[41] If Ismael and Piedad are comfortable, they also spend a great deal of time in various pursuits. Their livelihood comes from different streams of tourism, nursery stock (growing plants and trees), produce, carpentry, beekeeping, and likely others I am unaware of.

them." He says that a close relation also told him that it was a bad choice. "You are not going to be able to cut them," he said, like the neighbors. "*Bueno, sí, compañero, esa es la idea* [Well, yes, my friend, that is the idea]," Ismael responded. "We are doing this so that future generations can come to know them and say, thanks to those crazy people [*esos locos*] we have the opportunity to know them." Perhaps the neighbors are upset because Piedad and Ismael's conservation project, in combination with FL 7575's prohibition in changing land from forest, is putting land out of production permanently; no one will be able to buy this land later and convert it to another use.

For me, this part of Piedad and Ismael's narrative uncovered several points of conflict or contradiction within the concept of Costa Rican conservation, especially as it relates to governance and people's motivations. I'll rephrase their arguments here in terms of my theoretical framework. Piedad argued that the government must guide people's ideas and feelings so that they will choose to conserve. Strikingly, she argued that the government and people are not in sympathy regarding their reasoning about environmental conservation and policies and told me, despite Costa Rica's green image, that the majority of her neighbors are critical of her conservation project.

She and Ismael said that there is little will to comply with existing environmental policies, because the rationales of economy and environment have unequal influence on people's daily lives, needs, and desires. They have created a new reality on their Finca, where human and forest ontologies intermingle, but they feel that the future of environmental pursuits like reforestation and apiculture may be in danger due to the superior weight and relevance of economic rationales.

Ismael continues, saying that Finca Maquique houses many species which are hard to find or even extinct in the surrounding region. They brought plants from other places and planted them here to reintroduce them. "So," he says, "[although] we received many criticisms … I feel very proud, very content."

I respond by saying, "that's an interesting point, that you received that kind of criticism. Because here in Costa Rica, we talk a lot about ecology and conservation, but you are also describing a sentiment that, by doing that, you don't gain much [*uno no gana mucho por hacer eso*]." His response is worth quoting in full:

> *Ah sí, hay muchos conceptos equivocados en las poblaciones. Por ejemplo, de que haya arboles malos, malezas, hierbas malas – no hay maleza, no hay arboles malos, no hay hierba mala. Si vemos algo malo en el planeta, que hace daño a la humanidad, al planeta, al ecosistema, somos las personas. Somos lo mayor contaminante que hay. Ninguna planta por venenosa que usted piensa que es, o que usted la vea sin gracia: que no tiene flor, que no tiene fruto – está aquí de casualidad. Esta por algo especial. Este es el don del sitio.*

> Ah yes, there are many mistaken conceptions among people. For example, the idea that there are bad plants, weeds, bad trees – there are no bad plants, there are no weeds, there are no bad trees.[42] If there is something that we perceive as bad in this world,

[42] Ismael's phrase reminded me of a famous quotation from Victor Hugo's Les Miserables: There are no bad plants, or bad men, but only bad farmers. One night he brought me a desert Piedad had prepared and we chatted about Alexander Dumas; his son lent me a copy of Lazarillo de Tormes. Like many rural Costa Ricans I have met, their family enjoys reading and talking about books.

which harms people, the planet, the ecosystem, it is people. We are the biggest contaminants. No plant, no matter how poisonous you think it is, or no matter how worthless you may think it is, because it doesn't have flowers or fruit – no plant is here by coincidence. It's here for a special reason. That is the gift of this place.

Figure 36: An example of the biodiversity at Finca Maquique.

Figure 37: Piedad, Ismael, and their son and dogs.

They are standing beneath an awning which serves as an outdoor work and meeting place. An ox-yoke is hanging above them.

V. Analysis

As well as analyze the interview after the fact, I tell Ismael and Piedad that I would like to summarize the main points they have raised, all together, before ending the interview. We agree on four main points and they both add a few more comments. The points are as follows.

(1) Costa Rica is an environmentalist country according to law, but people do not follow policies. This is because of the need to make money and produce [*por la plata y por producción*]. There is also an element of danger in enforcing policies – they tell me that a local official was forced to resign after attempting to stop a cattle smuggling operation. He was threatened and forced to flee [*lo amenazaron, lo corrieron*]. This is similar to another story they told me about an official being unable to stop the destruction of a freshwater spring and ceiba tree for the construction of a parking lot.

(2) Space is a critical factor in profit because each unit of space produces income per year. This is especially the case with pasturage. Piedad says that, although her children are currently in support of her project, they could decide to make a pasture to make money after Piedad and Ismael pass away.[43] "We are lucky we have the cabin and there is some tourism, but the project is in diapers," she says. The neighbors have commented negatively ["*recibimos comentarios negativos"*] that they have such a small piece of property, and they

[43] Under FL 7575, this would currently be illegal. However, I outlined the weak enforcement environment in Chapter 3, so perhaps it would not be impossible.

dedicated it to something that doesn't make any money.[44] "But" Piedad says, "this is our passion, and it makes us happy. There are those who have 30 hectares, and they refuse to leave one in conservation, because the loss of that one hectare of productivity wounds them."

(3) Agroecology techniques are not new, but they have their roots in tradition. "In fact," Piedad says, "that is what we observed and experienced."

(4) There are paths to sustainable development, such as traditional agroecology. When I ask whether these are, perhaps, not so easy to apply [*no tan llevaderas*], Ismael responds that they are, in fact, practical, easy, and normal [*son llevaderas, fáciles, normales*]. What needs to change, he says, is the minds of the people, which is not an easy task. There is no willingness to pursue sustainability [*no hay voluntad*].

[44] Since there doesn't seem to be a good reason for the neighbors to be upset about Ismael and Piedad's land use choices, other than their removal of a small quantity of land from commodity production, I wonder if their hostility towards the couple has to do with their adoption of a different way of being and thinking – what I am referring to in this thesis as proximity, sympathy, and reasoning. Similarly, Durkheim argued that it is not the effect of a crime which is repaired by punishment, but that the punishment expresses society's outrage at the breach of social solidarity represented by the crime. Punishment is not functional but emotive (2014).

D. FINCA CANTAROS: SILVIO

I. Local NGO

Silvio is an environmentalist who works at Finca Cantaros, a conservation and reforestation site in Coto Brus. The director of the Finca selected him to talk with me about the history of the Finca and the organization, as well as its governing philosophy. To be honest, since Silvio was manning the front desk when I first visited, it seemed as though the director wanted to offload me onto someone whose job it usually is to talk to tourists anyway. It turned out well; perhaps because of similarities of age, gender, education, and general outlook, Silvio and I got along well and shared what I have described as a sympathetic form of reasoning.

He said that Finca Cantaros is the first conservation NGO to have been started in Coto Brus by people in the community. The site itself was first put into conservation in the 1980s, by a US American biologist who had come to work at the Wilson Tropical Research Station. It was sold in 2019 to the local NGO, which was formed to buy and manage the site. Silvio says that although Finca Cantaros is operated locally, it also has roots [*"bases"*] in the US and Canada, reflecting what I think of as the affiliative and fluid nature of regional and national identity and practices in Costa Rica.

Finca Cantaros does not charge admission fees. The first time I visit, I leave a note asking for an interview and then walk through the property. It is an incredible site, with a large laguna, many different species of trees, flowers, orchids, bromeliads, and other plants. The canopy is so thick in places that, even when it begins to rain, the water is slowed and

fragmented by the trees, so that some of it hangs in the air as a mist and the rest plummets through the open spaces; the sound of the rain striking the leaves, bark, branches, and ground is almost deafening.

Silvio raises three important themes during our conversation. First, we discussed the local history of the farm and the importance of integrating people with conservation programs. Then, we discussed the importance of connecting forested spaces to each other, and therefore the importance of convincing the community to engage in reforestation on their private lands. Last, we discussed the livelihood pressures people faced when the area was first being settled, and how these pressures were mediated by the state and other factors.

II. History of the Site

Silvio opened and closed the interview with the following point, which he said is very important to him. Silvio said that people in the region of Coto Brus often conflate the history of the region with the history of the Italian and ITCO colonies, focusing mostly on the Italian colony. “Perhaps,” he says, “it’s because it’s a pretty story: this is the only Italian agricultural colony which succeeded, among many which they attempted across the world."[45] He argues that Costa Rican historians themselves have been guilty of emphasizing this point and obscuring the contribution of Costa Ricans to the settlement of the area.

