

**Environmentalisms in Practice: From  
National Policy to Grassroots Activism in  
Costa Rica's Osa Peninsula**

PhD Thesis

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*Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy, September 2017*

I, Clate Korsant, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. I confirm that where the information has other sources it has been indicated in the thesis.

Clate Joseph Korsant

September 2017

## Abstract

This thesis examines the characteristics of Costa Rican environmentalism, focusing on biodiversity conservation in the Osa Peninsula. Relatively remote and long inaccessible, the Osa Peninsula is seen as a frontier region and the most renowned biodiversity hotspot of one of the world's most relatively biodiverse nations. Given the shift towards community-based initiatives, I explain how individuals have come to care for and interact with their surroundings, the interrelations of differing regimes of value, and tensions inherent to the politics of land use. Conservationist practice in the Osa Peninsula represents a messy, conflict-ridden, contentious, and ambiguous phenomenon, entangled with Costa Rica's history of elite domination over the extraction and use of resources, indoctrination and the influence of external interests, and global agendas. This in-depth ethnographic study of the different manifestations of environmentalism in the Osa Peninsula, including government policies, environmental education, grass roots activism, volunteering, and ecotourism, reveal environmentalism to be more complex than the static monolithic entity previously depicted. This ethnography illuminates the relationship between power and place, and the importance of global and historic processes that inform the politics of conservationism.

Altogether I identify five factors shaping these various forms of environmentalism: conservation as sincere efforts and good intentions to sustain ecosystems and non-human life, socio-economic concerns for making a living, the adoption of environmental movements as tools of capitalist expansion, imperialism, and reference to Costa Rican nationalism and senses of place. In identifying these five factors and exploring them ethnographically in one regional context, this study thus makes an important contribution to the understanding of environmentalism as inherently multi-faceted.

*To my parents, Philip and Catherine Korsant, and all their love and  
support*

## Acknowledgements

There are many people to thank, and I won't do justice to expressing all the gratitude that I owe within these short lines. But I will try. Firstly, I'd like to thank my friends and family for the years of love and support (especially, my parents and brother). I certainly would not have been able to complete this without you. I think about the wonderful teachers that have inspired me from Colorado College to the New School for Social Research to Goldsmiths, and their words have served as motivation. The years of feedback have helped me to become a better student, writer, and researcher.

The idea for this research site in the Osa Peninsula sprung from conversations with environmentalists from NRDC, and I thank them for the guidance and the contacts in Costa Rica. There are many in Costa Rica who provided invaluable help getting settled and acquainted with the area. Much of this work could not have been completed without your knowledge and expertise of the area, and I thank you for trusting me and sharing everything so openly. I count many of the best days of fieldwork as collaborative, and the opportunities research participants afforded me were invaluable. Many institutions were helpful, among them: OC, MINAE, RBA, INOGO, FC, PiOsa, and ASCONA. I would especially like to thank Mike, Eduardo, Ifi, Manuel, JJ, Isabel, Pilar, Alan, Kenneth, Adonis, Jim, Alvaro, Alberto, Alvaro Ugalde, Andres, Luis, JP, Sophie, Janina, Phoebe, Lana, Alice, and Enrique. A special thank you is owed to Evelina, my partner in crime through most of this process. You were there for me in more ways than can be articulated here, and I'm grateful that you shared your talents and curiosity during the adventure we created together – it wouldn't have been the same without that world.

There are a number of people at Goldsmiths that I would like to thank. My inspiring cohort, among other classmates and colleagues, helped to keep us all sane through this process: Charli, Sarah, Cy, Matteo, Claudia, and Diana. I would like to thank the anthropology department staff, especially Victoria, Casey, Mark, and Gavin. The Latin American Seminar group and ILAS at the Senate House Library were other inspiring groups of colleagues and friends. I am so grateful for the support of my dedicated supervisors, Pauline and Steve. You fielded drafts and redrafts and anxious emails, and provided consistent, thoughtful, and invaluable guidance. Thank you for pushing me to be better, for the constructive criticism, for thorough feedback, caring support, and the inspiring intellectual engagement. And thank you to friends and editors who looked over drafts of this, especially, Evelina, Jenny, and Angela.

The work within these pages was developed for various conferences and seminars; and it was assisted by countless discussions with colleagues. I apologize, as I don't have enough room here to thank everyone, but I hope you know who you are and that your assistance is greatly appreciated!

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## List of Pseudonyms, Research Participants, and Occupations

**Alejandro**, president of the development association in Rancho Quemado, *campesino* with some interest in tourism, longtime resident.

**Alex**, Spaniard, environmental education worker for FC in El Progreso.

**Don Benicio**, president of mollusk fishermen [*pianguero*] association in Sierpe, longtime local resident.

**Carlos**, head of the RFGD, from Central Valley, MINAE employee and activist.

**Claudia**, local and treasurer for Rancho Quemado's development association, operator of ecotourism project.

**David**, entrepreneur, interests in tourism, local Puerto Jiménez resident.

**Don Diego**, youth and athletics community service worker, longtime Osa resident.

**Edgar**, expert botanist, activist from Central Valley, employed by foreign private interest.

**Emily**, German, young volunteer and activist.

**Erika**, German, immigrant resident, activist.

**Jackson**, Rancho Quemado preacher, rural tourism advocate, *campesino*, longtime resident.

**Jacques Achen**, *campesino*, agrarian rights advocate, longtime Osa resident.

**Jeremi**, local to Piro, OC employee, guide, nature enthusiast.

**Johnny**, from San José, sustainable development advocate.

**Lucas**, entrepreneur, interests in tourism, Osa local.

**Lucy**, from San José, socially minded sustainability and environmental advocate.

**Maite**, Colombian, OC employee, activist and environmental education coordinator.

**Maria**, from San José, widely experienced in international development and sustainability projects, activist.

**Don Mateo**, *campesino*, agricultural cooperative member, longtime Osa resident.

**Don Matias**, *campesino*, founder of Rancho Quemado.

**Matt**, Peace Corps volunteer in Rancho Quemado, interests in sustainable development, from US.

**Mia**, local El Progreso resident working with FC, environmental and community advocate.

**Miguel**, from San José, sustainable development advocate.

**Natalia**, from San José, interests in tourism, environmental advocate.

**Rob**, Northern Irish, guide, interests in tourism, community advocate, biologist.

**Rodrigo**, Claudia's husband, rural tourism operator, education committee head, Rancho Quemado local.

**Roni**, from San José, young and enthusiastic environmental activist, biologist, guide.

**Samuel**, from San José, musician, community and environmental advocate, works in education.

**Santiago**, *campesino*, former gold miner, ecotourism operator in La Tarde and longtime resident.

**Doña Silva**, *campesina*, longtime local Osa resident.

**Teo**, Victoria's husband, former hunter, current guide, employed through tourism, longtime Rancho Quemado resident.

**Tina**, Spaniard, environmental education worker for FC in El Progreso, married with children to a local man.

**Victoria**, Teo's wife, from Central Valley, experience in tourism, environmental advocate, active promoter of sustainable development in Rancho Quemado.

**Don Zoraba**, *campesino*, shot by OPF employee, agrarian rights advocate, longtime local resident.

## List of Acronyms

<b>ACOSA</b>	Área de Conservación Osa, [Osa Conservation Area]
<b>ACOTPRO</b>	Asociación Conservacionista para la Protección de la Tortuga Marina del Progreso, [Conservation Association for the Protection of Sea Turtles of El Progreso]
<b>AECO</b>	Asociación Ecologista Costarricense, [Costa Rican Ecologist Association]
<b>AMARMA</b>	Amarma Osa, Asociación Mixta con Armonía con Ambiente, [Mixed Association for Harmony with the Environment], women's recycling group
<b>ASCONA</b>	Asociación Costarricense para la Conservación de la Naturaleza, [Association for the Conservation of Nature], or, later, Asociación de Servicio Comunitario Nacional y Ambiental [The Association for National and Environmental Community Service]
<b>BOSCOSA</b>	Programa Bosques de Osa, [Osa Forests Program]
<b>CATIE</b>	Centro Agronómico Tropical de Investigación y Enseñanza, [Tropical Agronomical Research and Higher Education Center]
<b>CBNRM</b>	Community-Based Natural Resource Management
<b>CI</b>	Conservation International
<b>COOPITURIC</b>	A pioneering rural tourism cooperative for small-scale Osa projects
<b>COTORCO</b>	Comité Tortugas Corcovado [Corcovado Turtle Committee]
<b>CRUSA</b>	Costa Rica – United States of America, non-profit funding body
<b>DGF</b>	Dirección General Forestal, [General Forestry Directorate]
<b>ENGOS</b>	Environmental Non-Governmental Organizations
<b>FC</b>	Fundación Corcovado, [Corcovado Foundation]

<b>FN</b>	Fundación Neotrópica, [Neotropical Foundation]
<b>FONAFIFO</b>	Fondo Nacional de Financiamiento Forestal, [National Fund for Forest Financing]
<b>ICDP</b>	Integrated Community Development Project
<b>ICE</b>	Instituto Costarricense de Electricidad, [Costa Rican Electricity Institute]
<b>ICT</b>	Instituto Costarricense de Turismo, [Costa Rican Tourism Institute]
<b>IDA</b>	Instituto de Desarrollo Agrario, [Agricultural Development Institute]
<b>IMAS</b>	Instituto Mixto de Ayuda Social, [Mixed Institute for Social Security]
<b>IMF</b>	International Monetary Fund
<b>InBio</b>	Instituto Nacional de Biodiversidad, [National Biodiversity Institute]
<b>INDER</b>	Instituto de Desarrollo Rural, [Rural Development Institute]
<b>INOGO</b>	Iniciativa Osa y Golfito, [Osa and Golfito Initiative]
<b>ITCO</b>	Instituto de Tierras y Colonización, [Colonization and Land Institute]
<b>MAG</b>	Ministerio de Agricultura y Ganadería, [Ministry of Agriculture and Cattle Ranching]
<b>MINAE</b>	Ministerio de Ambiente y Energía, [Ministry of Environment and Energy]
<b>NGOs</b>	Non-Governmental Organizations
<b>NRDC</b>	Natural Resources Defense Council
<b>OC</b>	Conservación Osa, [Osa Conservation]
<b>OPF</b>	Osa Productos Forestales, [Osa Forest Products]

<b>OTS</b>	Organization of Tropical Studies
<b>PAC</b>	Partido Acción Ciudadana, [Citizen's Action Party]
<b>PC</b>	Peace Corps
<b>PiOsa</b>	Programa Institucional de Osa-Golfo Dulce, [Osa and Golfo Dulce Institutional Program]
<b>PLN</b>	Partido de Liberación Nacional, [National Liberation Party]
<b>PNC</b>	Parque Nacional de Corcovado, [Corcovado National Park]
<b>PNUD</b>	El Programa de Desarrollo de Naciones Unidas [The United Nations Development Program]
<b>PSA</b>	Pago de Servicios Ambientales, [Payment for Environmental Services]
<b>RBA</b>	Reinventing Business for All
<b>REDD+</b>	Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation
<b>RFGD</b>	Reserva Forestal de Golfo Dulce, [Golfo Dulce Forest Reserve]
<b>SINAC</b>	Sistema Nacional de Areas de Conservación, [National System of Conservation Areas]
<b>TNC</b>	The Nature Conservancy
<b>UCR</b>	Universidad de Costa Rica, [University of Costa Rica]
<b>USAID</b>	United States Agency for International Development
<b>WWF</b>	World Wildlife Fund

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## Introduction

# The Osa Peninsula as a Frontier within the Greening Nation

Costa Rica was recently declared the “greenest, happiest country in the world” in the 2016 Happy Planet Index<sup>1</sup> (HPI). A World Economic Forum<sup>2</sup> (2017) article, “Which Is the Greenest, Happiest Country in the World?” discusses some of the trends common to the adulation Costa Rica receives, paralleling much of the popular discourse and reiterating stereotypes and misconceptions. While the indicators are vague, the messages are clear. The HPI formula is calculated by measuring quality of life by health by equality, then dividing by the nation’s ecological footprint, terminology and methodology left unexamined. The most successful countries are deemed “those where people live long and happy lives at little cost to the environment,” (Bruce-Lockhart 2017); Costa Rica has topped the list three times, the other years being 2009 and 2012. The author, Anna Bruce-Lockhart, cites a Gallup poll that “found the Central American nation to have the highest level of well-being in the world,” (Ibid) relatively high life expectancy, and she also links the abolition of the nation’s military to abundance in government spending on environmental initiatives. Bruce-Lockhart argues that “strong commitment to the environment” has helped secure the HPI top spot, referencing that 99% of the country’s electricity supply is said to come from renewable sources as well as the government’s pledge to go carbon neutral by 2021. Other factors include the strength of social programs and investment for health and education (Ibid). Such perceptions of Costa Rica as having the “greatest density of species in the world” (HPI 2016) are common and bolster the “green paradise” fantasy of many foreigners, but tend to gloss over conflicts and injustices,

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://happyplanetindex.org/countries/costa-rica>, for the country’s Happy Planet Index profile.

<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/07/greenest-happiest-country-in-the-world/>.



and support misrepresentations. Costa Rica's image as a peaceful welfare state is now inseparable from its image as an environmentally conscious pioneer for biodiversity conservation, a coherence of a particular national character coinciding with the centrality of an environmental agenda that has become a normative symbol for the country and its notion of exceptionalism.

How this particular national character is experienced demonstrates the aesthetics and methodology at work through this process of greening. Upon entry to Costa Rica, the visitor immediately encounters TV screens and posters advertising investment opportunities for various properties; exchanges foreign cash for colorful bills with images of animals, the bucolic, and the "exotic;" faces smaller aircraft operated by Nature Air and an onslaught of animal-themed images; and receives a green ink stamp in her passport. No visitor escapes the impression that Costa Rica is being sold, *commodified*, and the substance and operation of that sale are maintained through the environmentally friendly image. One airline advertisement reads, in English, "get ready to refresh your senses," with a backdrop of a green, winding river delta. The "green republic" (Evans 1999) of Costa Rica is better described as both green as meant by environmentalists and also green as in reference to U.S. dollars, a symbol of foreign capital, membership within the global economic system, and the nation's neoliberal reforms since its debt crisis during the 1980s (Edelman and Kenen 1989; Edelman 1999). Few words capture this attitude better than those of president Figueres Olsen<sup>3</sup> (1996), when he insisted on a particular sustainable development plan for Costa Rica and the world. He boldly identified capitalism as both cause and cure for environmental problems, which he identifies, in agreement with many in the international scientific community including environmentalists (Figueres Olsen 1996; Carson 2000; McKibben 1989, 2010).

President Figueres Olsen's essay, "Sustainable Development: A New Challenge for Costa Rica," asserts Costa Rica's role as "a pilot project of sustainable development," describing the nation as "offering itself to the world as a 'laboratory' for this new development paradigm – a laboratory in which we can, with help from the international community, design frameworks and mechanisms for a sustainable future" (Figueres Olsen

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<sup>3</sup> President of Costa Rica from 1994-1998, he is the son of another famous president who captured the presidency during the civil war of 1948.