However, he continues, what is being most obscured in this narrative is the role of indigenous people in the area, and the fact that this area has been inhabited for thousands of

[45] Some succeeded in Brazil.

years. On the site of Finca Cantaros itself, there is a Lagoon and associated archaeological site called "*Parque Arqueológico el Sonso [The Vulture Archaeological Park].*" This site contains stone tools which were used to process yucca and other evidence of inhabitation from 3000 years ago, according to official signage which accompanies the artifacts. The lagoon is also known as Laguna Julia because an Italian named Giulio Cesare died while exploring the area. Silvio points out that naming the lagoon in this way and narrating the history of the area as if Cesare, an Italian colonist, 'discovered' the lagoon erases the indigenous history of the site.

Silvio tells me that this area was under coffee and pasturage before the biologist mentioned above, whose name was Gayle, bought the property and converted it for forest restoration because of her personal love of nature. Silvio says that "because of the altitude and other characteristics of the site, it has very interesting endemic species which only occur in this zone," and while I was there I observed dozens of plants I could roughly identify and many more which I had never seen; I can understand why a biologist would choose this site for a restoration project.

Finca Cantaros is a continuation of the restoration project started by the US American and Wilson biologist, Gayle, and it is now led from within Coto Brus itself. About three years before the interview, at the beginning of the COVID pandemic in 2020, Gayle returned to the United States and the Finca was purchased by the NGO which currently operates Finca Cantaros. This is "the first NGO which has been formed and operates directly here in Coto Brus; it's true that others have operated in the area, but forming the organization and working here is something new [*es la primera ONG que se forma y trabaja propiamente en Coto Brus*

... para hacerlo y trabajar acá es algo nuevo]." The formation of this NGO, says Silvio, "coincides with a process, I'm not sure if its global, but certainly national and regional where people are seeing more value in natural resources, and more than anything, in conservation. I have discussed this shift as an encounter between environmental and economic ontologies in this thesis, and as a move from governing concepts of development to conservation.

Because he raised the topic of community action, I prompt Silvio in this way:

> in Costa Rica, we talk a lot about sustainable development, and of course conservation has a role in this. I'm curious about this topic, because sometimes we talk about conservation as if it cannot include human beings or address the needs of human beings. On the other hand, we have ideas like agroecology, which incorporates people with the environment. Does Finca Cantaros have some projects for production?

Silvio responds, "it's a very good question and I think you've hit the mark [*es muy buena pregunta y creo que das en el blanco*]." He says that for himself personally, and for Finca Cantaros as an organization, "it is impossible to talk about or practice conservation without involving human beings." He says that it is "illogical," because we are not able to remove ourselves from the environment. "This isn't a dream, or a choice – we're alive and we need to consume resources in one way or another [*No estamos en un sueño, no es una elección – vivimos y estamos, y hay que vivir ... pues, vamos a consumir recursos de una u otra forma*]*"*

Silvio continues, saying that that we need to consider contemporary problems as effects of our current society. "Civilizations have existed for thousands of years," he argues,

"but it is in the present that we are facing danger across the entire ecosystem. If people survived in other ways for thousands of years, that means the problem is contemporary [*es actual*]." So, he says, the problem of sustainable production is a serious issue which the Finca addresses through community programs.

One of these programs is an agroecology group for women called "*Mujeres Comprometidas con la Tierra* [Women Committed to the Earth]." The Finca also hosts workshops where local and foreign experts share sustainable production techniques. Silvio says that "one of our pillars [as an organization] is sustainable production … It's possible to involve people and we must try … I could conserve half of Costa Rica and live here by myself, but that's not sustainable or even a realistic possibility." He insists that "people are here, and they always will be, so we must take account of this."

Finally, Silvio concludes this topic by saying that Finca Cantaros is designed as an educational institution, because "conservation cannot happen without involving people." He says that it is good to pursue investigations and publish papers, but "people must be in the center." Otherwise, he says, "if our studies do not transcend [the academic space] into the community, into human beings [*si no transcienden en la comunidad, a los seres humanos*], the people who live in the region, then the NGO as a whole would say that we have advanced very little." He clarifies by saying, "I'm not saying that investigation doesn't have its value, but research must go hand in hand with the community's work [*no digo que sean malas las investigaciones, sino que tienen que ir de la mano con el trabajo de la comunidad*]."

Figure 38: The lagoon at Finca Cantaros (Laguna Zoncho)

Figure 39: Laguna Zoncho Signage.

Archaeological site (3000 years old) as shown by maize pollen and charcoal in lake sediments and associated ceramic and stone artifacts.

Figure 40: A stone with petroglyphs near Laguna Zoncho.

Figure 41: A metate at Finca Cantaros.

Figure 42: Metate signage at Finca Cantaros.

III. Connecting Forested Spaces

When I ask Silvio how he thinks the landscape in and around Finca Cantaros will change in the next 30 years, he is very optimistic. He says that even though the NGO was founded during the pandemic, there has already been enormous progress, and he "sees the NGO establishing itself as a leader in environmental education, not just regionally but nationally." He raises the issue of connectivity between forested spaces and says that involving the community is very important to successful reforestation, because patches must be connected to maintain healthy animal populations, using the white-face monkey as an example.

"Living in the tropics, Pablo," Silvio tells me, "You'll see that if you stop clearing an area for two or three years, I'm not going to say that it's a forest, but it's a thicket [*charral*]. You won't be able to get in there because the growth is exuberant [*es exuberante*]." "So," he continues, "if you [wait,] say, two or three decades, there will be very interesting secondary forests." Silvio says he thinks the forest cover in the area could double in five years, because the Finca has bought some neighboring properties and the community is becoming more involved.

Silvio tells me that, in the year of the interview (2022), the first white-face monkeys arrived at the Finca. He says that "although the forest is mature, there was no connectivity to other forested areas." For the monkeys to arrive at the Finca, he says, would be like telling me to go to San Vito (several miles away) without using the road. He believes that overall, "there is more diversity [now] in Cantaros and in neighboring areas, [allowing] what we call connectivity [*conectividad*]." Silvio says connectivity is important for the flora and fauna to

maintain healthy reproductive populations, especially in the case of small-group animals like the white-faced monkey.

He says that the connectivity, or what he also calls "biological corridors," has been improving. This is in part to large landholding families in the region [he names two] which left "certain zones in reforestation," on their farms. Private landowners have a role in conservation, since, for example, white-face monkeys need "a line of trees to be able to move [*caminar*], look for food, and find mates outside of their isolated group." And, in fact, many locals have created patches of forest; Silvio mentions the other Finca in this study, Finca Cantaros and Piedad and Ismael, specifically. This point contradicts what the subject of an earlier vignette, Roldan, said about conservation being a European inheritance, and also shows that conservation cannot happen only in the public sphere.

This leads us to the final topic of the conversation, the livelihood pressures which caused people to deforest and the way these pressures have changed or been mediated since the 1950s.

IV. Livelihood Pressures and Mediation

Silvio tells me that he believes it is important to contextualize deforestation with people's needs. "I am one of those people," he says, "who believes you have to have lived in an era to judge it … It is true that there was a significant clearing of trees in this area," he continues, "but people had to live one way or another; they committed errors, but they had to cut the forest to live."

He asks me to consider living in the 1950s, 60s, or 70s, "in the middle of the forest, without help from the government, without roads." He mentions that at that time it was common to live without electricity, with little food, and with children to feed – "*tenias que cortar el bosque* [you had to cut the forest]." "If I presume to judge from my position in 2022," he tells me, "What happened in those conditions in 1970 … I wouldn't be able to evaluate that situation correctly because I would be evaluating it from a position of comfort." Although he works and lives in an environment dedicated to conservation ["*trabajo y vivo de la conservación"*], he recognizes that if he had lived in that period, he too would have had to engage in deforestation ["*me hubiera tocado cortar el bosque"*]. In order to survive, he says, we have to produce. "For good or bad, we need to produce, and we need natural resources – so one thing [conservation] is tied to the other [production]."

Other economies are possible and could promote a different relationship with the landscape, he says. "More than anything," Silvio argued, "[problems occur] in an economy which is not circular, where it is consume and discard, consume and discard [so that production and consumption are in conflict]." "I feel," he continued, "that in a circular economy where things are more durable [*duraderas*], where you can reuse them or use them for other things, I believe that [people in that economy] could create a significant beneficial effect for the environment."