1996: 190). For the president, sustainable development means a balance between economic growth and ecological stewardship that actually complements growth (Ibid). In this sense, the logic of sustainable development works like the logic of capitalism (Argyrou 2005), and, although nature is meant for protection rather than submission to modern notions of “progress,” there remains a consumption and profit-driven motor behind the intentions of sustainability. The president adopts the language of Agenda 21 and Rio’s Earth Summit – the international calls to politically enforce a sustainable agenda for natural resource use – as a guiding set of principles to act upon, and that he feels should be pursued more radically (1996: 202). Importantly, this is not a statement of agenda only for Costa Ricans, but means to include the international community and include participation in global economic systems.

Seeking to reach out to civil society, make the process more egalitarian and democratic, Figueres Olsen suggests “international partnerships,” a “Central American regional fund for sustainable development,” “new indicators worldwide” for assuring sincerity throughout the process of becoming sustainable, and a Costa Rica that is “more integrated into the world economy” (1996: 200-202). The president proposes that globalization and the international sustainability movement merge into a united cause. This agenda rests on the assumption that “abundance and wellbeing” (Ibid: 188) are not only inherently good, but also products of the particular developing processes which should now include measured exploitation of resources so future generations can enjoy similar patterns of consumption. The weight given to such symbolic and political capital comprises an agenda unique for the region.

The friction between policies that favor free trade, on the one hand, and the enforcement of “protectionist” environmental laws, on the other, is a cardinal feature of Costa Rica. For example, in 2008 a Canadian gold mining company was given a concession at Crucitas by president Óscar Arias (1986-1990; 2006-2010) (Dyer 2015). Then in 2010, under the new president Laura Chinchilla (2010-2014), a court ruled that proper environmental impact statements were not complete and the mine was illegally given permissions to proceed (McDonald 2010). Legal battles ensued as the Canadian company felt Costa Rica violated a trade agreement between the two nations and owed for incurred costs and foreseen profits; but the mine remained shut down, and open-pit mining

proclaimed illegal nationwide. There is a negotiation, here, between the concerns of participating in free market-oriented global capital and maintaining the “green” reputation of the country. This event, which stirred some controversy, is emblematic of Costa Rica’s natural resource planning agenda in practice.

The research presented here is concerned with the interrelations between environmentalism, a sense of Costa Rican belonging, and global capital. I argue that rather than creating an amplification of its parts, this admixture disintegrates into various fluid forms that challenge the more conventional understandings of Costa Rican environmentalism. My study provides an alternative view to that common narrative propounded by HPI, and investigates the everyday implications of a greening nation for residents and visitors within the Osa Peninsula – the locality and case study concerned throughout. The unity expressed in HPI, given the problematic rhetoric of sustainability (Redclift 1987; Adams 2009), is deconstructed and shown to rest on divergent interests otherwise captured as a national, green, political discourse. How the relationship between power and place affects new sustainability movements, outlined in ethnographic detail, will explain not only how the greening process works but also the new possibilities of subjectivity in relation to natural resource planning.

### **The Question of the Greening Nation**

Singular features of Costa Rican environmentalism have been the subject of much research. Environmental history, biodiversity conservation (Boza 1993), and socio-economic concerns surrounding resource exploitation are well documented in Costa Rica; I examine some examples below, situating the research that follows. David Rains Wallace’s (1992) *The Quetzal and the Macaw: The Story of Costa Rica’s National Parks* and Sterling Evans’ (1999) *The Green Republic: A Conservation History of Costa Rica* are two notable ecological histories of Costa Rican Conservation. Wallace’s work maintains a less critical naturalist perspective, establishing the environmentalist as hero, and was published by U.S. environmentalist group The Sierra Club. Evans’ work builds significantly upon Wallace’s story with broad historical context, a depth of references, and archival information. Evans’ study analyzes the nation’s conservation movement, reminiscent of other global

environmental movements that responded to urbanization; he outlines the movement's reactive character regarding the commodification of nature, expansion of agro-exports, and neotropical ecosystem destruction (Evans 1999: ix). Evans takes a balanced approach towards qualifying the greenness of the green republic, and drawbacks or contradictions: rampant deforestation (some of the world's highest rates during the later 20<sup>th</sup> century), soil erosion, growing export demand for beef and bananas, neoliberal reforms following the debt crisis of the eighties, pesticide use, and habitat destruction.

While Evans's work is more historically developed than Wallace's and discusses high deforestation rates and agri-chemical use, anthropologist Marc Edelman maintains that Evans, "appears to have bought something that somebody painted green" (2000: 651). Edelman criticizes Evans for failing to problematize the sincerity of Costa Rican claims to greenness and uniqueness. Edelman challenges future scholars to look beyond the green façade to examine the socio-economic processes of power working to remake the Costa Rican image. This is what some Costa Rican scholars, like Ana Isla, have done, identifying the profit motive within the growing conservation *industry*.

Similar to the political economy framework of Edelman (Edelman and Kenen 1989; Edelman 1999), Isla's (2015) *The "Greening" of Costa Rica* critiques the process of greening for its ties to neoliberal forms of capitalism that, for her and other neo-Marxist critics, reveal environmentalism as another form of business not wholly sincere in its claim to preserve biodiversity. While Evans' reading upholds the "green" label and claims to Costa Rican uniqueness,<sup>4</sup> Isla exposes an agenda of commodification of nature that parallels the rise of conservation over the last several decades. This confluence of conservation and capitalism is of much interest in recent scholarship (Igoe 2004; Brockington, Duffy, Igoe 2008; Brockington and Duffy 2011; Büscher and Davidov 2014), and the issue is particularly relevant to Costa Rica because the conservation agenda – already central to national policy and a common sense of belonging – is also embedded within socio-economic networks. The tension between capitalism and conservation is explored in the Osa Peninsula by Fletcher (2012, 2014) and Horton (2007, 2009) who follow the way nature becomes marketed through ecotourism, questioning the motives behind an environmental agenda aimed at making money.

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<sup>4</sup> The question of Costa Rican exceptionalism and uniqueness is explored further in Chapter 1.

Rather than a great green movement of nature lovers that promise to save the planet, or a new form of capital accumulation, environmentalism in Latin America is nuanced. Juan Martinez-Alier (2002) and Ramachandra Guha (with Martinez-Alier 1997; 2000) have explained shifts in global environmental practice, the history of the environmental movement, tension between the global “north” and “south,” and the possibilities of an “environmentalism of the poor” in reference to the Global South (Martinez-Alier 2002). The authors explain that the environmental movement began as a Northern phenomenon in reaction to the rise of industrialization and urbanization. In the South, they explain, environmentalism is often overlooked and treated like a foreign ideological import rather than a regional need. They define environmentalism in the global South (environmentalism of the poor) as closer to concerns of the environmental justice movement – born from the need to protect livelihoods based upon natural resource use too readily assimilated into the system of globalization.

Studies of political ecology (Raymond and Bailey 1997; Zimmerer and Bassett 2003; Peet and Watts 2004; Paulson and Gezon 2005; Peet, Robbins, and Watts 2011; Robbins 2012) are especially attuned to this nuance. In their volume, *Liberation Ecologies: Environment, Development, and Social Movements*, Peet and Watts (2004), propose a type of interaction with the environment that can be subversive and revolutionary in relation to mainstream resource exploitation or protection as imposition of values. Their concern is to “mark the potential liberatory or emancipatory potential of current political activity around environment and resources,” (2004: 5) and to examine “the complex relations between Nature and Society through careful analysis of social forms of access and control over resources – with all their implications for environmental health and sustainable livelihoods” (4). The ways in which power and knowledge are exercised to privilege some interests highlight the logic of activism and imperialism, but also resistance and – drawing on Martinez-Alier and Guha – the ways in which other forms of quotidian environmentalism are critically important for the livelihoods of farmers (*campesinos*), for example. *Liberation Ecologies* proposes at least one other variety of environmental politics, looking beyond resource protection for the preservation of capital or conservation as a concern of urban elite, how socio-environmental interactions are negotiated in everyday life.

Another scholar of Costa Rican environmentalism, Luis Vivanco, complicates some of the categories employed by Martinez-Alier and Guha, while also drawing on their ideas and mirroring much of the political ecology approach. In *Green Encounters: Shaping and Contesting Environmentalism in Rural Costa Rica*, Vivanco argues for an understanding of environmentalism that opposes any normative view as a monolithic entity, but rather, proposes it as a varied and complex practice, using Monteverde as location for his case study. He is broadly concerned with institutionalized conservation, community outreach attempts, and tourism as “an environmentally sensitive economic development strategy” (2006: 17). Vivanco further explains:

Conservation is never simply about what kind of nature people imagine or know they want to preserve or restore; it is also an important arena in which they, explicitly and implicitly, project and reimagine social relationships, cultural attitudes, and political institutions. Indeed, the two should be considered as co-constructed processes: through conservation itself, new and authoritative visions of nature are derived and implemented, just as culture and social relations are scrutinized, redefined, and normalized (2006: 81).<sup>5</sup>

Vivanco’s take on conservation in conversation with Guha and Martinez-Alier’s “varieties of environmentalism,” here, emphasizes the power dynamics of the global North and South less than they do, and instead focuses attention on problematizing conservation at various scales, be they foreign, domestic, or globally cosmopolitan. While Guha and Martinez-Alier remain committed to differences between environmental initiatives within core and peripheral countries, Vivanco analyzes the fractured and problematic sense of environmentalism within each initiative – disturbing such categories as Southern or Northern.

There is some resonance here with Agrawal’s *Environmentality: Technologies of Government and the Making of Subjects*, which explains how identity and subjectivity are co-constituted within practices of interaction between individuals and the environment. Agrawal follows a recent shift in environmental practice in Kumaon, northern India, where a massive effort for ecological stewardship and environmental governance has taken place subsequent to years of destruction in political protest against colonial rule. This shift in practice, for Agrawal, marks a new form of subjectivity creation in a process he labels environmentality – a “domain of politics and practice implicated in the making of environmental subjects” (2005: 23). Agrawal explains this shift as, “the emergence of new

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<sup>5</sup> Also see: Vivanco (2003).

technologies of government that incorporated rural localities into a wider net of political relations, produced new forms of regulation in communities, and helped create new environmental subjectivities” (2005: 3). For him, “environmentality is about the simultaneous redefinition of the environment and the subject as such redefinition is accomplished through the means of political economy... concurrent processes of regulation and subject making that underpin all efforts to institute new technologies of government” (2005: 23-24). This concept is bolstered by Foucault’s work (1961, 1972, 1977), which disturbs the sovereignty of the subject and notions of causality within historical processes. Although there are striking similarities between this environmentality and the eco-identities of the greening republic, Agrawal’s work in Kumaon on the Chipko movement and the thousands of environmental interest parties, just on the basis of scale, dwarf the efforts one may encounter in the Osa. This analytic is helpful in illuminating the implications for the subject in relation to the state, the surroundings, the global economic system, and looking beyond the political economy of financial interest.

Vivanco (2006) makes a distinction between his work and work of those like Brockington (2002) who argue that fortress conservation is emblematic of hegemony and resource dispossession (see Edelman, Oya, and Borrás 2016). Worried about losing a more complete analysis of “the variety of cultural perspectives and the conflicts that emerge over how tropical nature and its conservation are defined in practice,” he wants to move beyond the “simplification that identifies actors according to their competing interests alone” (Ibid: 16). The critique (see Vivanco 2006: 9-10) may not be entirely fair, as the fortress conservation metaphor is not meant to refer only to the form of a fortress, but more to the function of its power – the architecture of the fortress structure is not the purpose of the metaphor’s use. Vivanco asserts, clarifying his treatment of environmentalism in light of other literature, “environmentalism is not a monolithic force intervening in a passive world, but an internally diverse set of ideas and practices that operate in a complex social environment whose boundaries are not so fixed as to be impenetrable” (2006: 10). This distinction in the approach to environmentalism recalls postcolonial debates that discuss environmentalism as a modern logic of domination rooted in Western hegemony (Argyrou 2005) and the making of the “third world” through dominant discourse (Escobar 2012); but I will argue that scholars can attend to the dynamics of power and justice in addition to the

complexities of environmentalism in practice. These approaches are not mutually exclusive.

As in Monteverde, as indeed globally, “there is no singular environmentalism, but multiple institutions and activists with diverse intentions and practices that have changed their priorities and practices over time” (Vivanco 2006: 19). By “considering, from diverse perspectives, the often confounding benefits and dilemmas that green encounters have provoked and amplified in the ongoing sociocultural and ecological changes taking place in the region,” (Ibid) Vivanco builds upon his commitment towards anti-essentialist language, focuses on how the process of environmental activism is socially embedded, and highlights the friction of green encounters, reproducing conservation as a dynamic and living thing. This important point brings nuance to the treatment of environmentalism by social scientists, but should not necessarily be placed in opposition to understanding “green imperialism” (Grove 1995) implicated by fortress conservation.

Taking the political ecologists’ concern with power and justice; Agrawal’s concern with making subjects and eco-identities, Isla and others critiquing the greenness of the green republic; and Vivanco’s understanding of various environmentalisms in process, there are many ways to analyze the politics of conservation in the Osa. Once we read new sustainability movements and biodiversity conservation in these terms, what types of arguments can be developed in Costa Rica (and the Osa in particular)? The variance of environmentalisms in Costa Rica exposes green initiatives to be linked to capital, which leaves the environment commodified in various ways; it disturbs defining characteristics of both grassroots activism and mainstream environmentalism; and, it situates knowledge in the contentious forefront of the struggle for reimagining futures and places.

I seek to build on Vivanco’s work in Monteverde, Costa Rica, using the Osa Peninsula as the case study. Like Monteverde, the Osa is famous for biodiversity, environmental activism, growing migration and farming, and a bustling ecotourism industry. The Osa, in contrast, is farther away from the Central Valley, less accessible, and has a more volatile history in terms of conflicts over land use. Dairy farming and the North American Quaker settlement is particular to Monteverde since the mid-twentieth century, while Panamanian migration, gold mining, and working in United Fruit’s Golfito plantation were prevalent activities in the Osa. Mainstream environmental initiatives as public



concerns in the Osa are historically less ethically/politically embedded and less strengthened by surrounding communities than those in Monteverde; but instead, more antagonistic. Most of the environmental management in Monteverde has been implemented through NGOs and other associations that seek funding from international bodies, and the presence of the Ministry of the Environment and Energy (MINAE) and other forms of state control is only recent. State controls in the Osa, on the other hand, are ubiquitous and have decades of precedent, with MINAE offices in many locations including villages of only 200 inhabitants. Categorized (incorrectly in today's world) as the remote and rural "frontier," the Osa as a case study provides the following context: (1) a locality with complex, fluid, and contentious forms of environmental activism, (2) an ecological history inseparable from political and economic conflict, (3) a peninsula home to Corcovado National Park, dubbed the "jewel of the national park system," and an impressive (some 80% of the Peninsula's landmass), albeit controversial, conservation area that has displaced residents and continues to regulate where families live, (4) a growing interest in environmental education and grassroots activism, and (5) a burgeoning tourism industry especially well-suited for ecotourism and international volunteer opportunities.

The most prominent distinction between my research and Vivanco's work is the fieldsite itself – the Osa Peninsula, and the lessons that are learned from work there. The area has a more notorious reputation for "frontier" violence, a land of outlaws and runaways. The Osa migrants of the mid-twentieth century suffered more violence and conflicts over access to resources than residents of Monteverde, and the presence of land controls has been more imperialistic and less integrated than Monteverde where one of the local schools manages one of the preserves. I, therefore, provide a historical account of this conflict and show how the memory of such issues has fed the resentment of biodiversity conservation. Also, Vivanco places less emphasis on nationalism and Costa Rica's history of elite control over resources, as his more postmodern language tends to mute the political economics of global power structures. In the Osa, where private police have been hired to burn *ranchos* and remove individuals from their land, structural violence is more prevalent. In contrast, then, this research in the Osa illuminates one variety of meanings for conservation as controversy – best explained systematically.