"Finally, Pablo," he tells me, "I believe that people who caused deforestation did so because they simply had to survive [*lo hacen simple y sencillamente porque tienen que sobrevivir*]." However, Silvio also points out that there is another group "*hay que decirlo* [it has to be said]," which clears the forest for profit [*razón económica, por dinero*]. He says that

"these are the worst because they don't care about anything [*no les interesa nada*]." "Big corporations" and "people like that ["*grandes compañías y gente así"*] have enough to live "one, two, three lives," and accumulate unreasonably. "It's just destruction. That's my point of view [*es simplemente destruir*. *Es mi punto de vista*]."

He also outlines the way conditions have changed in the region – both in material terms, and in the ways that people think about nature. "Now that people have been able to advance in their studies [*avanzar en los estudios*]," he says, "people don't depend on the countryside as much, or if they do, they see that there are other ways of relating to the land [*relacionarse a la tierra*], without clearing everything." Silvio tells me again, that he believes this is a national and regional change which is occurring at present, tied to rising education and different rural livelihood strategies.

As outlined in the chapters above, a coffee crash occurred in the 1980s along with other financial disruptions. Silvio says that at the end of the 90s or beginning of the 2000s, coffee markets changed again because of international agreements [he is probably referring to CAFTA, the Central American Free Trade Agreement] and coffee producers in Coto Brus were forced to compete with other producers, especially from Brazil.

At that point, as at other times throughout the canton's history, many people decided to abandon their *terrenos* and move away. Some pursued studies, and some local farms turned to reforestation. Some of the *cafetales* which were abandoned began to reforest naturally; as Silvio outlined above, this process can happen very rapidly in the region. Silvio says that many people bet [*apostaron*] on tourism, restoration, or both. He refers to sustainability as "investing in the goose with the golden eggs [*invertir en la gallinita de los*

huevos de oro],” because sustainable development is tied to “an infinity of related issues [*infinidad de cosas relacionadas*].” He is worried, however, that this movement could stall or run out of steam. “If we take our attention off of investing in natural resources,” he says, “we could go backward and create very negative consequences for the country.”

Silvio mentions that none of the recent elections have featured conservation or restoration as a theme, and that ideas about cutting government programs are more common and favorable.

V. Role of the National State

Silvio has mentioned various times that deforestation has a root in people’s needs, and he has also mentioned that improving education has caused people to consider environmental issues more carefully. “Here in Costa Rica, we have a very strong social system,” I prompt Silvio, “Do you think that has any effect on conservation efforts?”

He answers that he believes so. “For example,” he says, “we as Ticos may take it for granted, but having social security [including medical care] is very important … I know someone who never paid taxes in their life, and when they got sick, the clinic helped them get government insurance and cared for them the rest of their life.” Silvio argues that free access to healthcare and education is an important factor [“*contribuya bastante”*] in Costa Rica’s conservation efforts.

However, Silvio also tells me that the situation is changing. “Pablo,” Silvio says, “the economic situation has changed in the past years, not only in Costa Rica, I think, but in the

world." He says that this has caused cuts to social assistance programs which were very important. "Because the country was neither rich nor poor [in the past]," he says, "it focused on the basics: Health, Education, Security. It's something cultural, even, which goes beyond conservation, to a political and social stability in the region [*algo hasta cultural … va también hasta una estabilidad política y social del lugar*]." This focus is being lost because of an economic philosophy of austerity (which I have discussed here as neoliberalism). "They say it is about savings," says Silvio, "but where are we going to save? We have to focus on the fundamental resource, which is the environment."

Silvio refers to the last civil war in 1948 and the constitution which was created afterwards as an example of Costa Rican cultural and political characteristics. He notes that one party, led by Calderon, was an alliance between "communists, the [conservative] party, and the Catholic church – one of the strangest groups possible." The other was led by Figueres Ferrer, who was neither a politician nor a soldier, but nevertheless emerged victorious. "Even though they were on different sides, they were great friends," Silvio tells me.[46]

"It's a very interesting moment, and it makes me feel proud," Silvio says. He notes that Figueres Ferrer could have taken power after his victory, and said, "let's erase everything." Instead, says Silvio, Ferrer built on the positive gains Calderon's party had made. "The new government maintained social security and labor guarantees for workers

[46] In this section, I believe Silvio is confusing Calderon with Manuel Mora. Calderon was a fierce enemy of Figueres who invaded Costa Rica after the civil war with help from the Nicaraguan dictator, Somoza. On the other hand, Manuel Mora was the leader of the communist party, with whom Figueres maintained a life-long friendship. Although Figueres outlawed the Communist Party, his party [PLN] adopted much of its platform. Figueres Ferrer, J. *El Espiritu del 48*.

which had been created by Calderon," he says, "and we owe free education, and the abolition of the army to Figueres."

He notes that coming together after a civil war is a "progressive action." Silvio says that "even though they had ideological differences, they wanted some of the same things: for people to have access to health, to labor rights, so I think it was a very mature act." He concludes this thought by saying that "the balance that they created was really an important push [*empujón*] for Costa Rica to be the country it is today."

I ask Silvio whether the government is active in supporting conservation or agroecology projects, and he responds like this: "The first answer would be no, it isn't – that's the mentality people have." "However," he continues, "if you take a closer look, and you compared to other Central American or Latin American countries, it's a great support … I've been lucky enough to work with colleagues from other countries, and they see the difference." In conversations with these colleagues, Silvio came to realize that "in comparison with other countries, we have a lot … national parks, systems of sustainable production, monitoring groups; there are many programs in which the government is invested."

VI. Conclusion: Impacts of Finca Cantaros. Return to Indigenous History

There were two final topics in my conversation with Silvio. First, I asked him how people feel when they visit Finca Cantaros. Then, I asked him if there was anything he would like to add and he returned to the theme of indigenous history.

I asked Silvio, “When people come to visit, what do they say when they leave? How do they feel about the landscape?” And he responds, “Ok, it’s a very interesting and a very nice question.” Silvio tells me that “almost 100%” of visitors say something positive – the landscape is beautiful; they enjoyed the animals and plants – “they feel something positive inside [*uno sienta algo bonito por dentro*].” “Actually,” he says, “I think it’s very difficult for someone to see a beautiful landscape and not feel affected … nature has the capacity to amaze anyone [*tiene la capacidad de asombrar a cualquier persona*].

Silvio says, however, that this goes back to a point we discussed earlier: “One way or another, people have to eat,” he says. “So,” Silvio tells me, “I don’t think deforestation is a question of people not liking the landscape or not enjoying the forest,” it’s a question of necessity. Because almost everyone who visits, he says, “say the same things: I loved it, I saw birds, trees, plants!” I ask him if he believes there is a conflict between what people feel and what they think they have to do [*puede ser que haya un conflicto entre lo que se sienten las personas y lo que tienen que hacer*], and he agrees.

I ask Silvio if there is anything he would like to add, and he responds at length. This was his full response:

> Sí, bueno, yo quería hablarte un poco de San Vito porque ese ámbito como estábamos hablando ahora siempre genera un poco de controversia, verdad, y es que hay como dos bandos. Un lado que dicen los ticos otro lado que dice que los italianos [fundaron la colonia] y yo creo que los dos tienen algo de razón. Creo que lo que a veces tal vez pasa es... reducir la historia de San Vito como tal. Que está muy bien, pero no es la historia

completa de Coto Brus. San Vito es solamente una pequeña parte de un cantón más grande.

Si vemos por ejemplo, tanto mi abuelo, como un hombre muy buen amigo y familiares de el, habían llegado en autobús por el lado de Sabalito. Algunos en el mismo momento que los Italianos, y otros un poquito después ... los italianos muchos han dicho que 'no hubiéramos podido construir esto sin ayuda de los costarricenses' ...

Creo que tal vez el error ha estado un poco más en los historiadores costarricenses. Tal vez sonaba más bonito hablar de una colonia italiana que de una colonia tica ... sobre todo porque fue la única Colonia italiana agrícola que realmente funcionó en el mundo, hubieron varios pero ninguna llegó a buen término.