The literature so far has shown environmentalism to manifest in a variety of ways: as imperialism (the form of fortress conservation and exclusive controls), as liberation (grassroots movements and individuals struggling for their livelihoods), as nature loving (with varying degrees of elitism), and as capitalism (representations of nature's commodification). The link to national identity and patriotism is often mentioned, but for a study in a country like Costa Rica, I argue that it should be foregrounded in this list of varieties of environmentalism for the particular ways that enviro-ethics are centralized in Costa Rica's discourse. Although nearly every student of Costa Rican conservation mentions the national importance of the environment, and biodiversity is commonly known as *patrimonio nacional* [national heritage], it should be included as an influence for subject creation – through dialectic interaction with the environment – in the group of themes mentioned as capitalism, imperialism, liberation ideologies, nature loving, and getting on with daily life.

My research in the Osa contributes to this nationally-oriented literature by looking at the way the green agenda asserts itself at a micro level (Chapter 3); by examining diverse residents' reactions to the new mainstreaming of land use (Chapter 4); by looking at the institutional pressure on the politics of making places and futures as reflected within environmental education (Chapter 5); and through examining the core notions of grassroots activism (Chapter 6); and examining the effects of tourism in its various forms and, particularly, the industry's relationship with science, spirituality, and the "expat" community (Chapter 7); and ecotourism as a new sustainability movement through the experience of *campesinos* (Chapter 8). I will build on the understanding of conservation as authors discussed above have noted, and attend to the confluence of nationalism, sense of belonging, capitalism, and environmentalism, which manifests as a mix of new forms of interaction with the environment rather than a re-amplification of older forms. Throughout, I am concerned with the different elements that define environmentalism as practiced in the Osa Peninsula. Each item in the list above provides an interpretation of environmentalism's variety; it challenges us to look beyond the environment as a "thing" and to try and see the political processes at work, and to view these spatial politics in congress with national identity and agendas particular to Costa Rica. Before introducing

the fieldsite, it is important to discuss some of the more general literature that many authors above have drawn upon, regarding the making of places as socio-political processes.

### **Environmentalisms in Place**

There is a broad interdisciplinary literature on space and place that includes social theorists and geographers (Lefebvre 1991; Bachelard 1994; Harvey 1996; Massey 2005), human geography and environmental justice (Smith 2010; Nixon 2011), anthropology (Basso 1996; Feld and Basso 1996; Stewart 1996; Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003), environmental history (Cronon 1991, 1996, 2003), historical ecology (Balée 2006, 2010; Balée and Erickson 2006; von Hellermann 2007, 2009, 2010), and ethnographic monographs concerning (urban) Costa Rica (Low 2000) to name just some. Places are not merely places in the concrete sense, but socio-political fields of action; a claim that is evident within the politics of conservation found in Costa Rica's Osa Peninsula. Scholars of place, noted above, have explained how place is not a given or static thing, but created through social processes. This is a critical point of departure for environmental anthropologists because the environment – especially sustainability and biodiversity conservation movements – concerns the way that power, privilege, and knowledge shape and reimagine places.

Space as a social process is an idea developed by Lefebvre (1991) who explained the fabrication of space as a method of capitalism. David Harvey is influenced by Lefebvre, and also concerned with the types of places created through the socialization of space – what inequalities and privileges become structured. He is keen to point out that place as a social process does not imply a radical sense of relativity or constructionism. On the contrary, Harvey commits to a certain sense of realism while arguing that place – created through interaction between the agent and the structure where the agent finds itself – is indeed situated in a particular sense of historical materialism:

The 'solid rock' of historical-geographical materialism is here used to say that dialectical augmentation cannot be understood as outside of the concrete material conditions of the world in which we find ourselves; and those concrete conditions are often so set in literal concrete (at least in relation to the time and space of human action) that we must perforce acknowledge their permanence, significance, and power (1996: 8).

Reminiscent of Hacking's (1999) argument, in *The Social Construction of What?*, scholars should not, in Harvey's view, ignore the substance of what is constructed (or what is there to interact with) through a discussion of the process by which it is constructed. Perhaps, the dialectic language is not entirely poststructural, and reifies both the structure and the agent, despite the emphasis on interaction between the two – forcing us to think about process and method. For political ecology, Harvey's framework has helped to explain dispossession and injustice resulting from power dynamics inherent to the definition of places.

In contrast to Harvey's approach, treating places as socially embedded and historically located, emphasizing the role of power in their construction, is also analyzed through a more poststructuralist tradition. The natural/social binary has been argued to be obsolete as a basis for social analysis (Descola and Pálsson 1996; Descola 2013a). All matter, even the "concrete" world is historically located (De Landa 1997), leaving scholars to "reassemble the social" (Latour 2005). This line of thinking is not meant to pursue a radical relativism nor to deny a mind-external reality, but, for the purposes here, to better illuminate – on the basis that everything could potentially be both natural and social – the processes of interaction between individuals and their surroundings, the manner in which place and person are co-constituted. This understanding theoretically helps environmentalists who argue that environmental problems are also social problems, supporting the idea of oneness with the environment and gaining political leverage from messaging that readdresses the focus towards people's health.

The tension between realism and social constructionism regarding the environment is worth pursuing a bit further; philosophers and social scientists alike have long entertained questions regarding nature in the tradition of Anglo-European intellectual thought. Although this research focuses on the environment and reorganization of space, it is worth noting how the question of the natural connects to debates on environment. Long before nature became a concern for activists and scientists, it was, among other things, an antagonistic wilderness, a space to be tamed and conquered, an opposing force against which people would define the social world, and an essential quality for ordering cosmological understanding (Nash 2001; Argyrou 2005: 4-5). For Argyrou (2005), this pattern was also a method for European hegemony, and mirrored colonialism. Some of the recent work in political ecology and environmental anthropology (Escobar 1999: 1-2) has

sought to disturb the old Nature/Culture dualism by explaining how everything could both be social and natural, and that the Nature/Culture binary is historically located within an Anglo-European intellectual discourse (Haraway 1991; de Castro 2014). There are a number of societies that do not share the distinction and separation of Nature and Culture as Viveiros de Castro (2014) has noted. Additionally, anthropologists and social theorists (Descola and Pálsson 1996; Biersack and Greenberg 2006) with an interest in space, place, and the environment now find it important to dismantle this false dichotomy, complicate the interrelations between people and their surroundings, pursue an understanding of how landscape is socialized, and explore the power relations that help form our understandings of space. It is within this vein that both the concreteness mentioned by Harvey and the way “nature is simultaneously real, collective, and discursive – fact, power, and discourse” (Escobar 1999: 2) can be held in tension for one analytic approach.

While Harvey’s work (see also Smith 2010) has focused more on urban spaces, his approach also applies to rural space and landscapes. In *The Anthropology of Landscape: Perspectives on Place and Space*, Eric Hirsch (1996) argues that “landscape as a cultural process” (23) is not the landscape that is just seen, but what is understood through local engagements and interactions, and further analyzed through ethnographic analysis. The emphasis on practice, here, shares theoretical understandings with phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty 1958; Hegel 1977; Tilley 1994; Ingold 2000; Husserl 2012) and studies of embodiment (Bourdieu 1977, 1990, 2010; Wacquant 2004), in addition to landscape and memory (Stewart and Strathern 1994; Schama 1995) and questions of politics and identity within studies of landscape (Bender 1993; Bender and Winer 2001; Mitchell 2002). Understanding the way that landscape is socialized is indicative of a system of power relations.

Of the many interdisciplinary frameworks that assist understanding the relationship between power and place, political ecology (Bryant and Bailey 1997; Stott and Sullivan 2000; Zimmerer and Bassett 2003; Paulson and Gezon 2005; Peet, Robbins, and Watts 2011; Robbins 2012) effectively employs ethnography in a way that details the roles of power and justice in daily life. Different interpretations of this exist, however, as Latour (2004) takes political ecology to be a must for “social” analysis because it emphasizes relations between entities, the processes of becoming, and the politics of knowledge

construction. While Latour treats political ecology as a method for understanding on a broad scale, others, like Paige West (2006), engage political ecology within a specific ethnographic context. In her work, *Conservation Is Our Government Now*, West explains how biodiversity conservation strategies have become forms of policing and governance, revealing how differing forms of knowledge and values are entangled within the tensions between residents and conservation management. This exemplifies how ethnography is well suited for detailing the difference and specificity within conservation movements and within the political friction found amongst those movements.

At first glance, Annemarie Mol's (2002) *The Body Multiple: Ontology in Medical Practice* may seem to have little in common with a discussion on understanding place, but methodologically, her contribution and focus on practice are astute ethnographic interventions that assist scholars in analyzing the multiplicity of a "thing." As the body, for Mol, occurs through various practices and appears in multiple forms through those practices, so does the environment take on multiple lives depending upon the type of engagement one pursues. In the Dutch hospital where she worked, atherosclerosis was diagnosed based upon a certain build up of plaque in the arteries, becoming the object of intervention and the sign of disease without necessarily proving causality between leg pain and plaque, for example. The plaque becomes "the target of an operative intervention" (Mol, 2002; 94), in a similar way in which the Earth will be diagnosed with a sickness – the plaque as deforestation or environmental degradation – the targets that allow certain types of interventions, pointing to the environmentalist logic at work and a particular environment being enacted through this practice. Nature, like the body, is multiple or hybrid (Escobar 1999), with multiple environments; different political fields of action enacted through their practice.

### *The Argument Revisited*

This literature helps build a framework through which to analyze the politics of conservation in the Osa Peninsula, where there are multiple forms of environmentalism in practice with implications for the many who are involved. Environmentalism in practice in the Osa reveals no fewer than five themes, which are systematically analyzed: (1) nature

loving, (2) socio-economic concerns for making a living, (3) capitalist expansion, (4) imperialism, and (5) reference to Costa Rican nationalism and sense of place. The colonial and national histories of Costa Rica expose a system of resource control by a landed elite (Chapter 1), directly influencing the structures through which Costa Rican environmentalism can be understood. The Osa Peninsula's political ecology within the context of the nation's environmental movement (Chapter 2) will show how conflict over land use has shaped sentiment towards further land controls, especially resentment towards the Osa's protected areas, and that the Peninsula has historically been a site for globalization.

These themes are not mutually exclusive, but co-constitute one another, and the overarching point is that environmentalism is messy, ambiguous, contradictory, shaped by conflict and Costa Rica's history of elite control over resources, and at the forefront of national messaging. The first theme, nature loving, reflects genuine attempts and sincere efforts to acknowledge the rights of the non-human, caring about nature for "nature's sake," and promoting environmental health, which is meant to ensure public well being. The second theme, socio-economic concerns for making a living, suggests that many small-scale tourism workers and subsistence farmers, for example, are continuing their daily lives with a degree of dependence upon healthy and readily available resources; nature as neither a luxury nor a profit, but closer to a necessity. Third, conservation parallel the expansion of capital pertains to the commodification of nature on a larger scale, globalized conservation, bioprospecting, greenwashing, and, especially prevalent through Costa Rica's recent decades, structural adjustment and neoliberal shifts in the nation's economic structures that incentivize the business of conservation (through ecotourism or voluntourism, for example). The fourth theme, conservation as imperialism, refers to several factors: influence of foreign interests and the imposition of ethics within an area without a reflexive understanding of the existing politics of land use, environmentality – negotiations of new subjectivities oriented around the logic of environmental governance, strict state controls that dispossess populations and maintain an exclusive regulation policy (e.g. fortress conservation), and various methods of indoctrination and advocacy. The fifth theme highlighted above, a unique Costa Rican mix of nationalism and environmentalism,

suggests a particular form of enviro-speak that upholds the national imaginary while centralizing the importance of sustainability and biodiversity conservation.

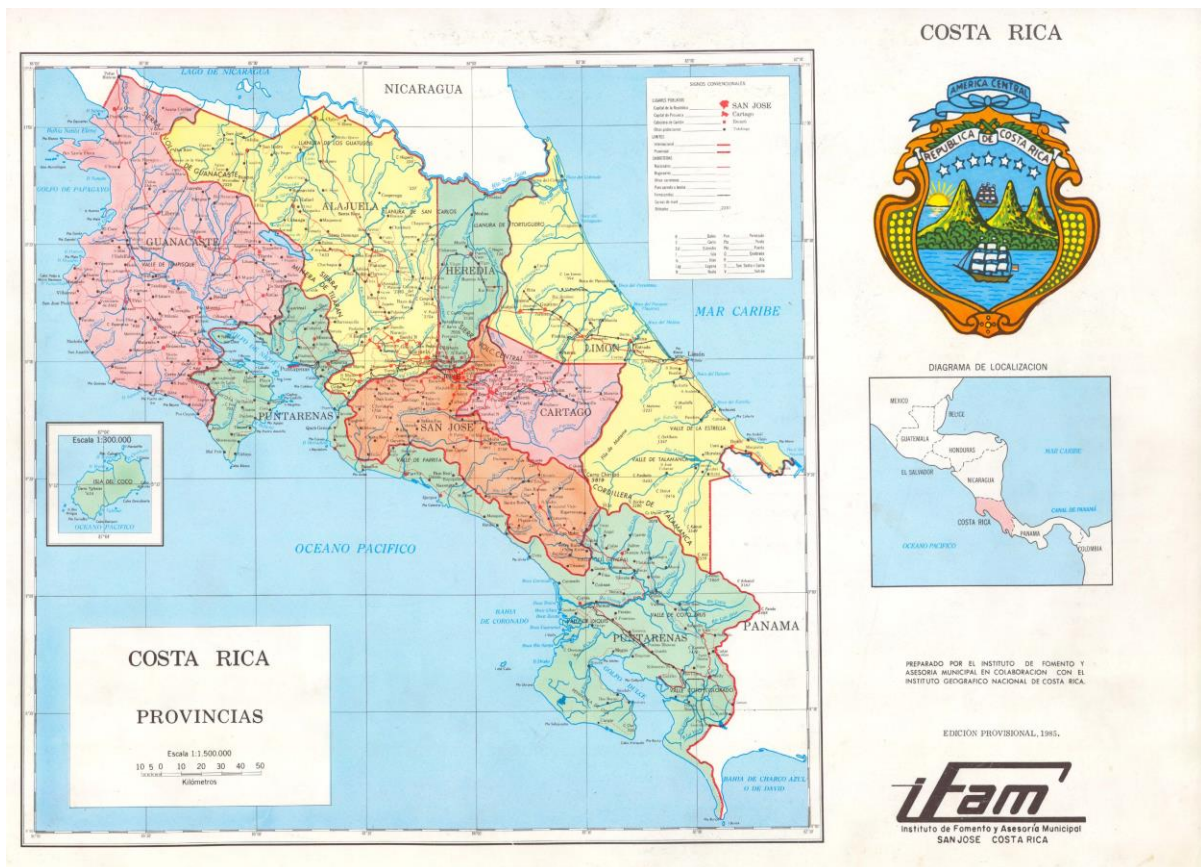


Figure 1.1. Costa Rica's provinces and urban areas.