Entonces como te digo, tal vez los historiadores decían, 'vamos a hablar y escoger como de este grupo nada más,' y tal vez les olvidó un poco del otro. Y para mí, eso es el punto, Pablo. Digamos para mí los dos van de la mano, verdad, sin olvidar un punto muy muy importante: **los pueblos originarios que habían antes, los verdaderos dueños de estos terrenos que todavía son menos mencionados a través de la historia, y qué es una ingratitud.**

Porque al final la frontera [con Panamá] la estamos poniendo nosotros por una u otra razón, y no se tuvo ni siquiera en cuenta toda la división cultural que se hizo de un país a otro, verdad, porque Coto Brus es base a los pueblos indígenas. Fueron los pueblos – perdón, son – en el período antes de que llegaran italianos y costarricenses habían, son,

pueblos indígenas que vivían acá y que ya eran por muchos tiempos dueños de estas tierras, entonces la historia hay que ir más allá.

Yo creo que la terminamos como la comenzamos hablando del sitio arqueológico y de las diferentes cosas que el ofrece con su cultura ancestral y ahora lo terminamos con lo mismo: con los grupos indígenas que vivieron acá. Creo que es un grupo que también hay que sacar a relucir todavía más.

[Yes, well, I wanted to talk to you a little bit about San Vito. Because in the environment we are in, this always generates some controversy, right? And it's like there are two groups. One side says it was the Ticos and the other side that it was the Italians [who founded the first colony]. I think both sides have a point. But I think what happens is … the history of San Vito is treated reductively in and of itself. It's fine, but that's not the whole history of Coto Brus. San Vito is only a small part of a larger canton.

If we look at, for example, my grandfather, who came with a good friend and some relatives, He came on a bus and arrived first in Sabalito. At the same time as the Italians, and others came a little later [this would have been around 1952]. Many of the Italians have said that they would not have been able to build this place without the aid of Costa Ricans.

I think the error is due to Costa Rican historians. Perhaps it sounded better to talk about a successful Italian colony rather than a Costa Rican colony … more than anything

because it was the only Italian agricultural colony in the world which succeeded – there were many, but none came to a good end.

So, what I'm saying to you is that maybe the historians decided to choose and talk about that group, and not others, and maybe they forgot a little about the others. Pablo, for me that is the point. Let's say that the two go hand-in-hand, right, and also let's not forget a very important point: **the indigenous people who were here before, the true owners of this land, which are still less mentioned in history. That's an ingratitude.**

Because at the end, we made a border with Panama without respecting all of the cultural divisions that we were causing by separating the countries – Right? Because Coto Brus is based on indigenous people [whose territories traverse the national borders]. They were – excuse me, they are – before the Italians and Costa Ricans came, there were and are indigenous peoples here and they have been the owners of these lands for a long time, so the story has to go further into that.

I think we'll end it how we started: talking about the archaeological site and the different things that it offers through its ancestral culture. And we'll leave it with the same point: With the indigenous people who lived here. **I believe it is a group whose history should be illuminated more and more**.

Silvio's conclusion points out a critical gap in this thesis: it does not include perspectives from indigenous people. I plan to extend my historical research into this area as I develop greater expertise in Costa Rican history and a greater capacity to meet IRB standards which are more rigorous when collaborating with indigenous populations. The indigenous history of Coto Brus is a crucial topic which must be investigated. It is extraordinary that the cultural and historical memory of Coto Brus begins, for many people in the region, including myself, with the Italian and Costa Rican colonies.

This point shows the strength, and also segregating qualities, of the nation-building and community identity building practices which coincided with the founding of the colonies around 1950. It also shows something about my own biography as a scholar, and perhaps about the people I spoke to: even though I am a Costa Rican who identifies as *mestizo* and my family lives in a region with a prominent indigenous population, my connections to those communities are virtually non-existent. In terms of this thesis' framework, I do not experience proximity and therefore sympathetic reasoning with the indigenous people of Coto Brus, and it seems that my interlocutors do not, either. Silvio spoke of their importance but used an (us) (them) language which showed separation.

In my experience, it seems as though indigenous people in Coto Brus are socially and geographically segregated from the *mestizo* and non-indigenous population. This is a situation which produces emotional, social, political, and cultural distance. While it is important and necessary to relate across difference (Arney et al.,

2022), and therefore to recognize and value the differences of each community and individual, it is not possible to relate across lines of segregation. This is a topic which demands further study and analysis.

I have left Silvio's narration mostly free from critical and analytical intervention because I feel that I identify closely with his viewpoints, and he expressed himself in a way that is easily integrated into this thesis' framework. I will simply summarize and say that Silvio described very clearly the co-production of economic and environmental rationales in the region, the mediating effects such rationales have in the country, and argued for the inclusion and importance of local people's well-being in the calculus of conservation. He said that deforestation was caused both by settlers and by large corporations.

He also pointed out the importance of politics in opening possibilities for communities to realize their own values, as in the case of the 1948 constitution which brought a lasting peace to the country through compromise and a humanistic governing philosophy of democratic socialism. This constitution established social services which lessened livelihood pressures on the landscape. Finally, he outlined a vision for the future of Coto Brus' environment, where forest cover expands, and people integrate themselves in a more reciprocal relationship with nature.

E. CONCLUSIONS FROM VIGNETTES AND ANALYSIS

These narratives described the reality which has been constructed in Coto Brus through the work of indigenous and mestizo Costa Ricans, Italians, and others. Here, *development* and *conservation*, *environment,* and *economy*, are not simply abstract concepts: they are immanent practices which respond to concrete needs, desires, and motivations. They connect Coto Brus to global currents of thought and philosophies of governance. These thoughts and philosophies, in turn, take on form and reality through operating in the canton. In this chapter, I have used incorporated comparison to analyze global forces through interpersonal narrative and dialogue; I followed wa Thiong'o by *writing globalectically* and *attending to orature*; and Roland Barthes by *writing out loud* and *respecting the grain of the voice*.

Because of its recent history of colonization and extraordinary geographic/environmental qualities, Coto Brus will continue to draw international attention to its forests. The Wilson OET already draws scholars from around the world, and the importance of Costa Rica in the global environmental imaginary is well established. Therefore, I have made it the objective of this chapter to understand, interpret, and represent the memories, values, and perspectives of Coto Brusenos: there may come a time in the near future when scholars, planners, development practitioners, and neoliberal conservationists attempt to craft a neat narrative about the region's history in order to make their interventions seem justifiable and urgent. The existence of detailed and grounded narratives from the region can balance interventionist claims with historical data.

My argument is not that every non-local interest should be excluded; rather, I think that Coto Brus is fundamentally global and cosmopolitan in important ways. However, I do believe that, based on the construction and history of developmentalist and conservationist discourses and practice, it is a real risk that dominant discourses, wherever they originate from, will obscure the history of the problems they seek to address; the agency of local actors; and the rationales, embodied forms of reasoning (sympathy), and values which drive their activities. I argue that localized desires and values can and should be deployed through democratic politics in order to create a political ontology of nature which integrates the needs of people with other beings and entities.

In the next and concluding chapter of this thesis, I will expand on this argument and discuss conclusions, concepts, and avenues for further research which I have drawn from this study.

CHAPTER 6: CONTRIBUTIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

A. SUMMARY

This thesis has used an interdisciplinary methodology and theoretical framework to examine changing human environment relationships in the canton of Coto Brus, Costa Rica. I analyzed and interpreted historical sources including oral history to contextualize Coto Brus' settlement among the geopolitical and conceptual dynamics of the 20th century. I described the encounter between two sets of ontologies or conceptual systems in Costa Rica generally and Coto Brus specifically – development/economy and conservation/environment. I related these conceptual sets as they function in national and international governance to their definitions under a Political Ecology theoretical framework and showed how global and local understandings of these concepts led to the establishment of different phases of environmental policy in Costa Rica – from land-to-tiller to Forest Law 7575, which prohibits changing land from forest to any other use.

After establishing the historical and policy context of Coto Brus' settlement and development, I presented 5 vignettes drawn from interviews of local people. Three of the people I interviewed were early colonists of the region and three were conservationists involved in local reforestation projects. Through these vignettes, I illuminated the ways people in Coto Brus experience human-environment relationships in the area, and how these relationships are mediated by global factors,

principally commodity markets and international conservation policies and ideologies.

I also suggested that decision making is powerfully influenced by embodied aspects of reasoning, which I discussed as *circumstances* and *sympathy*. I argued that social and physical proximity causes people to share experiences, feelings, values, and ways of reasoning; this is reinforced by the creation of lifeways which depend on semi-permanent structures (what Roldan referred to as *construcciones*) and modes of land-use (like pasturage or coffee plantations). Such structures and landscapes reinforce and maintain established forms of relating to the environment, and these forms reproduce their own logics.