### The Osa Peninsula Frontier

The Osa Peninsula, located on the Pacific Coast of Costa Rica's southwest region has often been described as the "wild," "exotic," and "remote" frontier – labels meant to suggest backwardness, disorder, and danger. This peninsula is often compared to the Nicoya Peninsula, the rest of Costa Rica's Pacific Coastline, and the Guanacaste region in the northwest, which are more heavily trafficked by tourists, in order to make several points: (1) that the Osa is less traveled to and therefore less important, (2) that, according to environmentalists, visitors, and most Osa residents, the Osa should never develop the infrastructure that attracts Guanacaste-style crowds because it would ruin the rainforest and quotidian way of life, (3) that the Osa is relatively "remote" and "underdeveloped," given



the presence of busy resorts along the Central and Northern Pacific Coast and the northern international airport in Liberia, and (4) that the lack of such large resorts in the Osa creates an opening for ecotourism to thrive, suggesting a more ethical travel experience than what may be found within the maligned areas of Quepos and Jacó for their prostitution, drug use, crime, and “overdevelopment.”

Residents of San José talk of the Osa as a place of Costa Rican “roots,” perhaps in reference to the nearby Diquís Valley stone sphere carvings, symbols of Costa Rican indigenous heritage. Other residents, especially professionals, in San José reiterate the trope of the “remote and wild” Osa. Such comments are consequences of the split between urban centers and the countryside in Costa Rica, as most of the populace lives in the Central Valley (Alajuela, San José, Heredia, and over to Cartago), and more rural areas are stereotyped as remnants of the bucolic past. One ecotourism guide working in the popular Arenal region forgot about the road improved during the eighties that connects the Osa’s hub, Puerto Jiménez, to the Pan-American Highway, and told me one could only reach the Osa by boat and that it would take all day to travel there. Many in San José do not list the names of Osa towns like Puerto Jiménez or Rancho Quemado, but instead refer to the entire Osa and Golfo Dulce region as the “Southern Zone,” a mystifying label that assimilates all specificity and difference into the claim of a different type of Costa Rican place that is at once a symbol of cultural roots, rural past, a dangerous evolving frontier, a unique home to biodiversity conservation, and a promising expansion of ecotourism. Many stereotypes of the Osa are fantasies of the urban and cosmopolitan elite, pursued also by adventure travel writers (Zykë 1985; Anderson 1989), and even many current Osa residents as we will see in the chapters that follow. The research that follows reveals a more complex lived experience for Osa migrants, their families, foreign immigrants, and visitors.

The Osa Peninsula is politically split into the cantons of Osa (Figure 1.2) and Golfito (Figure 1.3) within the province of Puntarenas (Figure 1.4). Costa Rican cantons are further split into districts, and those relevant to the study are the Sierpe district in the Osa canton and the Jiménez and Golfito districts within the Golfito canton. Throughout the thesis I refer to the geographic Osa Peninsula, and clearly state when referring to the Osa canton. The political division creates many practical problems for people living on the Peninsula, as the regional canton capitals are Golfito and Ciudad Cortés respectively,

neither situated on the physical peninsula. Furthermore, municipality services are not shared across the geographic area of the peninsula, so someone in need of assistance in the Osa canton (within Rancho Quemado or Agujitas, for example) will not receive help from Puerto Jiménez, and it is even unlikely that any assistance will be provided due to the distance and accessibility of Ciudad Cortés. Even the clinic in Puerto Jiménez is not equipped for lab tests, broken limbs, or giving birth, meaning that many residents rely on the ferry to Golfito, which is usually more practical than driving. Such issues have led to protest, caught some attention from San José, and have brought most in the Osa to desire their own canton that makes geographic and practical sense – in addition to a common sense of belonging felt by those living on the actual Peninsula, distinct from the relatively crowded Golfito and Pan-American Highway strip. The formalized development associations within certain towns act as seats of political power, and the seven such associations in the Osa are located within Puerto Jiménez, La Palma, Carate, Rancho Quemado, San Juan/ Rincon, Sierpe, and the Ngöbe Indigenous Reserve. Political divisions influence the structuring power within residents’ lives, as do conservation areas.



Figure 1.2. The Osa canton within Puntarenas.

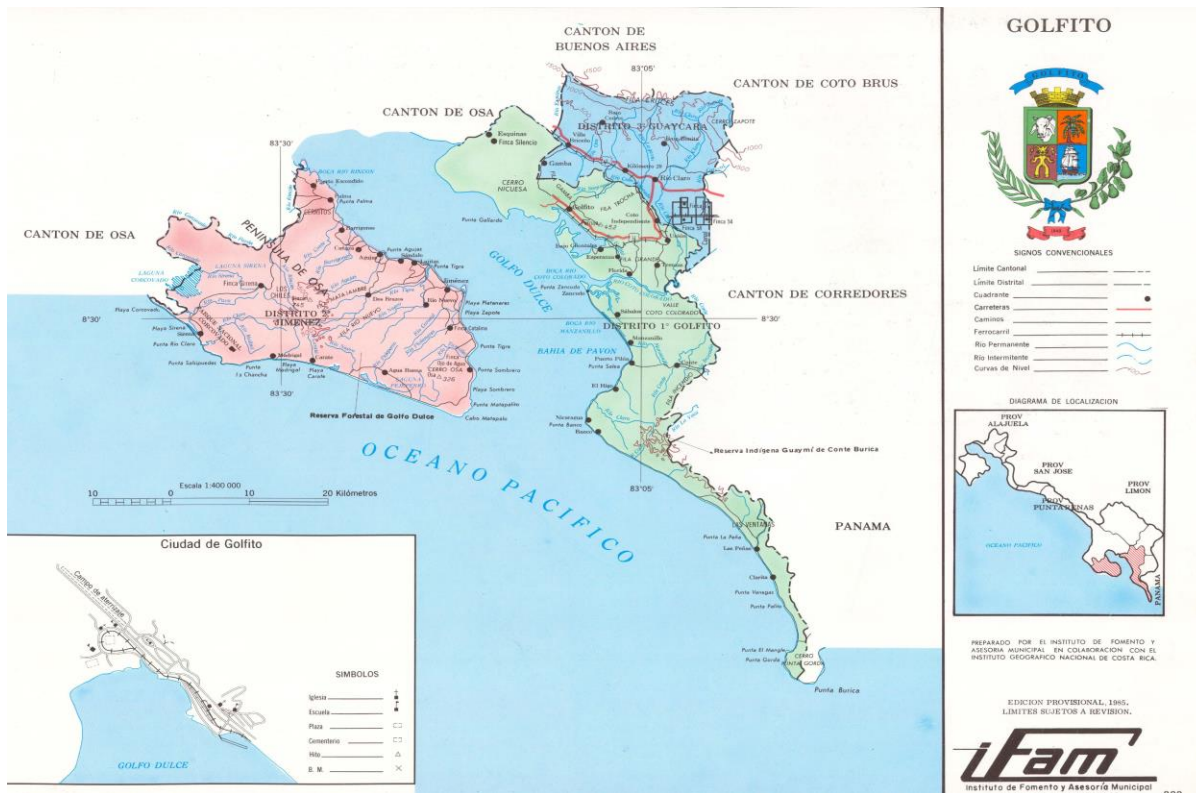


Figure 1.3. The Golfito canton within Puntarenas.

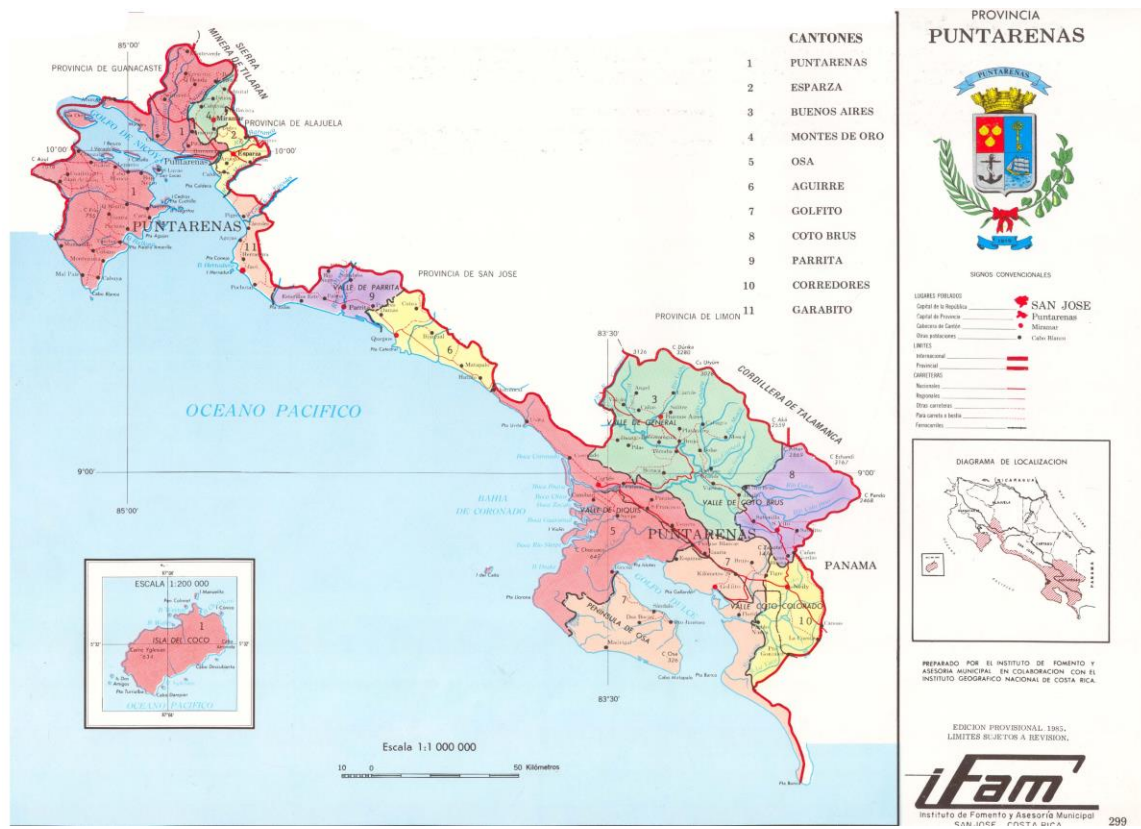


Figure 1.4. The entire Puntarenas province.

The Osa Peninsula is famed for its biodiversity, and conservation has greatly structured aspects of daily life. There are many protected areas in the Osa (see Figure 1.5), but the most relevant for this study have been Corcovado National Park (PNC)<sup>6</sup> and the Golfo Dulce Forest Reserve (RFGD). In a country already famous for 5% of the world's species biodiversity, the Osa has just over 2.5% of the world's species biodiversity, making it one of the most biodiverse places on the planet per unit area. The Osa is home to the only lowland rainforest on the Pacific Coast of Central America, one of the largest mangrove structures, and Golfo Dulce, a tropical fjord where whale and dolphin species frequent. Such qualities captured the attention of environmentalists and scientists who have been active in the area since the late sixties. As the movement developed (discussed in Chapter 2), conservation became a form of governance and policing within everyday life and the politics of land use.



Figure 1.5 National Geographic 2002. The Osa Peninsula, including conservation areas.

<sup>6</sup> Acronyms appear in Spanish when appropriate.

The area's history reveals pervasive foreign interest, migration, gold mining, conflict over land use, tales of danger, and reference to shifting ideologies and practices concerning environmental stewardship. The Osa has been read as a transitory space, but has had a growing populace since the seventies. Most residents are migrants or families of migrants from Panama, other parts of Costa Rica, or Nicaragua. The Ngöbe Indigenous Reserve was allocated to the Osa, not within historically Ngöbe lands along the Panamanian border, because the government did not wish to allocate the Osa land for other purposes. Today's Osa is a cosmopolitan menagerie of interests including environmental activism, international volunteering, public sector controls, business, ecotourism, environmental education, scientific research, nature-seekers, farming, gold mining, guiding, and a variety of ways to make a living near the famed rainforest. Most of my interlocutors who were residents of the Osa discuss conservation as inherently controversial, echoing past conflicts over land use and thus creating an atmosphere of mistrust and animosity between *campesinos* and state or foreign intervention. As interests arrive, leave, mix, and disintegrate, relations are renegotiated between understandings of place and subjectivity.

This thesis will take the Osa frontier as a case of political friction regarding land use, and observes the reimagining forms of citizenship (Ong 1999) regarding various environmental initiatives within this particular site. The politically centralized concerns for the environment in Costa Rica have led to uniquely powerful ways of being Costa Rican. Patriotism, nationalism, and senses of belonging cohere with environmental agendas, shot through with globalization and Costa Rica's neoliberal turn since the eighties. The external reception of Costa Rica's green stereotypes informs the discourse that feeds into this coherence of nationalism and environmentalism. There is a variance of forms of environmentalism (and representations of nature) that challenge normative understandings of the environment. Within the capitalism/conservation nexus and the friction between global and local scales, complex assemblages of interaction demonstrate new forms and concerns, challenge older practices, portray specificity in conflict with generalizations, and demonstrate forms of political agency and strategy. Instead of this confluence amplifying nationalism and environmentalism, both are exposed as a myriad of interests and conflicts;

they break down into more complex things that work to disturb older agendas rather than an intensification of a sincerely “green” republic.

## **Methodology**

Before explaining how research was done, I briefly note what is currently accepted as anthropological method today. There have been many important nuances to the ethnographic method since Malinowski’s (1922) pioneering work that established participant observation as a critical means to gather data, and I briefly outline some here in order to situate the methods followed during fieldwork. Max Gluckman’s (1940) well-known interpretation of the construction of a bridge exposed how the unfolding of an event can reveal power dynamics, political hierarchies, and the roots of conflict. The “thick description” espoused by Clifford Geertz (2000 [1973]) sought to interpret “webs of significance” (2000: 5), “a stratified hierarchy of meaningful structures” (2000: 7), and to follow processes of meaning creation similar to discursive practice. In contrast to Malinowski, Geertz reminds us, “anthropologists don’t study villages... they study *in* villages” (2000: 22), and hence ethnographers do not study a reified or reduced object known as “culture,” but alongside processes of meaning creation, phenomena, and events. Geertz has proven to be among the most influential anthropologists writing on ethnographic method.

Among those influenced by Geertz, the famous contribution of *Writing Culture* edited by Clifford and Marcus (1986) marked a discursive or reflexive turn in ethnography that emphasized the process of creating ethnographic knowledge and problematized the role of the ethnographer as scientific observer. Discussing the impact of the *Writing Culture* critique, Tobias Rees writes of the concern that ethnographers had been creating “timeless others” and “bound cultures” that “[deny] the natives a voice of their own” (Rees in Rabinow et al. 2008: 5). The problem of imperialism and ethnocentrism within the act of circumscribing the Other has been greatly discussed (Said 1978; Wolf 1982), and the proposition for an anthropology of the contemporary (Rabinow 2008; Rabinow et al. 2008) seeks to move beyond the bounded, static, and timeless, in order to interpret global social movements (like environmentalism, for example) and various timely phenomena. The

methodology for this thesis draws on such interventions within the development of ethnographic practice.<sup>7</sup>

My previous relationship with the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), a US-based environmental advocacy NGO, proved to be a useful introduction (having once labeled the Osa a “bio-gem”), and helped foster a relationship with Osa Conservation (OC), a Costa Rican managed environmental NGO with roots in the international environmentalist community. Both environmentalist groups acted as gatekeepers and led to invaluable access to researchers, activists, volunteers, and the institutional workings of an environmentalist NGO in the Osa. Similarly, Peace Corps was another useful gatekeeper, largely due to the enthusiasm of the volunteer that I met working in Rancho Quemado. Some other institutional assistance was provided by Stanford University’s INOGO<sup>8</sup> effort, and relationships with that team aided in an understanding of environmental conflicts in the area and fostered connections with other researchers and residents. The head of the forest reserve<sup>9</sup> provided helpful access to the government’s environmental management branch (MINAE<sup>10</sup>), conservation system (SINAC<sup>11</sup>), and even critical *campesinos* who he thought would broaden my perspective on environmental conflicts. Inquiry regarding the environmental NGO Fundación Corcovado (FC) was especially helpful in understanding NGO-community relations in El Progreso, and Fundación Neotrópica (FN) was helpful in understanding advocacy for sustainable development. In Rancho Quemado, RBA<sup>12</sup> and PiOsa<sup>13</sup> were integral for understanding support for the rural tourism collective. Near Carate, I looked at organizations like COTORCO<sup>14</sup> and, briefly, Planet Conservation.<sup>15</sup> In Piro, OC and Frontier, the UK-based international research and community service

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<sup>7</sup> See Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) for comparison to *Writing Culture* debates, in addition to the feminist reaction, *Women Writing Culture* (Behar and Gordon 1995).

<sup>8</sup> Iniciativa Osa y Golfito [The Osa and Golfito Initiative] managed by Stanford University’s Woods Institute for the Environment.

<sup>9</sup> Reserva Forestal de Golfo Dulce [The Golfo Dulce Forest Reserve].

<sup>10</sup> Ministerio de Ambiente y Energía [The Ministry of Environment and Energy].

<sup>11</sup> Sistema Nacional de Áreas de Conservación [National System of Conservation Areas].

<sup>12</sup> See <http://www.grupo-rba.com>. Reinventing Business for All is a Costa Rican non-profit aimed at “economic, social, and environmental development” (RBA 2017).

<sup>13</sup> Programa Institucional Osa-Golfo Dulce (PiOsa) is a sustainable development initiative managed by the University of Costa Rica (UCR).

<sup>14</sup> Comité Tortugas Corcovado [Committee for Corcovado Turtles] is a cooperative that includes foreigners and locals in the conservation of sea turtles near Corcovado National Park.

<sup>15</sup> This Costa Rican conservation NGO (with roots in the international environmental community) practices sustainable development and sea turtle conservation along with COTORCO, and sends volunteers (mostly foreign) to the Osa.

organization, were essential for understanding conservation efforts and community interaction. In Puerto Jiménez, environmental organizations like ASCONA<sup>16</sup> and ecotourism outfits like Osa Wild provided important access to information and activity surrounding the dynamics of conservation, sustainability, and ecotourism. For practical reasons it was not possible to speak with every active NGO or institution in the Osa nor is it necessary to list them all here; instead, I highlight the fact that I engaged with the most prominent ones, and that following the dynamics of environmental advocacy and work in the Osa cannot be done thoroughly without an understanding of these groups, what they do, and how they interact with residents.

Fieldwork consisted of 14 months in Costa Rica from October 2013 until December 2014, in addition to a two-week pre-field visit in May 2013. During this time, over 225 interviews were conducted, including over 95 hours of recorded material (with 80-85 different people). The interviews ranged from casual conversations to semi-structured and structured interviews. The majority of these were lengthy and at least semi-structured. These interviews, along with participant observation as central to ethnographic method (Robben and Sluka 2012), proved to be most essential to data collection. Below I will discuss the research participants in terms of geography, demographics, gender, and nationality, before detailing the type of participant observation completed. To clarify one point on ethnicity, most research participants identified as white or mestizo. Although racial tensions are central to understanding Costa Rican nationalism, ethnicity was not a central focus of this study, and more on race and the nation is provided in Chapter 1.

I measure the group of interlocutors, for the purpose of this summary, in two ways: the approximate total interviews (including some casual conversations that lead to some insight) and a selected group of 53 key research participants with whom I spent substantial time. Most interviews took place in or near to Puerto Jiménez (including areas like La Balsa), and many others were carried out elsewhere in the Osa – Dos Brazos, La Tarde/ La Palma, Rancho Quemado, Piro, Carate, El Progreso, various farms, Golfito, and several popular tourist destinations throughout Costa Rica. Some interviews were given via Skype, in the US, in San José, CR, and even the UK – making this study “multilocal” (Hannerz

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<sup>16</sup> The Asociación de Servicio Comunitario Nacional y Ambiental [The Association for National and Environmental Community Service] is a Costa Rican non-profit that focuses on the Osa.



2003). Out of 53 major informants only 19 were female and the remaining 34 were male. Of the 53, 16 were self-described “expats,” 24 were from the Osa area, and 13 were from other parts of Costa Rica (almost always San José or the Central Valley).

A large majority of the total interviews were with men; however, a substantial amount of time was spent with women because the majority of volunteers and active environmentalists were women. The majority of gold miners and *campesinos* tended to be men. Fewer interviews with local women may have been an issue of access and trust, with my being a foreign man. Most of research participants were Costa Rican, though large portions were from the US; then many volunteers, visitors, and immigrants were from the UK, EU, and other countries. Of the Costa Ricans, most were longtime Osa residents or had grown up there. The overall group has slightly fewer Osa residents than those who arrived from elsewhere, but that definition is complicated by the fact that most Osa residents are migrants or have at least one parent who migrated to the Osa. Very few Osa residents today claim roots in the Peninsula dating before the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, many in the group that I labeled as external to the Osa would qualify themselves as practically native to the area.

Interviews were sought with *campesinos*, gold miners, people working in the tourism industry, environmental activists, volunteers, researchers, foreign migrants, guides, government officials, those working in the institutional and private sector, educators, fishermen, and various others – many times, resulting from luck. Interviewing style was constantly a negotiation and a reading of what participants were comfortable with, as some did not want to be recorded or felt uneasy about excessive notes. Similarly, I spoke with participants in the language in which they felt more comfortable, whether English or Spanish. Speaking Spanish, therefore, was a critical asset for me as I engaged with research participants. Because Puerto Jiménez is the hub of the Osa, most interviews were conducted in that area, and allowed for insight into the workings of the town, meeting residents, immigrants, volunteers, and attending many important events. It was also critical to seek interviews in many more rural pockets of the Osa including Dos Brazos for its gold mining history; Rancho Quemado for its rural tourism collective; El Progreso for its interaction with Fundación Corcovado, turtle conservation, and volunteering; the La Palma area for its farming and ecotourism start-ups; La Tarde for ecotourism success; Matapalo

for foreign migrants; Carate for turtle conservation and ecotourism with proximity to the park; and Piro for volunteering and voluntourism. San José also proved invaluable as the political and economic center of Costa Rica where most institutions have a home base, in addition to its helpful insights from university students.

I collected documentation material that includes photos, brochures, information packets from meetings, organization related materials, public record documents, lesson plans and guide books for environmental education, and tour marketing resources. Facebook and other types of social media provide an extensive record of data (opinions, events, various negotiations). Most grey literature, documents, or various advertisements and event propaganda taken from fieldwork are publicly available but, in some cases, how the documents were obtained created momentum for research. For example, one informant enthusiastically handed over pages on the Forest Law and the Golfo Dulce Forest Reserve. He wanted me to help him challenge the government and show that the reserve was unfairly established.

Because of the institutionalized nature of the environmentalist movement in Costa Rica meetings were common strategies to create a collective sense of purpose. I had to, therefore, attend as many environmental meetings as possible in order to understand advocacy, outreach, and the dynamics of collective action. The meetings formalized activism, and created a unified space meant to call attention to the seriousness of conservation strategy. I attended many talks [*charlas*] (discussed in Chapter 6) organized by several active environmentalists living locally, in addition to other meetings regarding environmental education strategy, sustainable fishing, ecological presentations, outreach aimed at obtaining donations, and event planning (just to name a few).

Volunteering was a successful piece of participant observation strategy. By volunteering with OC in Piro, I was able to gain intimate knowledge regarding turtle conservation and the daily life of volunteers. Teaching English to children and some adults at the library along with the ASCONA volunteers was a good way to meet and speak with more residents, and especially children and their families. For historical perspective on the area, some of the small cafeterias and bakeries were helpful, but especially visits to the elderly home and befriending some older residents, which then led to farm visits with some of the oldest members of the Osa community. Volunteering at the Jungle Hostel in La

Balsa created bonds with a local family trying to maintain an ecotourism outfit and small sustainable agriculture garden. Overall, volunteering was critical to participant observation in the Osa; it led to quotidian understandings of the concerted efforts of activism, education, and making a living through ecotourism.

Festivals represented the spectacle of conservation. Themes and events included birds, turtles, sustainable agriculture, a parade for Corcovado National Park, the World Environment Day, Earth Day, environmental education, beach cleanups, and other occasions for large gatherings in connection with an environmentalist agenda. Public events not necessarily connected with the environmental agenda were also key locations for gaining an understanding of what people will gather for, how local movements develop, and some insight into public priorities. Some included the Festival of Lights and other such gatherings aimed at family fun. There were scheduled gatherings to claim social benefits, parties for Costa Rica during the World Cup, the teaching strike, and political support for presidential candidates. One notable event held at the school pertained to the lacking ability of the local health clinic, a serious problem for residents that forces them to cross the gulf by ferry for anything from pregnancy to a broken bone. Residents threatened to close the Pan-American Highway in order to gain more political attention for the issue, and attending such events – although not directly relevant to the research topic – does help foster a contextual understanding of place and assist in meeting residents within a setting that shows a researcher involved and observing key issues for the community.

Another important strategy for gaining an understanding of the politics of land use was to go out and walk with people. Hiking and taking tours of farms were useful ways to understand space and place. Information that revealed itself while walking was unique – it usually pertained to the experience of being outside, discussing certain plants, animals, and ways of inhabiting the rainforest. Especially concerning environmental education, participant observation both inside and outside the classroom illuminates how the education practices are experienced and the character of this embodied knowledge. It was critical to interact with students outdoors and witness their reactions to the activities and advocacy provided, and also the way they negotiated an understanding of space.

As much of the institutionalizing of the green agenda arrives external to the Osa, it was critical to gain an understanding of local political structures. Attending development

association<sup>17</sup> meetings was important for understanding power dynamics and priorities. In cases like Dos Brazos and El Progreso, the conservation association acts as the center of political power for the town, and thus remains critical for viewing the practice and negotiation of environmentalism. Encounters with COPITURIC, a pioneering ecotourism cooperative for the Osa; Sendero Osa, a tourism-based community hiking trail in Rancho Quemado; and ACOTPRO, a community-based turtle conservation initiative in El Progreso, were fruitful for revealing interconnections between conservation, tourism, and volunteering. I tried to familiarize myself with grassroots initiatives in the area such as the AMARMA women's group, which worked on recycling and town cleanup. Another way to follow political tensions was inquiry into common controversies like the proposition of a new marina in Golfo Dulce. Investigating differing sides to the story and collecting opinions on topics like this was key for illuminating the fissures within the public discourse on environmentalism.

Ethical guidelines were followed throughout the fieldwork. I anonymize research participants who are not published authors or public figures, and provide a pseudonym guide (see Contents page) to assist with various names and occupations. Where appropriate, ethics will be discussed in text (Chapter 4, for example). Every effort was made to ensure the safety and respect of research participants, permissions were sought, and I have remained cautious against using research as a platform to endanger anyone's reputation. Philippe Bourgois (1991) has discussed ethical tensions imbedded within the methods of research in Costa Rica and elsewhere in Central America. His balanced interpretation of his own ethical relations with United Fruit while studying questions of justice and racism demonstrate the tensions within research that attend to oppression, power dynamics, and honestly communicating the research topic to informants and gatekeepers. Bourgois's welcome contribution helps to balance the concerns of an ethical fieldwork methodology with the politics of empowerment.

Becoming more familiar with Puerto Jiménez and the Osa became easier through the process of deep hanging out, meeting people, following up, and going with the flow of what the activists, researchers, and volunteers were doing. Most of the research completed

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<sup>17</sup> Many Costa Rican towns have development associations that act as seats of political power and economic decision-making. In the Osa the seven development associations are located within Puerto Jiménez, La Palma, Carate, Agujitas/ Drake Bay, Rancho Quemado, the Ngöbe Indigenous Reserve, and San Juan.

was qualitative apart from a questionnaire created with OC, which was keen on learning more about environmental education, what teachers want, how to deliver, and how it either was or was not being practiced. This questionnaire (Appendix A) was given mostly to educators, and I found these interactions limiting. While open-ended interviews allowed for ample time and self-expression, engagements with the questionnaire tended to be brief and formal. Differences between qualitative and quantitative methods have been well documented (Bernard 2006), merits of both discussed, and field methods have recently been practiced with the understanding that ethnography is in transformation – reinventing itself in preparation for a world more unattainable than Malinowski’s research object had intended to be (Faubion and Marcus 2009).

### **Chapter Breakdown**

Chapters 1 and 2 are meant to historically locate the thesis. Chapter 1 situates Costa Rica as a particular place within comparative frameworks of global capital and Central America more generally. The chapter also places Costa Rican exceptionalism and nationalism in conversation with concerns over land use and the politics of place. Chapter 2 introduces the Osa Peninsula, the case study for this thesis, and provides historically relevant political ecology that reveals a tumultuous period during the 1970s. Such conflicts over land use have haunted environmental interventions since, and thus carry some responsibility for local resentment and mistrust regarding state and foreign land use initiatives.

After these first two chapters concerned with political and historical context, the following six chapters each represent an aspect of the variety of environmentalisms. They ethnographically reveal how the practice of conservation rearranges the possibilities of residents’ experience of place, belonging, land use, political knowledge, and the power dynamics inherent throughout this practice.

Chapters 3 and 4 deal with the institutionalizing of the green agenda in the Osa and the dissent therein. Chapter 3 follows the operation of green strategies today, top-down and failed conservation approaches, tensions between residents and both the RFGD and PNC, and the presidential visit to the Osa on World Environment Day. Here, the paradigms of

environmentalism become clearer. Chapter 4 details the reaction to the mainstreaming of land use for conservation established in Chapter 3, and reaction to previous conflicts established in Chapter 2. We meet *campesinos* eager for justice, critical entrepreneurs, and realize that environmental practice in the Osa complicates the green reputation that Costa Rica exports.

Chapters 5 and 6 discuss the practice of conservation on a local level in regards to environmental education and the question of grassroots campaigns. They illustrate – in practice – the paradigm shift from fortress conservation to community outreach already outlined in previous chapters. Chapter 5 discusses environmental education and its development into ecopedagogy. Participation within the environmental education festival in El Progreso, among other events, reveals how a primary and profound function of Osa environmental activism works to make particular types of citizens, places, and futures. In Chapter 6 the lines between grassroots activism and green imperialism are blurred by exploring initiatives like the biweekly talks held in Puerto Jiménez on various topics important to the environmentalist agenda. Both chapters 5 and 6 are concerned with the tension between invasion and empowerment regarding the friction within differing types of knowledge and the dynamics of power.