To describe this complex web of individual and communal identity-and-decision-making, I borrow the term *aesthetogenesis* from architect Paolo Soleri. This term encompasses the ways that aesthetic and functional values and practices combine to create ontological realities through built environments, landscapes, and communal valuations of the 'good,' 'proper,' or 'beautiful.' I linked this to a concept one of my interlocutors, Roldan, introduced and which he called *idiosyncrasies of construction*. While Roldan suggested that two idiosyncrasies exist in Coto Brus, the Italian or European and the 'authentic,' or 'legitimate,' Costa Rican, I found that Coto Brus contains many, and not just two, sets of aesthetics or idiosyncrasies. This suggests that Coto Brus is more culturally diverse than ethnic glosses like 'Costa Rican,' 'Panamanian,' 'Indigenous,' 'Italian,' or 'Afro-descendant,' imply. Several of my interlocutors could not recall their family history beyond their parents or

grandparents and linked their personal identities strongly to the region. No single identity has emerged in Coto Brus, which has become, rather, a space where many backgrounds and idiosyncrasies co-exist and intermingle.

Coto Brus, then, is a cosmopolitan space. Since the beginning of its Costa Rican history in the 1950s, the region has been home to people from many different cultural and geographical backgrounds. Its settlement was made possible by improved transportation and communication technologies, linked to systems of credit and finance at national and international scales. Through these technologies, Coto Brus was populated and influenced by people from all over Costa Rica, Central America, Europe, and the United States. I called this specific form of development *colonization* and argued that it created the conditions which were then responded to in Costa Rica by the new conceptual apparatus of *conservation*.

In Chapter 2, I described the developmentalist and conservationist narrative which implies that environmental damage and socioeconomic disparities are the results of isolated, traditional, village life. The detailed history of Coto Brus, which I have presented at different scales, shows that it does not fit this narrative, and that the causes of deforestation and reforestation in the region are more complex than a shift from traditional to modern modes of life.

Rather, I traced changes in employment and settlement patterns in Costa Rica to show that expanding agricultural frontiers, and subsequent deforestation, were encouraged by the possibilities of commodity production, like coffee and cattle, and land ownership under the newly proficient administrative state, to enrich companies

and individuals. Costa Rica's social systems of health and education, and its political stability since the 1948 revolution, also opened possibilities for people to diversify their livelihood strategies, reducing livelihood pressures on the landscape.

Finally, through the narrative vignettes, I illuminated the experiences and motivations which cause people to deforest, conserve, or reforest. They include economic, normative, and aesthetic considerations. My interlocutors described positive feelings around the natural landscapes of Coto Brus, saying that they are beautiful and personally meaningful to them. Silvio told me that almost everyone who visits his NGO, Finca Cantaros, reports positive feelings towards the forest. This suggests that economic incentives can be part of conservation strategies, but also that natural environments provide positive, and unique, affects which cannot be produced by any productive human activity other than conservation and reforestation. This could be a powerful incentive to create new forms of valuing nature but must be balanced with the necessity of appropriating resources from the environment in order to maintain livelihoods.

B. DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study highlighted two important directions for future research, which I have outlined in the paragraphs above. I will describe them in detail here.

I. IDIOSYNCRACIES AND AESTHETOGENESIS

Future research should describe, interpret, and analyze the differing idiosyncrasies of construction or modes of aesthetogenesis in Coto Brus. This could shed light on the differing histories, cultures, and lifeways which are embodied in the region. In turn, a detailed understanding of local values could inform conservation projects and make them more effective – one of the main conservation challenges highlighted in this study has been a lack of compliance with environmental policies and planning.

A comprehensive and holistic understanding of local culture, as realized through the production of built environments and productive landscapes, would also help to deconstruct any idea of a unitary Costa Rican identity. Destabilizing the unitary role of white or Hispano-American ontologies in Costa Rica can make space for other personal and communal identities to take their place in a more diverse constitution of Costa Rican identity. This leads to the next point:

II. ADDRESSING THE RESULTS OF COLONIZATION

The history of Coto Brus, as usually narrated by Costa Rican historians, now including myself, begins in 1948 with the civil war and new constitution. However, my experience in researching and drafting this thesis made me realize that this is a colonial view of history which is linked to the colonial development of the region. Beginning histories of Coto Brus with the Italian and Costa Rican colonies erases the millenary presence of indigenous groups in the area as well as the work of Panamanian pioneers who were active in the area before Costa Ricans or Italians.

In Chapter 5, Silvio opened and closed his interview by stressing this gap in local and national histories. I recognize that the way I framed my study caused me to omit these important histories. I also came to realize that my omission of indigenous histories in this thesis reflects the lack of indigenous perspectives in Costa Rican historiography more broadly. I plan to address this gap in future studies by creating a methodology and ethics review process which allows me to interview indigenous people in Coto Brus and incorporate their perspectives into my work. This will likely mean collaborating with Costa Rican scholars with language skills and research experience which is necessary for studying with indigenous groups and individuals.

Integrating these perspectives into my narration of Coto Brus history will provide another side of the story, including details about how indigenous communities were affected by the influx of migrants beginning in the 1950s and the colonial method of development which they employed: privatizing land and putting it under semi-permanent constructions and modes of production while using the environment as a reservoir of cheap resources. Including indigenous perspectives

would also disrupt a reification which could emerge from my analysis of aesthetics, landscapes, and constructions: the idea that there may be some form of 'unitary,' 'legitimate,' or 'authentic,' essentially Costa Rican identity. While I have traced the integration of developmentalist and conservationist discourses in Costa Rican society, showing that these discourses carry constructed values and identities which they encourage people to adopt, this thesis has not convincingly destabilized the idea of Coto Brus as a 'blank slate' where such values and identities could be imprinted without violence or displacement.

III. POST-CAPITALIST DESIRE

In his final lectures, Mark Fisher (2021) proposed the idea of 'post-capitalist desire,' as a conceptual escape from the capitalist logic of production and consumption. The vignettes I presented in Chapter 5 suggest that people draw feelings from natural environments which they value as positive and beneficial. Piedad's practice of traditional medicine creates beneficial effects in the body by using elements of the forest, and this does not always involve consuming anything from the environment – when I was sick with a fever, for example, she and Ismael suggested I walk the trails, saying, "la montaña sana" (the mountain heals).

Under the logic of neoliberalization of nature, production of emotional and bodily affects, including traditional medicine and ecotourism for example, would be monetized and the monetary value of forested areas would serve as motivation for

people to continue conserving. However, this logic also implies that any land use which is more productive than these examples could and should easily supplant them. In reality, neoliberal conservation programs like PES do little to address this fundamental contradiction, so I argue that another value system and a different form of reasoning is needed in order to make conservation a viable way for Costa Ricans to earn their livelihoods.

Working on this thesis has made me consider alternate forms of valuing nature. Following Fisher's suggestion about new forms of desire, my future research will continue to ask the question, "what do people desire from the landscape," and its corollary, "how are these desires mediated?" Illuminating the relationships between people's feelings, wants, and needs; global circuits of desire including production and consumption; and transformation of natural environments into landscapes and built environments can provide a basis for imagining future, post-capitalist circuits of desire between people and nature. Political Ecologists and other critical scholars should highlight desires and values (seeing a unique plant or animal and enjoying it in its own being without the need to own or consume it) which cannot be produced by modes other than conservation and restoration; these desires and values can point the way towards future, more egalitarian relationships between people and nature. More radically, scholars in PE can enquire, "what does nature desire of us?"

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Sobre la Cooperativa / Uso general del terreno

¿En qué año comenzó la Cooperativa?

¿Por qué se fundó la cooperativa?

¿Quién lo empezó?

¿Cómo fueron los primeros años?

¿Qué productos se producían o estaban disponibles en la región?

¿Dónde cultivaron productos?

¿Describe el proceso de llevar un producto al mercado (es decir, desde la preparación de la tierra hasta la cosecha y la comercialización)?

¿Dónde vendían originalmente los productos?

¿El gobierno tuvo un papel en la creación de la cooperativa?

¿Cuáles fueron los principales obstáculos para el trabajo de la Cooperativa al principio?

¿Cómo ha cambiado?

¿Qué tipo de arreglos financieros existían entre la cooperativa y los agricultores individuales?

2. Sobre la gente

¿De dónde viene su familia?