In Chapters 7 and 8, the relationships between tourism and environmental ethics are explored. Chapter 7 illustrates a portrait of the cosmopolitan Osa, and the hustle of Puerto Jiménez as the center for the growing business of nature commodification. Chapter 7 presents various forms of tourist, volunteer, researcher, visitor, and foreign migrant to show the variety afforded by the Osa's nature commodification. As science forms the basis for environmental knowledge and many volunteer packages (turtle research and voluntourism, for example), understanding such phenomena informs the variance of environmentalism's practice. Chapter 8 takes a close look at ecotourism, the successful efforts of one *campesino* in La Tarde and the collective action of rural tourism within Rancho Quemado, in two particular case studies. This chapter, unique within the regional literature on this subject, follows *campesino*-led projects rather than big tourism data or successful foreign-owned outfits. Similar to Chapter 7, Chapter 8 is concerned with nature commodification and the relationship between capital and conservation – one that complicates the definition of the Costa Rican enviro-nation by revealing neoliberal undercurrents.

## **Chapter 1**

# **Constructing Coherence: Nationalism, Resource Use, and the Question of Costa Rican Exceptionalism**

Setting the stage for concerns with the politics of environmentalism, this first chapter provides necessary political and economic context where the history of Costa Rican land use and resource exploitation from the period of first European contact to the present is outlined. Land and resource politics constitute the context within which individuals interacted with their surroundings, the moral registers created, and the ethical and economic negotiations implicated. Senses of belonging and national identity have been linked to landscape in unique ways throughout Costa Rican popular discourse, which support commonly held beliefs about the country as a nation particularly keen on tackling environmental issues. The merging of nationalism and environmentalism entangles with key socio-political developments: the burgeoning of an agro-export economy, the decisive Civil War, social reforms, debt crisis, the adoption of free trade and a laissez-faire economic structure, and the rise of tourism. Foreign intervention and geopolitics are also critical for understanding Costa Rica as a globalized space. Whilst Chapter 2 provides a political ecology of the Osa Peninsula and Golfo Dulce region – the area of ethnographic research – this chapter focuses on Costa Rica at large, understanding the national polity within its comparative contexts. By outlining these comparative frameworks, including Central America and dependent economies, I situate the historical discussion that follows within a relevant context for understanding the politics of environmentalism in Costa Rica today. Costa Rica should be viewed, rather than as an entity with a steady teleological development over time, as a fragment of colonial space that, like and unlike its neighbors, emerged as a bounded political entity after several hundred years. Before proceeding to the main body of the chapter, I examine the nation as part of Latin (and Central) America, and the nation as a dependent economy in the world economic system.

It is critical to account for geopolitics and the dynamics of power within a study of colonial space as it becomes its own political entity. Some historians focus upon Latin America's history of revolution and conflict (Galeano 1997; Chasteen 2011), while others take the "idea of Latin America" (Mignolo 2005) as the result of a particular discourse situated within privileged positions of power. Following a postmodern discursive analysis (Said 1994; Fanon 2004, 2008; Escobar 2012), Mignolo argues that America was "an *invention* forged in the process of European colonial history" (2005: 2), emphasizing "the necessary colonial matrix of power that modern expansionism implies," (Ibid: 10) and suggests that the collective consciousness that accounts for a sense of Latin American identity is filtered through colonial discourse (see Fanon 2004, 2008). Rather than pursue a more discursive analysis, I follow Galeano's counter-narrative that focuses on power in its geopolitical sense, core and peripheral economies (Mintz 1985; Wallerstein 1974), and Latin America as inheriting the injustices of European (and later U.S.) hegemony. In this vein, Galeano writes that what is "known today as Latin America... has specialized in losing ever since those remote times when Renaissance Europeans ventured across the ocean and buried their teeth in the throats of the Indian civilizations" (1997: 1). Galeano's intention is not to circumscribe Latin American identity as essentially "passive" or "losing," but to better craft a historical analysis of power that emphasizes inequality and geopolitics.

Central America is historically defined as the five nations that constituted the Kingdom of Guatemala and for a short time, after 1821, the United Provinces of Central America: Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica, with common economic and political histories (Perez-Brignoli 1989; Woodward 1999). Although Belize and Panama are commonly understood to be Central American countries today, they are treated separately throughout some historiography because they gained national independence at later dates, respectively, 1981 (from the UK) and 1903 (from Colombia). Central America within the Spanish Empire was a "divided, poor, and marginal region," (Perez-Brignoli 1989: xiv) and part of the "peripheral and rural world" (Ibid: 7). The Isthmus is argued to embody a "frontier element" that is characterized as follows: "the struggle against the jungle, inexorable rains, and rugged mountains all impose themselves



on a small dispersed population” (Ibid: 11). The five regions, now Central American countries, shared a common economy based upon the trade of exported agricultural goods.

The theme of the frontier is implicated within Costa Rica’s colonial experience, as Guanacaste and the Central Valley marked the most southern section of the Guatemalan-controlled area (Ibid: 45). Costa Rica was viewed as a frontier, especially during the 17<sup>th</sup> century, but also throughout colonial history, that had relatively few people and was isolated from the political center of Guatemala (Ibid). In contrast to the ethnic diversity of Guatemala, Costa Rica is, “more homogeneous and the European racial influence is easier to recognize” (Perez-Brignoli 1989: 18).

The Pacific side of Central America is economically linked with “rustic simplicity, and... ceaseless movement of coffee, cotton, and sugar cane” (Ibid). There are comparatively more women workers in Costa Rica and “more schools, fewer soldiers, and, generally speaking, less poverty and backwardness” (Ibid). The Atlantic coast of Costa Rica (and, generally, Central America) is more influenced by the Afro-American Caribbean and history of slavery, “suffering under the power and prejudice of a criollo and mestizo Central America” (Ibid). Identifying the “moderate economic success” of Costa Rica relative to other Central American nations, Perez-Brignoli writes, “from 1950 to the present only the per capita income of Costa Rica has managed to approach the average for Latin America as a whole” (1989: xiii), an example of a characteristic that would feed notions of Costa Rican exceptionalism. Costa Rica has shared a common history with its neighbors but has managed to also establish a particular nation, as historical accounts indicate.

John Booth (1998) examines some of the Costa Rican national myths, demystifies stereotypes, explains how the nation has succeeded as a democracy, and characterizes it in relation to these stereotypes: “its beauty, its democracy, its institutionalized pacifism, and its scrappily egalitarian people,” in addition to, “its bureaucracy, inefficiency, pride of self, and intolerance” (xxi). He notes, “the striking contrast between the liberty and stability of democratic Costa Rica and the turbulence, repression, and tensions of Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, and Nicaragua” (Ibid). Where “democracy not only exists but persists,” the Costa Rican “regime defined by the 1949 Constitution is today the most consolidated and stable in Latin America” (Booth 1998: 2). Although the relative peace post-1949, the high literacy rates, and the successful healthcare system bolster the widely

recognized characterizations of Costa Rica, historical accounts now paint a more complex picture that retains some praise for the democracy while highlighting its shortcomings and contradictions (Booth 1998; Edelman 1999; Edelman and Kenen 1989; Molina and Palmer 2004, 2012; Perez-Brignoli 1989). Booth challenges scholars to demystify Costa Rican myths, to reveal their complexities, and to examine how the nation is similar to many of its neighbors – looking beyond conventional understandings and superficial first impressions (1998: 30). Socio-economic indicators like healthcare, education, infant mortality, literacy, and life expectancy support the popular praise for Costa Rica as exceptional and noteworthy.<sup>18</sup> Such statistics are a “direct product of public policy” and that the state’s historic support for social welfare and progressive reforms – especially after the 1949 Constitution – created conditions where such middle-class growth has been possible. For example, in 1980 the average income was \$176.70 per year for the poorest fifth of Costa Ricans, which was still 85% above the regional average (Booth 1998: 28). Although these statistics reflect the promise of relative wellbeing, the exaggeration of the Costa Rican distinction is problematic and includes a disparaging gaze towards the country’s neighbors, as well as elitism, racism, arrogance, and propaganda.

Since the European encounter, Latin America’s economy has been dependent on foreign markets (Galeano 1997), and Costa Rica, specifically, has been integrally tied to foreign capital as well – a situation which has only exacerbated since the 1980s (Edelman and Kenen 1989; Perez-Brignoli 1989; Booth 1998; Edelman 1999; Molina and Palmer 2004, 2012). The idea of economic dependency rests in part on world systems theory that examines the interconnected relations of globalized capital, moving beyond the idea of bounded places, and is especially critical of the perpetuation of inequalities within the global political economy that hold similarities to imperialism and European hegemony. Sidney Mintz’s (1985) work is one such example of a study that explains how an agro-export grown in Latin America for European consumption is manipulated by foreign markets, creating a subservient role for the plantations and workers. Other scholars (Appadurai 1996; Escobar 2012) have been critical of labels like “core” and “periphery,”

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<sup>18</sup> Booth provides supporting statistics: “Costa Rica’s literacy rate, close to 90%, is almost 23% higher than the regional average. University enrollment per capita is nearly four times higher than the Central American average. Infant mortality per 1,000 live births in 1993 was fourteen; the mean for the Isthmus was fifty-five. Life expectancy for Costa Ricans was seventy-six years, nine years longer than the regional average” (1998: 28).

for what they deem essentialist rhetoric that assumes peripheral economies and their inhabitants to be powerless, without agency of their own. This thesis will remain attuned to the importance of discussing economic inequalities and the dynamics of power without circumscribing a sense of identity of the Other (Wolf 1982) or denying agency, power, and complexity within an area of global economic dependency. There are multiple scales, for example, within core or peripheral economies: Central America was peripheral within the Spanish empire, Costa Rica's Central Valley was peripheral to Guatemala during colonial times, the Osa Peninsula has been peripheral to the Central Valley, and, within the Osa, Rancho Quemado is peripheral to Puerto Jiménez.

The characterization of Latin America as a “sub-America, a second class America of nebulous identity” (Galeano 1997: 2) should be acknowledged, not to perpetuate a stereotype, but to critique a clear imbalance of power since colonial encounter. The production of agro-exports, as Galeano explains, is “always for the benefit of the foreign metropolis of the moment, and the endless chain of dependency has been endlessly extended” (Ibid). Within that system, Central America “never enjoyed a monopoly on valuable products” and the “weakness of state authority” exacerbated the cyclical effects of a dependent export economy. Power dynamics ordered themselves along similar lines: “the relations of social hierarchy and domination thus took on an undisguised violence that almost exclusively benefited the landed class” (Perez-Brignoli 1989: 8). Having land has meant power, which has meant integral ties to precarious foreign markets. Costa Rica has shared this sense of elitism, dependency on agro-export, and – although less impacted – it has not been immune to the effects of regional political conflicts (Booth 1998: 27).

The following four sections provide a historical overview that follows land and resource politics in connection with growing concerns of nationalism. I delineate periods as follows: European contact to the late colonial period; from Costa Rican independence to the Civil War; post-war reforms; and the period of structural economic changes to the debt crisis and rise of tourism. With a comparative understanding and historical overview in place, I continue to the section, “nationalism and contradictions,” summarizing nationalism, corruption, and the myth of a Central American paradise. Finally, the chapter explains under what types of socio-political interrelations the ascendancy of enviro-driven national

politics occurred, and how nationalism, exceptionalism, and resource exploitation have created particular power dynamics.

### **From Colonial Contact to the Late Colonial Period**

Given that Costa Rica was a fragment of colonial space, this overview begins with European contact – imperialism at work in reimagining and constructing boundaries. The land’s anthropogenic history, archeological record, and the archive of pre-colonial history are beyond the scope of this overview. During Columbus’s fourth voyage across the Atlantic, the colonizers landed upon the present-day Caribbean coast of Costa Rica in 1502, wrote to Spain about golden riches, and thus formed the territory’s name – Costa Rica or “Rich Coast” (Edelman and Kenen 1989: 1). Between 1519 and 1525, the Spanish conquered Central America, and soon afterwards established the Audiencia of Santiago de Guatemala, controlling territory from Chiapas, Mexico to Bocas del Toro, Panama (Molina and Palmer 2012: 20-21). Political power for the colony was centered in Guatemala, and Costa Rica’s reputation was that of a “poor, empty, isolated, and marginal colony” (Molina and Palmer 2012: 27). One misconception in earlier historiography is that populations were small; in fact, there were hundreds of thousands of indigenous inhabitants (Molina and Palmer 2012: 12) within the Costa Rican territory upon European contact (see Denevan 2002, 2011). The indigenous populations of the early 16<sup>th</sup> century had grown greatly with the successes of agriculture, but anthropogenic changes in the land were relatively unremarkable. During that century, there was an estimated population of 400,000 – a figure unmatched by the Hispanic mestizo<sup>19</sup> populace of Costa Rica until the 1920s. By 1569, when the Spaniards maintained a more dominant presence, there were only 120,000 indigenous people, and by 1611, only 10,000 remained. Diseases and influenza spread by European bacteria and viruses were the most likely causes for this massive population decline (Molina and Palmer 2012: 19-20). The genocidal practices of colonial empire were additional stimuli for this biological catastrophe. Despite the existence of slavery and serfdom (the colonial *encomienda* system) mostly in the north, the indigenous population of

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<sup>19</sup> This term commonly refers to an ethnic mix between Spanish (European) blood and indigenous, although it is sometimes used to refer to any “mix.”

Costa Rica was nearly impossible to subdue in the manner colonists had intended. By the 17<sup>th</sup> century, an export economy was established and those in power were the descendants of *conquistadores* who constituted an elite group of landowners with great political and social control (Stone 1989).

Though Costa Rica was a relatively poor and remote colony, cacao soon became the leading export and was profitable mainly for an elite “political class” (Stone 1989: 21). The construction of the land-elite under the guise of European hegemony gained momentum, thus laying foundations for what would become Costa Rican space, and prestige within the global economy by establishing political hierarchies based upon natural resource use. Until the start of the cacao trade, it was unclear if Costa Rica would have any great role within the Spanish empire. Cacao production began to slide by the eighteenth century, with demographic and economic ramifications; slavery declined, the population of mestizo peasants grew; and subsistence agriculture became the most viable activity of the eighteenth century (Stone 1989: 21-22). These farmers soon spread across the Central Valley to Alajuela, Heredia, and San José. Importantly, political privilege stayed intact; Costa Rica was no “classless rural democracy” in the late colonial period (Molina and Palmer 2012: 39). European descendants and *peninsulares* held more land rights and economic opportunities than the mestizos, mulattos, indigenous peoples, and former slaves. Handfuls of families maintained monopolies over production, and the growing agricultural economy was less egalitarian and democratic than previously understood (Stone 1989).

Edelman and Kenen offer an important caveat to understanding the generations of elite during the colonial period. Although political hierarchies and monopolies over production were certainly potent and have structured Costa Rican politics throughout the nation’s history, they claim that this process of domination should not be seen as absolutist or deterministic. To Edelman and Kenen, the fact that future generations of political elite are related to various *conquistadores* is not sufficient evidence to assert that political power is equally potent across generations, nor that it determines a defined and inevitable limit for an elite class of nobility (1989: 20). Ruling governors were subjects of the Crown as well, and when Costa Rica failed to maintain strong exports during the eighteenth century for

various reasons,<sup>20</sup> it became clear that economic power was also external to the borders of the colony and the will of the political class. The colonial space established was one of political and economic privilege, based on natural resource cultivation, despite nuances that explain the difficulties with assuming historical continuities. With a relationship between power and land established, future agro-exports would echo this structure, and a national imaginary would emerge from this colonial space – one entangled within land use.

### **Costa Rican Independence Through the Civil War (1821-1949)**

Whilst Costa Rica is typically portrayed as an uncharacteristically peaceful Central American country, military coups were common during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the famed Costa Rican democracy of today is only relatively recent. Costa Rica's political instability during the 85 years following independence from Spain is well documented (Booth 1998: 40).<sup>21</sup> This section serves to question the peaceful egalitarian reputation by discussing inequality, conflict, and an elitist construction of political power in what would become Costa Rica. It is during this period that we see early nationalism, as a process of the complex bonding that informs the current Costa Rican sense of belonging. Then, I discuss the post-civil war nation, and what many scholars mean when they discuss Costa Rica as a “modern” welfare state.

The expulsion of Spanish colonial power from Mexico during 1821 held potent symbolic weight throughout Central America. After 1821, the colonies of Central America were independent but remained, for a number of years, under Guatemalan political control within the Mexican Empire. The Costa Rican republic was founded in 1838 when it split from the Federal Republics of Central America, but it is the date of Mexican separation from Spain in 1821 that is celebrated as Costa Rican independence. The post-independence era arrived with the burgeoning success of the coffee trade.

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<sup>20</sup> Stone cites “the Church and piracy” as potential upsets to cacao production (1989: 22). Also, a large population of natives to exploit was lacking (Edelman and Kenen 1989) as well as slaves in general (Molina and Palmer 2004; 2012).

<sup>21</sup> Booth writes, “from 1824 through 1905, 17% of Costa Rica's presidents were toppled by a coup, 24% served a year or less in office, and 36% of the period was spent under military rule” (1998: 40).

Coffee, or “the golden bean” as it was revered, surpassed cacao as Costa Rica’s most important agro-export, amounting to new fortunes for some. Monopolization over resources and inequality were already in place by the time the *cafeteleros* (coffee producers) achieved economic dominance (Gudmundson 1989; Booth 1998: 36). The inequalities regarding access to resources were exacerbated by the growing wealth of *cafeteleros*. Privatization of common lands assisted the efforts of this “coffee bourgeoisie,” (Castro 2004: 59) and during the mid to late nineteenth century, coffee trade to Europe was approximately 90% of export earnings (Molina and Palmer 2004: 55).

Despite some unrest, Costa Rica’s relative peace within the Central American Federal Republic created a fortunate environment for the large coffee producers. By the mid-nineteenth century, coffee wealth had “Europeanized” consumer tastes in clothing, food, and books, for example (Ibid: 59). The popular National Theater constructed towards the end of the century attested to this. The rise in elitism and land privatization that accompanied the export-based economy was evident within the central seat of political power, as thirty-three of the forty-four men who served as Cost Rican president between 1821 and 1970 descended from three original colonizers (Barry 1989: 3). Control over land and resources accompanied and helped create such power.

Amidst the growing wealth of “coffee capitalism” (Molina 2004)<sup>22</sup> during the mid-nineteenth century, the new country suffered an invasion headed by the mercenary William Walker from the United States. After assuming presidencies elsewhere, Walker established as many colonies as possible. When Walker sent troops to Costa Rica, giving individuals there a reason to unite for war, he lost at the battle of Santa Rosa in 1856 (Edelman and Kenen 1989: 8). The fighting with Walker served as a rallying cry for distant populations of farmers to embody a new sense of togetherness: “The bud of *Tico* [Costa Rican] consciousness became visible in 1856, when Costa Ricans went to war against the American mercenary William Walker, who had taken over Nicaragua and was threatening a Central America conquest” (Molina and Palmer: 2004: 56). Additionally, massive educational reforms aimed at creating an open public institution – constructing the *Costa Rican* student, avid monument building promoted by a “bold, young political vanguard” that supported ideas of liberalism, positivism, and modernity – contributed to this push for

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<sup>22</sup> See (Acuña and Molina 1991; Molina 1987).

creating a particular Costa Rican state. Nationalism began to take form at this time, and such calls to arms demonstrated this, by simultaneously creating a patriotic attitude and becoming a consequence of it (ibid).

One Costa Rican fighter, Juan Santamaría, who died during the battle with Walker, became immortalized as a brave within legend and has remained symbolic of Costa Rica's victory. The stories about Santamaría paint the mulatto<sup>23</sup> peasant as a national hero who turned the battle to favor the Costa Ricans. Praising Santamaría's bravery paralleled creating a unified understanding of being Costa Rican (Palmer 2004: 92-93). Such reverence reflected a growing attitude in Costa Rica that aimed at nation building: "With messianic zeal, the priests of progress – lawyers, physicians, teachers, and journalists – began to spread the modern values of patriotism, capitalism, science, hygiene, and racial purity" (Molina and Palmer: 2012: 70). Along with the dissemination of the nationalist message and liberal reforms came an increase in elitism and racism. The Liberals distinguished people within Costa Rica from those in other Central American nations by "their work ethic, their peaceful nature, their status as landowners, and, above all, their membership in the white race" (Ibid: 72). The racist overtones and link between white supremacy and nationalism became increasingly salient when Santamaría was remembered as being mulatto, something some nationalists hid (Palmer 2004: 92).

The momentum and nationalist spirit thrived while progressive reforms emerged in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Such reforms attempted "to strengthen political authority, favor the expansion of capitalist agriculture, and 'civilize' the lower classes" (Molina and Palmer 2012: 69). Although education and social reform were popular and many saw benefits not previously enjoyed, there was also a prevailing elitist disposition that accompanied this growth and the measures for educational advancement. Many of the policy makers and powerful landowners assumed patronizing rhetoric that manufactured the image of a peasant as "uncivilized," "primitive," or "backwards." Similarly, the growing mulatto population on the Caribbean side of the country was often discriminated against and seen as Other against the sprouting mainstream nationalist message that enforced inclusion among Costa Ricans.

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<sup>23</sup> This term refers to an ethnic mix that includes African descent.



The late nineteenth and early twentieth century witnessed increasing patriotic rhetoric along with growing prominence of various new agricultural exports, and especially bananas. Banana plantations eventually rivaled coffee and turned Costa Rica into one of United Fruit's famous "banana republics." In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the United Fruit Company, a U.S. based corporation, spread throughout the Caribbean basin, establishing a monopoly over the region's banana industry, symbolic of U.S. economic imperialism. Subsequently, many problems accompanied the expansion and success of the banana business, such as health risks to workers and environmental degradation along with pesticide use.

This continued growth and exploitation meant more privatization of land, peasant revolts, and the creation of the Reformist (1923) and Communist (1931) Parties, each of which were reacting to what they felt were oppressive working conditions. The socio-political and financial distance between the upper class and the middle and lower classes grew, with little promise for social mobility and a proliferation of increasing inequality (Molina and Palmer 2012: 97-98). The preoccupation, buried in elitist and class-based rhetoric, with "evangelizing, civilizing, and redeeming the lower classes" was promoted by the Church, the Liberal state, and the young, radical intelligentsia (2012: 89). The class-based language here was used to categorize and identify those that were to be controlled and molded into the ideal that would become the Costa Rican character.

With an export-based economy, Costa Rica was already globalized and absorbed politico-economic consequences from events outside its borders. The New York Stock Market Crash of 1929 had disastrous effects on the Costa Rican economy, as values for imports and exports plummeted. Economic troubles continued into the 1930s, and in 1934, workers in the Caribbean zone carried out a famous strike against United Fruit. Although there was a call for reform earlier, the economic crash and subsequent strikes by thousands of workers helped convince President Rafael Calderón's government (1940-1944) that reforms were necessary. These reforms included founding the University of Costa Rica (1940), establishing a social security system (1941), writing social guarantees into the constitution, establishing a labor code (1943), minimum wage, low-cost housing, land reform, and national healthcare. Furthermore, Costa Rica proved to be an important exception during this period: it was one of the few countries in the world where democracy

did not collapse during the 1930s and that maintained a legal Communist Party in Central America to assist with unions and workers' rights (Molina and Palmer 2012: 102-103).

During the 1940s, a political rivalry between President Calderón and soon-to-be President José Figueres (1948-49; 1953-58; 1970-74) intensified, especially after Figueres leveled a scathing radio broadcast critiquing Calderón's government. Figueres was then exiled to Mexico (1942-44). Calderón supported the Allied forces during WWII and declared war on Nazi-occupied Europe. Subsequently, he expropriated the coffee farms and assets of German and Italian descendants living in Costa Rica, and interned many as well. The influential German minority then supported Figueres. By 1948, Figueres prepared a coup that would overthrow the government he believed guilty of abuse of power and election fraud (Edelman and Kenen 1989: 83-85).

The election of 1948 was contested, as the opposition party defeated Calderón's bid for reelection. The congress was overwhelmingly reelected along Calderón party lines and therefore some believed the popular vote for president had to be a mistake. The government called for a re-vote and nullified the election results, believing that Calderón had indeed been elected. In retaliation, Figueres launched a military campaign, and the Costa Rican Civil War began. Figueres established the National Liberation Party (PLN), and his army became known as the Liberation Army. His rhetoric of being the populist representative overthrowing an oppressive regime helped Figueres maintain much of his support. The most intense fighting left more than 4,000 people killed, in what was the worst outbreak of political violence in Costa Rican history (Molina and Palmer 2012: 114). After an especially bloody battle in Cartago, the government and *Calderonistas* knew they had lost and negotiated peace.

The agreement was meant to restore the original election results, but Figueres established a *Junta*, which controlled Costa Rica until November of 1949, followed by his intended candidate President Ulate (1949-53). The *Junta* put forth several policy changes, famously abolished the military, created a 10% tax on all capital over 50,000 *colones* (about \$8,000), nationalized the banks, thus eliminating the control of the coffee bourgeoisie over credit, promoted economic diversification, strengthened other social reforms, established the Costa Rican Electricity Institute, and created a greater tax rate on United Fruit exports (Molina and Palmer 2012: 115). Most of the social reforms by

Calderón were kept in place, but Figueres seized *Calderonista* assets and exiled many *Calderonistas*. Importantly, inequality was addressed in the form of greater access to voting, including an increase in ballot boxes that reached previously marginalized communities. Ideally, discrimination based on gender or race would decrease, and the new Constitution of 1949 finally secured women the right to vote. Although Costa Rican democracy was placed on a more inclusive path post-1949, problems of justice and equality remained.

During the period from 1821-1948, Costa Rica established a political entity largely based upon privileged access to land, an export-based economy, a national imaginary that favored European descendants, and a common understanding of social welfare. Despite some political instability during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed reforms that aimed at creating a more inclusive Costa Rican democracy – one that infused national pride with Progress that heavily depended on the political and economic centrality of land use.

### **Rebirth and Reform: 1949-1979**

1949 to 1979 was a period of reform where Costa Rica established a “welfare state” and invested greatly in social programs, which strengthened citizen participation in a growing economy. This is also the era on which generalizations of the country as a democratic haven amidst a violent Central American context are based. This section outlines the events that helped inform the image of a “modern” Costa Rica, highlights some costs, and foreshadows trends that expose some of the country’s strengths (e.g., healthcare, high literacy, economic growth) and weaknesses (e.g., dependency upon foreign markets, political dominance of the Central Valley, a landed elite). What follows are only a few examples of social unrest, land degradation, and migratory shifts during the development of the welfare state.

For decades, the Civil War would be remembered from the perspective of Liberación and Figueres was affectionately referred to as Don Pepe; but, especially since the 1980s, historians<sup>24</sup> have nuanced the nationalist message and explained that the social reforms of the two leaders were not so different, Calderón may have received the necessary

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<sup>24</sup> Edelman (1989; 1992; 1999); Molina and Palmer (2004; 2012).

votes, and the abolition of the military was a defensive move to disarm future coups rather than a mere act of peace (Edelman and Kenen 1989: 87). Without placing blame for the Civil War on either side, this historic moment is remembered as a break from the past and the creation of the fresh beginning of a peaceful democracy for which Costa Rica has come to be known. The social programs begun by Calderón were continued and protected under Figueres's new Constitution, building momentum for the country's popular welfare programs and a trajectory that delivered three decades of growing opportunities. This extension of equal rights and political access for citizens, assured that this period would revitalize the nation.

Simultaneously to welfare legislation, conflicts arose as a result of the transformation of land use and various export-based industries. Many were marginalized by intensified agricultural activities; including subsistence farmers, laborers, "squatters" (*precaristas*), and immigrants from nearby countries, some of whom were fleeing conflict or political instability. The southern Pacific region, including the Osa Peninsula and Golfito, became a new home for many immigrants, given its close proximity to Panama and its abundance of uncontrolled land. Perhaps because of Costa Rica's history of successful exports like cacao, coffee, and bananas, the dependence upon a stable agrarian structure meant that political peace and economic growth essentially accompanied complicated relations between landscape and all relevant parties as the industry intensified.

There were successes for both the Costa Rican Left and Right during the 1970s – a critical time when many social movements gained their momentum. Left-leaning<sup>25</sup> President Daniel Oduber (1974-78) played a large role in the development of conservation, despite his administration's pro-business reputation and the fact that environmentalism was an unprecedented political concern at that point. His prominent influence and agenda as it materialized in the Osa Peninsula, demonstrates an important instance of interaction between new conservation initiatives, government bureaucracy, rural settlers, and private interests. Both presidents Figueres (his third non-consecutive term) and Oduber delivered an intriguing mix of social and environmental welfare, along with growing businesses. The new Left in Costa Rica "witnessed a few golden years between 1970 and 1978," as under

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<sup>25</sup> A member of the PLN, Oduber reopened relations with Cuba in 1977 and once again legalized the Communist Party in 1975.

both Oduber's and Figueres's presidencies, the arts, education, research, and music each flourished (Molina and Palmer 2012: 140). The strengthening of the Left helped the budding interests in environmentalism at a time when deforestation was peaking. Also, the increased business prospects in Costa Rica brought foreign investment. As corporate interests clashed with *precarista*, environmental, and union demands, confrontations occurred between activists and corporations. Some activists were known as *Sandillas* [watermelons]: Communist red on the inside and eco-friendly green on the outside, implying a pro-worker agenda that used environmental health as a political tool.

During the three decades following the civil war of 1948, there was an increasingly invasive presence and power of foreign capital that tended to devalue local goods. Much of the profit and benefit from the surge in business had its impact outside of the country. Oduber's so-called "entrepreneur state" continued to grow public spending, as public investment in production increased between 1974 and 1977 at an annual rate of 183%. Primarily two things occurred: the absorption of credit that otherwise would have been allocated to the private sector and the great increase in foreign public debt from 164 million dollars in 1970 to over one billion dollars in 1978 (Molina and Palmer 2012: 141-143). After 1978, and especially during the 1980s, foreign debt would become a major economic concern (Edelman 1999). While globalization had taken root in Costa Rica, the ramifications were varied in that other movements like environmentalism, education, agrarian reform, and personal health and wellbeing were also affected by global elements.