¿Cuándo llegaron a la región de Coto Brus?

¿Cuántos eran en ese momento? ¿Padres solteros, con hijos, etc.?

¿Cómo hicieron el viaje?

¿Cuánto tiempo duró?

¿Regresaban a menudo a sus pueblos antiguos?

¿Cómo se comunicaban con sus familiares lejanos?

¿Qué recuerdos e historias se han transmitido a través de su familia?

3. Paisaje

¿Cómo era el paisaje cuando se establecieron los primeros pueblos?

¿Qué tipos de plantas y animales existen / existían en la región?

¿Cómo son los patrones climáticos?

¿Cómo ha cambiado el paisaje / medio ambiente?

¿Quién ha influido los cambios en el paisaje / medio ambiente (gobierno, corporaciones, individuos, instituciones)?

¿Cómo te sientes acerca del paisaje / medio ambiente y la forma en que ha cambiado?

¿Cómo ves que cambiará el ambiente en el futuro?

4. Sobre los Recursos del Pueblo

¿Qué había en Coto Brus cuando empezó a llegar gente de otros lugares de Costa Rica?

¿Había caminos? ¿Que tipo?

¿Qué servicios había, agua, luz, etc.?

¿Hospitales?

¿Escuelas?

¿Alojamiento?

¿Policía?

Si no había servicios, qué tan lejos para acceder a ellos (por ejemplo, ¿qué tan lejos para llegar a una escuela o un hospital?)

¿Cuántas personas había en el pueblo cuando llegó su familia?

5. Geografía Política

¿Cómo era la división política y geográfica de la región en ese momento?

¿Cantón, distrito, etc.?

¿Cómo se otorgaron e intercambiaron los derechos sobre la tierra (propriedad)?

¿A qué distancia vivían los vecinos?

¿Qué tipo de gobierno comunitario u organizaciones existían?

¿Hubo elecciones para el pueblo, la provincia, el país?

¿Qué partidos o ideologías existían en ese momento? ¿La política nacional tuvo un efecto en la región?

6. Necesidades

¿Dónde conseguía alimentos y otros artículos de necesidad diaria? Ropa, combustible, etc.

7. ¿Entretenimiento?

¿Qué hacían para divertirse en los primeros años?

¿Todos los días?

¿Durante los fines de semana?

¿Había vacaciones? ¿Ocasiones especiales?

8. Deportes

¿Se practicaba algún deporte?

9. Trabajo

¿Cómo era un día típico de trabajo?

¿Qué diferentes roles/profesiones/tipos de empleo existían?

¿Cómo se dividía o asignaba el trabajo?

¿Hubo acuerdos de trabajo comunal? ¿Por ejemplo, ayudar a un vecino a cosechar?

10. Acerca de los cambios

¿Qué cambios puede ver desde los primeros días hasta ahora, con respecto al desarrollo y la población de la región?

¿Cómo ve el pueblo dentro de 20 años, en términos de sociedad, infraestructura, economía, población, etc.?

APPENDIX B: THE COSTA RICAN IDIOSYNCRACY

Comentario a título personal

Arquitecto Armando M. Arias del Cid

Las diferencias, al inicio de la colonización, entre las construcciones de los italianos y las de los ticos, en mi opinión, son tres:

1. Los italianos construyeron las casas mas juntas, cerca uno de otro.

Su intención era crear un centro urbano denso, me imagino que por influencia de los modelos de urbanización que empezaron a definirse en el renacimiento, en Italia, como, por ejemplo: Pieza, Palmanova y la ciudad ideal, Sforzinda.

El mismo Leonardo Da Vinci exploro el concepto de una ciudad ideal, que según él tendría paredes altas y fuertes, torres y defensas, todo lleno de la belleza necesaria. La ciudad como fuerte de defensa.

Yo veo el desarrollo de San Vito un poco así. Los italianos hicieron un centro urbano en medio de la selva. Se agruparon los más posible como forma de defensa, fue su "Testudo Formation". Las áreas de producción de los italianos estaban fuera del centro urbano.

A diferencia de los italianos, los ticos construían casas alejadas el uno del otro, en las fincas, en el mismo lugar donde tenían su producción y cerca del agua natural, del río. El centro urbano tico, en Sabalito o Agua Buena, en esa época, estaba definido por la Iglesia, la

pulpería y la plaza de futbol, según recuerdo, lo cual es típico de la urbanización colonial española.

2. Los italianos construyeron casas de dos pisos.

Recuerdo ir a visitar un amigo en San Vito, cuando yo tenia como 8 o 9 años, y una cosa que me entusiasmaba, era subir al segundo piso de la casa. Solo en San Vito había casas de dos pisos en esa época, y eso fue debido a los colonos italianos.

Ese tipo de construcción respondía a un modelo de vivienda colonizador y defensivo que también se vio en las casas desarrolladas por las compañías bananeras. Alejarse del suelo como defensa contra los peligros de la selva y de los nativos. Las casas italianas generalmente tenían un balcón en el segundo piso, mas como elemento defensivo para ver quien viene, que para otra cosa.

Los ticos construían casas de un solo piso. El tico ya conocía la selva tica y sus peligros, por experiencia y herencia cultural. La casa tica tenía por lo general un gran corredor afuera que servía como zona de reunión y acercamiento con el exterior. La casa tica tenía más contacto con la naturaleza. Grandes jardines, árboles frutales, espacio para que los animales domésticos deambularan y buscaran alimento.

3. Los italianos construyeron casas planeadas de antemano.

En mi opinión, una de las características de las primeras casas italianas consiste en que fueron diseñadas por profesionales, ingenieros o arquitectos, y construidas con mejores

materiales y técnicas de construcción que trajeron los italianos. Durante mis años estudiando la Educación Secundaria en el Colegio a San Vito, tuve la oportunidad de visitar algunas casas de mis compañeros, que eran de las casas italianas originales. Todas, desde el inicio, tenían agua potable adentro, baños terminados con azulejos, y con ducha, inodoros y lavatorios. Cocina con todos los aparatos necesarios como estufa, horno, etc.

Las casas ticas no eran diseñadas y escasamente planificadas; en su manera, más orgánicas. No había quien hiciera planos y no hacían falta. El constructor era típicamente, el dueño de la casa con la ayuda de los hijos, los vecinos y un carpintero. Los materiales eran los que se encontraban en la finca y se procesaban mínimamente con poca tecnología. No había agua potable interna, no había ducha, lavatorio o inodoro adentro de la casa.

Aun años más tarde, ya habiéndome graduado como arquitecto, regresé al pueblo para ejercer mi profesión. Una de mis primeras acciones fue ir a la Municipalidad para explicar a los lideres de la comunidad mi intención de establecerme y empezar a trabajar en el cantón, para lo cual les manifesté mi esperanza de que se requiriera lo establecido por el código de construcción para la edificación de nuevas estructuras residenciales y comerciales. El mismo Roldan de tu historia, en ese momento un líder comunal, miembro del Consejo Municipal, expresó algo como así, parafraseando: *"Armando, vos sabes que casi nunca se necesitan planos para construir casas, y aunque es la ley que todas las nuevas construcciones deben contar con planos elaborados por un profesional en ingeniería o arquitectura, tienes que acordarte que las leyes se hicieron para romperlas"*

La estetogénesis de Soleri y el Desarrollo de Coto Brus

Comentarios de Armando M. Arias del Cid, Arquitecto.

El concepto de "estetogénesis" de Paolo Soleri es un término que acuñó para describir el proceso mediante el cual el entorno construido puede crearse en armonía con la naturaleza y las necesidades humanas, expresando al mismo tiempo un carácter estético único. Soleri creía que la arquitectura no solo debería ser funcional y utilitaria, sino que también debería encarnar un sentido más profundo de belleza y significado que surge de una comprensión holística del medio ambiente y la sociedad humana.

Según Soleri, el proceso de estetogénesis implica un enfoque integrado del diseño que considera los aspectos físicos, sociales y ecológicos de un lugar. Este enfoque busca crear edificios y entornos urbanos que sean a la vez funcionales y hermosos, al mismo tiempo que promueven la vida sostenible y la armonía social.

En términos prácticos, la estetogénesis de Soleri se puede ver en sus diseños para arcología, que son comunidades autosuficientes y sostenibles que integran arquitectura y ecología. Estas comunidades están diseñadas para minimizar el impacto sobre el medio ambiente y, al mismo tiempo, brindar una alta calidad de vida a sus habitantes.

Los desarrollos en San Vito, Coto Brus, muestran diferentes estilos de estética en relación con el concepto de estetogénesis de Paolo Soleri de varias maneras:

1. Densidad y planificación urbana: los colonos italianos construyeron sus casas más juntas, formando un centro urbano denso que probablemente fue influenciado por los modelos de

urbanización de la época del Renacimiento de Italia. Este enfoque priorizó la densidad y la organización como medio de defensa contra la selva y los pueblos originarios. En contraste, las casas costarricenses se construyeron más separadas en fincas, lo que refleja un enfoque más orgánico del asentamiento.

Desde una perspectiva soleriana, el enfoque italiano podría verse como un intento de integrar el entorno construido con la naturaleza de una manera que maximiza la eficiencia y minimiza la interrupción de los sistemas naturales, mientras que el enfoque costarricense prioriza una relación más simbiótica con el entorno natural.

2. Verticalidad y defensa: Los colonos italianos construyeron casas de dos pisos con balcones, que servían como elemento defensivo para ver quién venía. Este enfoque refleja el deseo de elevar el espacio habitable y protegerlo contra las amenazas del medio ambiente. En cambio, las casas costarricenses se construyeron a ras de suelo, con grandes corredores en el exterior que servían de zona de encuentro y acercamiento al exterior.

Desde una perspectiva soleriana, el enfoque italiano podría verse como un intento de crear un espacio vital autónomo y autosuficiente que sea a la vez funcional y estéticamente agradable, mientras que el enfoque costarricense refleja un enfoque más informal y comunitario del espacio vital que prioriza la conexión con el entorno natural.

3. Diseño y planificación: los colonos italianos construyeron casas previamente planificadas diseñadas por profesionales, utilizando materiales y técnicas de construcción de alta calidad. Las casas costarricenses, por otro lado, fueron típicamente construidas por el propietario con una planificación mínima y utilizando materiales locales.

Desde una perspectiva soleriana, el enfoque italiano podría verse como un intento de crear un entorno construido cohesivo y armonioso que sea a la vez funcional y estéticamente agradable, mientras que el enfoque costarricense refleja un enfoque más orgánico y espontáneo de la construcción que prioriza la flexibilidad y la adaptabilidad.

En general, las diferencias entre los enfoques de desarrollo italiano y costarricense en San Vito reflejan diferentes enfoques para integrar el entorno construido con la naturaleza y las necesidades humanas. Mientras que el enfoque italiano enfatizó la densidad, la verticalidad y el diseño, el enfoque costarricense priorizó el crecimiento orgánico, la conexión con la naturaleza y los espacios de vida comunales. Ambos enfoques tienen sus fortalezas y debilidades, y ambos reflejan diferentes interpretaciones del concepto de estetogénesis de Soleri.

REFERENCES CITED

Arney, R. N., Henderson, M. B., DeLoach, H. R., Lichtenstein, G., & German, L. A. (2022). Connecting across difference in environmental governance: Beyond rights, recognition, and participation. *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space*, *6*(2), 1164-1190. https://doi.org/10.1177/25148486221108892

Asad, T. (1973). *Anthropology & the colonial encounter* (Paperback edition. ed.). Ithaca Press

Humanties Press.

Auerbach, E., & Trask, W. R. (1957). *Mimesis : the representation of reality in Western literature*. Doubleday.

Avendaño Flores, I. (2005). *La relación ambiente y sociedad en Costa Rica : entre gritos y silencios, entre amores y odios* (1. ed.). Editorial de la Universidad de Costa Rica.

Bakker, K. (2020). Neoliberalization of Nature. In Perreault, T. A., Bridge, G., & McCarthy, J (eds.) (2020). *The Routledge handbook of political ecology* (pp. 446-457). Routledge.

Barthes, R. (1972). *Mythologies*. J. Cape.

Barthes, R. (1973). *The pleasure of the text*. Hill and Wang.

Barthes, R. (2010). *A lover's discourse : fragments* (Paperback edition. ed.). Hill and Wang.

Barthes, R., & Thirlwell, A. (2012). *Writing degree zero*. Hill and Wang.

Breitling, J. Costa Rica's Forest Transition Revisited. In Fletcher, R., Dowd-Uribe, B., & Aistara, G. A. (eds.) (2020). *The ecolaboratory : environmental governance and economic development in Costa Rica* (pp. 147-161). University of Arizona Press.

Censos, I. N. E. (2011). *Censo 2011 Costa Rica*. inec.cr

City of Santa Barbara. 2000. "Timeline." Retrieved 21 March 2017. https://www.santabarbaraca.gov/services/community/historic/historysb/timeline.asp

Clastres, P., & Hurley, R. (1989). *Society against the state*. Zone Books.

Cooper, M. (1965). *The inventions of Leonardo da Vinci*. Macmillan.

Cronon, W. (1992). *Nature's metropolis : Chicago and the Great West* (First edition. ed.). W.W. Norton.

Cusicanqui, S. R. (2012). Ch'ixinakax utxiwa: A Reflection on the Practices and Discourses of Decolonization. *South Atlantic Quarterly*, *111*(1), 95-109. https://doi.org/10.1215/00382876-1472612

da Vinci, L., & Richter, J. P. (1989). *The notebooks of Leonardo Da Vinci*. Dover

Constable.

de Castro, E. V. (2015). Who is Afraid of the Ontological Wolf? Some Comments on an Ongoing Anthropological Debate. *The Cambridge Journal of Anthropology*, *33*(1), 2-17. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26370550

Deleuze, G., Guattari, F., & Foucault, M. (2009). *Anti-Oedipus : capitalism and schizophrenia*. Penguin.

Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. l. (1987). *A thousand plateaus : capitalism and schizophrenia*. University of Minnesota Press.

Derrida, J. (1994). *Of grammatology*. Motilal Banarsidass.

Desmond, J. C. (1997). Invoking "The Native": Body Politics in Contemporary Hawaiian Tourist Shows. *TDR (1988-)*, *41*(4), 83-109. https://doi.org/10.2307/1146662

Dietler, M., Dietler, M., & ebrary, I. (2010). *Archaeologies of colonialism : consumption, entanglement, and violence in ancient Mediterranean France*. University of California Press.

Durkheim, E. (1952). *Suicide, a study in sociology*. Routledge & K. Paul.

Durkheim, E. m., Cosman, C., & Cladis, M. S. (2001). *The elementary forms of religious life* (Reissu ed.). Oxford University Press.

Durkheim, E. m., Lukes, S., & Halls, W. D. (2014). *The division of labor in society*. Free Press. https://librarysearch.cardiff.ac.uk/openurl/44WHELF_CAR/44WHELF_CAR:44WHELF_CAR_VU1? ?u.ignore_date_coverage=true&rft.mms_id=9911938371502420

Eco, U. (1976). *A theory of semiotics*. Indiana University Press.

Eco, U. (1984). *Semiotics and the philosophy of language*. Indiana University Press.

Eco, U. (1986). In Praise of Thomas Aquinas. *The Wilson Quarterly (1976-)*, *10*(4), 78-87. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40257057

Eguchi, S. (2020). A Transnational Queer of Color Vision: Toward the “Future” of Autoethnography. *Journal of Autoethnography*, *1*(3), 309-314. https://doi.org/10.1525/joae.2020.1.3.309

Escobar, A. (2012). *Encountering development : the making and unmaking of the third world*. Princeton University Press.

Fairhead, J., & Leach, M. (1996). *Misreading the African landscape : society and ecology in a forest-savanna mosaic*. Cambridge University Press.

Fairhead, J., & Leach, M. (1998). *Reframing deforestation : global analyses and local realities ; studies in West Africa*. Routledge.

Ferguson, J. (1994). *The anti-politics machine : "development," depoliticization, and bureaucratic power in Lesotho*. University of Minnesota Press.

Ferguson, J. (2005). Seeing Like an Oil Company: Space, Security, and Global Capital in Neoliberal Africa [https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.2005.107.3.377]. *American Anthropologist*, *107*(3), 377-382. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.2005.107.3.377

Fisher, M. (2021). *Post-Capitalist Desire: The Final Lectures*. Repeater.

Figueres Ferrer, J. (1987). *El espíritu del 48* (1. ed.). Editorial Costa Rica.

Fletcher, R., Dowd-Uribe, B., & Aistara, G. A. (2020). *The ecolaboratory : environmental governance and economic development in Costa Rica*. University of Arizona Press.

García Márquez, G. (2009). *Cien años de soledad* (1. ed.). Vintage Español.

Gay-Antaki, M. (2020). Feminist geographies of climate change: Negotiating gender at climate talks. *Geoforum*, *115*, 1-10. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2020.06.012

Geertz, C. (1973). Thick Description: Towards an Interpretive Theory of Culture. In C. Geertz (Ed.), *The Interpretation of Cultures*. Basic Books.

Gómez, L. E. (2007). *Manifest destinies : the making of the Mexican American race*. New York University.

Graeber, D. (2004). *Fragments of an anarchist anthropology*. Prickly Paradigm Press : Distributed by University of Chicago Press.

Graeber, D. (2015). Radical alterity is just another way of saying "reality": A reply to Eduardo Viveiros de Castro. *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, *5*, 1-41. https://doi.org/10.14318/hau5.2.003

Hall, C. (1984). *Costa Rica, una interpretación geográfica con perspectiva histórica*. Editorial Costa Rica.

Hansen, R. D., Morales-Aguilar, C., Thompson, J., Ensley, R., Hernández, E., Schreiner, T., Suyuc-Ley, E., & Martínez, G. (2022). LiDAR analyses in the contiguous Mirador-Calakmul Karst Basin, Guatemala: an introduction to new perspectives on regional early Maya socioeconomic and political organization. *Ancient Mesoamerica*, 1-40. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0956536122000244

Heidegger, M. (1971). Dwelling, Building, Thinking. In *Poetry, Language, Thought*. Harper Colophon Books. http://faculty.arch.utah.edu/miller/4270heidegger.pdf

Hernandez, A., Arias-Benavides, P., Machada, D., Moller, P., and Pame, O. (Forthcoming). Pathways to Sustainability: Industry, Development, Agriculture, Economy, and Politics. In C. Zilli-

Vieira (Ed.), *The Impact of Anthropogenic Activities on the Natural Environment and Society During the Contemporary Period*. CRC.

Huggins, M. K., Haritos-Fatouros, M., Zimbardo, P. G., & De, G. (2002). *Violence Workers : Police Torturers and Murderers Reconstruct Brazilian Atrocities*. University of California Press.

James, D. (2004). *Doña María : historia de vida, memoria e identidad política*. Manantial.

Johnson, M. (2010). *Archaeological theory : an introduction* (Second edition. ed.). Blackwell.

Keizer, J. M., Christoforou, C., & Christoforou, C. (2016). *This is Leonardo da Vinci*. Laurence King Publishing.

Leff, E. (2020). The Power-Full Distribution of Knowledge in Political Ecology. In Perreault, T. A., Bridge, G., & McCarthy, J. (eds.) *The Routledge handbook of political ecology* (pp. 64-75). Routledge.

Li, T. (2007). *The will to improve : governmentality, development, and the practice of politics*. Duke University Press.

Longley, K. (1997). *The sparrow and the hawk : Costa Rica and the United States during the rise of José Figueres*. University of Alabama Press. https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/leeds/detail.action?docID=4386927

Matulis, B. and Fletcher, R. Paying for PES: Taxes, Tariffs, and the World Bank in Costa Rica. In Fletcher, R., Dowd-Uribe, B., & Aistara, G. A. (eds.) (2020). *The ecolaboratory : environmental governance and economic development in Costa Rica* (pp. 133-147). University of Arizona Press.

Malthus, T. (1798). *An Essay on the Principle of Population*. Project Gutenberg. https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/4239

McIntosh, D. M. D., & Eguchi, S. (2020). The Troubled Past, Present Disjuncture, and Possible Futures: Intercultural Performance Communication. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, *49*(5), 395-409. https://doi.org/10.1080/17475759.2020.1811996

McMichael, P. (1990). Incorporating Comparison within a World-Historical Perspective: An Alternative Comparative Method. *American Sociological Review*, *55*(3), 385-397. https://doi.org/10.2307/2095763

McMichael, P. (2019). INCORPORATING COMPARISON IN ONTOLOGICAL ENCOUNTERS. *2019*, *13*(1), 29. https://revistas.ufrj.br/index.php/RevistaHistoriaComparada/article/view/27542

Mendez-Trejos, R. (2016). *Con Hacha y Machete: Pittier Distrito 5o Coto Brus*. Litografia Morales.

Molina Jiménez, I., & Palmer, S. P. (2007). *The history of Costa Rica : brief, up-to-date and illustrated* (Second edition revis ed.). Editorial UCR.

Mollett, S. (2016). The Power to Plunder: Rethinking Land Grabbing in Latin America [https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12190]. *Antipode*, *48*(2), 412-432. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12190

Montiel, M. A., Atencio, T. s., & Mares, E. A. (2009). *Resolana : emerging Chicano dialogues on community and globalization* (1st ed.). University of Arizona Press.

Moyo, D. (2011). *Dead Aid : Why Aid is Not Working and How There is Another Way for Africa* (©2009 ed.). Penguin. https://discover.gcu.ac.uk/discovery/openurl?institution=44GLCU_INST&vid=44GLCU_INST:44GLCU_VU2&?u.ignore_date_coverage=true&rft.mms_id=991002833569903836

Newman, R. (2020). Nature Conservation. In Perreault, T. A., Bridge, G., & McCarthy, J (eds.). (2020). *The Routledge handbook of political ecology* (pp. 391-406). Routledge.

Ngũgĩ wa, T. (2014). *Globalectics : theory and the politics of knowing*. Columbia University Press.

Patel, R., & Moore, J. W. (2017). *A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things : A Guide to Capitalism, Nature, and the Future of the Planet*. University of California Press. http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/unm/detail.action?docID=4820021

Perreault, T. A., Bridge, G., & McCarthy, J. (2020). *The Routledge handbook of political ecology*. Routledge.

Plato, Hamilton, E., Cairns, H., Cairns, H., & Hamilton, E. (1961). *The collected dialogues of Plato, including the letters*. Princeton University Press.

Robbins, P. (2020). The Trickster Science. In Perreault, T. A., Bridge, G., & McCarthy, J (eds.). (2020). *The Routledge handbook of political ecology* (pp. 89-102). Routledge.

Rostow, W. W. (1959). The Stages of Economic Growth. *The Economic History Review*, *12*(1), 1-16. https://doi.org/10.2307/2591077

Rutherford, D. (2015). Kinky Empiricism. In O. Starn (Ed.), *Writing Culture and the Life of Anthropology* (pp. 105-118). Duke University Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv11vc72n.8

Scott, J. C., & De, G. (2020). *Seeing Like a State : How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. Yale University Press.

Scott, J. C., Leftwich, A., & De, G. (2009). *The Art of Not Being Governed : An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*. Yale University Press.

Shatz, A. (2010, December 16). Desire was Everywhere. *London Review of Books*, *32*(24). https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v32/n24/adam-shatz/desire-was-everywhere

Shaw, I. (2003). *The Oxford history of ancient Egypt* (New ed.). Oxford University Press.

Soleri, P. (1973). *The bridge between matter & spirit is matter becoming spirit : the arcology of Paolo Soleri* (1st ed.). Anchor Books.

Soleri, P. (1981). *The Omega seed : an eschatological hypothesis* (1st ed.). Anchor Press/Doubleday.

Soleri, P. (1993). *Arcosanti: an Urban Laboratory?* Cosanti Press.

Spivak, G. C. (1988). *Can the subaltern speak?* Macmillan.

Sundberg, J. (2004). Identities in the making: conservation, gender and race in the Maya Biosphere Reserve, Guatemala. *Gender, Place & Culture*, *11*(1), 43-66. https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369042000188549

Trask, H.-K. (2016). Lovely Hula Lands: Corporate Tourism and the Prostitution of Hawaiian Culture. *Border/Lines*, *0*(23). https://journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/bl/article/view/24958

Vasari, G., & Bull, G. (1987). *Lives of the artists*. Penguin Books

Wallace, S. (2014, February). Why do Environmentalists keep getting Killed around the World? The Brutal 2011 slayings of two local rainforest defenders ... . *Smithsonian Magazine*. https://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/why-do-environmentalists-keep-getting-killed-around-world-180949446/

Wallerstein, I. (1974). The Rise and Future Demise of the World Capitalist System: Concepts for Comparative Analysis. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, *16*(4), 387-415. http://www.jstor.org/stable/178015