Regional land politics become crucial for understanding the consequences of globalization. Nuancing scholarly perception of the influence of globalization in Central America is Edelman's (1995) critique of the popular "hamburger thesis," which stated in demand-based terms that U.S. consumption of fast-food hamburgers was directly responsible for most Central American pasture expansion and deforestation. We know that, at least in Costa Rica, this is not entirely the case because domestic demand has outpaced foreign exports from the late seventies and through the eighties, and deforestation was growing coincidentally due to various factors (mostly timber sales) during the late 20<sup>th</sup> century (Edelman 1995: 34-36). "Livestock sector stagnation" (Edelman 1995: 26) coincided with rising deforestation rates, tax incentives for large ranches, and tax incentives for making profits – structural terms that favored wealthier cattle ranchers, as inflation and

rising interest rates of the early eighties burdened smaller-scale producers (Edelman 1995: 31). This transformation of the beef industry in Costa Rica serves as an example for understanding a peripheral economy not as a passive dependent of the dynamic core (U.S. economy, for example), but as complex and dynamic itself – challenging scholars to complicate dependency theories and reframe globalization in Central America in light of regional demands, tax structures, land politics, and other area-specific indicators.

Known as the “golden age of the middle class,” the period from about 1950 to 1978 was marked with prosperity, but also with great difficulties for *campesinos* and wage laborers, and the environment. The successes of agribusinesses like beef, coffee, sugar, and bananas tended to move wealth to the high reaches of ownership, rather than shared with the majority of Costa Ricans, and environmental degradation and deforestation were exacerbated. As agricultural business was privileged over biodiversity conservation at that time, the environment was greatly altered towards those ends. The use of agro-chemicals created pollution that was poorly understood between 1950 and 1970, and has more recently faced litigation and entered into public discourse as a health hazard (Molina and Palmer 2012: 128-129).

Exploitation of natural resources without any regulatory policies in place meant serious health hazards for many workers, especially on the banana plantations. Steve Marquardt provides one example of environmental impact and its dangerous consequences. This occurred as technology advanced, agricultural businesses grew, and before environmental regulations and health hazards became public knowledge. The Bordeaux Mixture, a copper-heavy, blue-green substance sprayed by hand in many banana plantations, would completely cover the workers and give them the appearance of parakeets (Marquardt 2004: 302). While it was characteristic to disperse a pesticide by aircraft, the weight of the liquid mixture in this case was too great, and it therefore had to be sprayed by the workers on the ground. Consequently, they inhaled metals and toxins throughout the day. The mocking job title, parakeet, “suggests that plantation workers themselves saw spray work not as a step up into the brave new world of industry and technology, but rather as a humiliating task for those at the bottom of the plantation work hierarchy” (Marquardt

2004: 302). Echoing Rachel Carson's (1962) famous critique, *Silent Spring*,<sup>26</sup> Marquardt argued that the chemicals and metals were not only permanently toxic for the soil and plants, and dangerous for workers for whom long-term effects have included life-threatening illnesses, but they also created an emotional and mental cost. The workers embody the mocked identity of parakeets and pay with their health – a corporeal price for the efficiency and high profits of the banana industry.

Land became scarce as agricultural business grew, and settlers who had worked their land for years suddenly gained competition for property rights. Increases in immigration only exacerbated the territorial disputes, as most were farmers. Due to issues of displacement, rural families occupied lands without legal titles, taking the label “*precarista*.” The number of such families grew from 14,000 in 1963 to 17,421 in 1973, and at least 2,203 struggles over land were ignited. Most struggles occurred in Guanacaste, the Pacific south, and the Limón province where the expansion of agro-exports like bananas and beef were common. The social unrest generated from such conflicts precipitated a growth in bureaucracy, NGO or governmental agencies,<sup>27</sup> and groups devoted to quelling such complaints. Privileged access to power has been centered within San José, making uneven development (Smith 2010) all the more apparent, as 42% of the populace in 1973 centered within the urbanizing confines of San José and the Central Valley (Molina and Palmer 2012: 133). This distinction greatly affected the way that relationships could be built between groups of rural and urban residents. There have been conventional attitudes from both sides of this rural and urban divide that have roots in Costa Rica's history of a densely populated Central Valley becoming politically and economically influential, and a less populated periphery. Many of the urbanites saw rural residents like the *precaristas* as “backwards peasants,” while the rural settlers viewed the urban dwellers as corrupt, violent, and deceptive.

The legal conventions regarding small-scale farmer and migrant access to public land and subsequent valorization were challenged by intensive industry claims to land.

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<sup>26</sup> Marquardt claims to be making a departure from ecological historians like Carson, as his work focuses primarily on the wage laborers rather than environmental impacts in general (2004: 299).

<sup>27</sup> One example of a critical organization (discussed later) is the Institute for Land and Colonization created in 1962. Edelman and Kenen explain that after 1961's Alliance For Progress, “US policymakers began to encourage Latin American governments to carry out agrarian reforms as a means of undercutting more radical change” (1989: 169).

This challenge to land rights and access transformed from being represented by custom to being represented by law. Land occupancy agreements that date back to the 1950s and earlier held the understanding that cultivated and farmed land was good and useful; therefore, unclaimed land could simply be taken and legally occupied after usually three years of planting. As the agribusinesses grew in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and more interests for natural resource exploitation arrived, this “right to possession” law was made obsolete, replaced with a land title system, and land had to be legally possessed and titled in the name of its owner. This change in policy had dire implications for the *precaristas*, even though it was meant to protect their rights. Immigrants, furthermore, could be denied titles on the basis of citizenship and lacking a national tax identification number (*cedula*).

Many of the generalized labels for Costa Rica as a new “modern democracy” come from these three decades of economic growth and strengthening job security following 1949. Clearly, the limits to defining such growth have been tested and they are evident, for example, within land conflicts and environmental health hazards. Validating land rights and negotiating ethical practice regarding natural resource exploitation were to become central to the nation’s economic model and political future. Some of the most critical economic and political influences for Costa Rica today were to materialize during the eighties. Structural adjustment, a debt crisis, geopolitics, and growing private sector interest would transform the reformist state. Although there were already some conflicts arising around land use, inequality would be exacerbated in the decades to come.

### **New Directions and the Rise of Tourism: 1979-Present**

This section outlines change within the agro-export economy, the dissolution of the welfare state, structural adjustment, tumultuous geopolitics, and the emergence of tourism as the country’s latest and now most prominent export. Natural resources and various forms of land use have remained critical factors within Costa Rican political economy and everyday life. The greening image of nature is integral to Costa Rica’s fame; and the prosperity of nature, through its commodification as the latest agro-export, reinforces a financial purpose for that fame. Although Costa Rican environmentalism developed slightly earlier, it is in this context that the movement gained most of its momentum. There



was once a farmers' market in Puerto Jiménez at the entrance to town, near an old dock on Golfo Dulce. There is no such farmers' market today – the area is taken up by a foreign-owned hotel offering various “eco-tours.” The shift away from a strong agrarian production towards tourism is one of the most important recent changes in Costa Rican livelihood. This version of commodified nature would reaffirm the importance of resource exploitation and control.

The transformational 1980s witnessed a changing Costa Rican welfare state and a move towards liberal trade and structural adjustments that, in many ways, continue to the present day (Booth 1998; Edelman 1999; Edelman and Kenen 1989; Molina and Palmer 2004, 2012; Perez-Brignoli 1989; Woodward 1999). Foreign debt, global interests, and free trade all played roles in converting the welfare state into a haven for capital investment at the cost of rising income inequality and rising poverty. This change would also bring a transition from an agribusiness economy to one where foreign exchange would overtake as the largest cash crop (Edelman 1999). Tourism, as the new export, changed not only employment opportunities but also the consciousness regarding what natural resources were and how they were to be used. Nature, in materialist terms, would begin to change from the potential of cultivating sellable things to an attraction that must be guarded.

The socio-economic transformation of Costa Rica's late 20<sup>th</sup> century indicates a political and economic shift of the typical middle-class during the “golden age,” or welfare state of 1950-78, constituted by professionals, teachers, farmers, and public employees, towards a more precarious and informal middle-class workforce. The growth of new exports, trade, tourism, private banking, service sector positions like call centers, online gambling, and more recently, the arrival of the Intel Corporation, assured that this transformation would link more workers to foreign capital than before (Molina and Palmer 2012: 162-163). This marked the undoing of the welfare state and many of its benefits including powerful unions, political entities committed to social change and equality, and workers' rights (Molina and Palmer 2012: 164); a challenge for the progressive agenda for social justice because it privileged free-market economics and corporate control.

One such example has been the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) between the United States, Dominican Republic, and Central America (Ibid: 178), a processes of globalization described as “cultural transnationalization” (Ibid: 169). Not only

were socio-economic changes during this period accompanied by free trade, but also changes in everyday life, pop-culture, film, music, and other products that have transformed the experience of being Costa Rican. While there were suddenly more goods, there was also more inequality (Ibid: 173). Immigration rose (due partly to political unrest in neighboring countries), and many service, agriculture, and construction jobs were taken up by this incoming population (Molina and Palmer 2012: 162-163). Most of the immigrants were from Nicaragua,<sup>28</sup> and current estimates state roughly 800,000 Nicaraguan descendants living in Costa Rica, making up about 17% of the population.

Costa Rica defaulted on foreign loans and had realized inflation and lack of capital (Edelman 1999). The economic crash of the early eighties was difficult for Costa Ricans: the per capita GDP fell 10% in 1982 after already beginning a drop during 1979, real salaries decreased 30%, unemployment increased to 9%, and inflation climbed to 90% (Molina and Palmer 2012: 145). Poverty nearly doubled and debt skyrocketed. This period for Costa Ricans, and Latin Americans more generally, during the early 1980s became known as “Latin America’s worst economic crisis since the Great Depression” (Edelman 1999: 1). Companies like United Fruit which had provided employment for many, left areas in the Pacific south (Molina and Palmer 2012: 145); meaning immediate unemployment and increases in poaching, gold mining, and other illicit activities in the Osa Peninsula.

Such economic woes at a time when free-market “solutions” were popular, mixed with foreign debt and growing global interest for investments in Costa Rica, meant that the debt crisis forced Costa Rica’s doors open even farther and the nation became increasingly globalized (see Edelman 1999; Edelman and Kenen 1989: 191). As Edelman explains, the eighties saw a tide of aid organization interests like the IMF and USAID appear to restructure the Costa Rican economy on the assumption that the social welfare state had failed (Edelman 1999: 78-79). Times of disaster are apt opportunities for economic restructuring that may not have been possible under banal circumstances (Klein 2007). The timing was ripe for foreign intervention and control, privatization, and increased attention from many NGOs – groups that would become permanent fixtures within Costa Rica’s

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<sup>28</sup> In 2005, approximately 75% of residents born abroad were Nicaraguan. See: <http://www.inec.go.cr/Web/Home/GeneradorPagina.aspx>. In 2005, Nicaraguans made up 5.7% (267,900 individuals) of the total population (4.27 million), not including people who claim Nicaraguan descent.

private sector. Silvia Lara summarizes: “Privatization came to be regarded not simply as one possible remedy but as part of an all-encompassing ideological imperative” (1995: 36).

Along with the growing wealth and foreign attraction came new challenges and means of resistance, exemplified in Costa Rican literature by Anacristina Rossi’s (1992) *La Loca de Gandoca*. Rossi’s book championed issues surrounding women’s rights, indigenous rights, and the environment. The heroine of this bestseller is a passionate woman or *loca* [mad woman] who protests aggressive “ecotourist” development in the Caribbean coastal region of Gandoca. Rossi’s protagonist pleads with the Constitutional Tribunal to make her case: “Shelter me from life gone awry and from premature death. Everything here is dying like soldiers breathing deadly gas. Trees are falling before the buzz of chainsaws, the pools and springs are drying up...” (2004: 315). Rossi’s work came to embody the resistance to “green-washing,” the use of ecologically sound rhetoric to portray private development schemes in more favorable light. Her work in activism and literature influenced debates over regulating natural resource use and respecting indigenous populations despite the demands of private development.

Like cacao, coffee, beef, and bananas, tourism represented a new important transformative industry in Costa Rica. As early as the mid-eighties, tourism began to consume much of the labor market. Molina and Palmer give a helpful account of its beginning and its trajectory:

The exceptional biodiversity of Costa Rica and the structure of parks and natural reserves (covering just over a quarter of the national territory in 2003) have provided the basis for the promotion of the country as an ideal destination for the ecotourist from Europe, Canada and the United States in particular. The rapid growth in foreign tourism began in 1985, and reached one million people in 1999. By 2004, almost 1.5 million tourists generated \$1.3 billion in revenue and 7% of GDP (2012: 159).

Today, there are over 2.5 million tourists annually – visiting a country of approximately 4.8 million people (2015 estimate),<sup>29</sup> and generating more revenue than the top agro-exports combined (Edelman 1999). Conservation has helped the tourist industry, as many enthusiasts visit to view the wildlife and experience the beauty of Costa Rica’s tropical waters and landscapes. Conservation has also become an embedded aspect of the industry and necessary language for the ecotourism industry.<sup>30</sup> Honey and Stewart (2002) define

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<sup>29</sup> See: <http://www.inec.go.cr/Web/Home/GeneradorPagina.aspx>

<sup>30</sup> See: Honey (2008).

ecotourism as “a set of principles and practices” that “focuses on what the traveler does, plus the impact of this traveler on both the environment and the people in the host country” (1). Ecotourism inserts ethically charged language into the industry and suggests “sustainable” practices that are meant to better the immediate environment and create regionally beneficial socio-economic impact. The new economy has come to depend upon “precious spaces.” Threats to conservation, therefore, are threats to the tourism industry.

The tumultuous global geo-politics of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century manifested as a time marked by Cold War paranoia, violent uprisings, and bloody dictatorships throughout Central America. Costa Rica’s relative peace during this time created an ideal place for eager tourists and tropical researchers. The country found itself surrounded by turmoil and pushed by the U.S. to play an anti-Sandinista<sup>31</sup> role regarding the warfare in Nicaragua. President Óscar Arias (1986-1990; 2006-2010) won the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts brokering a deal between war-torn countries of Central America (Edelman and Kenen 1989: 269). Although Arias opened the country for the United States to support the Contras against the Sandinistas, he did not submit to U.S. pressure to amend the peace agreements – something neighboring countries saw as a negotiating strength for the defiance against U.S. interests (Edelman and Kenen 1989: 274-275). When the country accepted participation within U.S. President Ronald Reagan’s Roads for Peace initiative,<sup>32</sup> Costa Rica allowed the United States access to position itself militarily within its borders. Hence, the United States built a number of strategic roads, bridges, and other infrastructural advances (including some within the Osa Peninsula). The contemporary era for Costa Rica meant porous borders, and constantly redefining social democracy, citizen welfare, economic structure, and relations with foreigners and their governments.

### **Nationalism and Contradictions**

Returning to the national imaginary systematically linked to land and resource use, this section opens with one Costa Rican myth, and suggests that issues of inequality and

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<sup>31</sup> Sandanistas, a Nicaraguan political party, led the 1970s revolution there. Given the communist leanings of the Sandanistas, the U.S. supported the Contras during the 1980s in hopes of regaining regional influence.

<sup>32</sup> Edelman and Kenen (1989) explain that this was a disruption of Costa Rican sovereignty and call Reagan’s policies a “covert crusade to back the rebels [contras]” (xvii).

corruption are often overlooked when such myths are disseminated. Costa Rica as the “Switzerland of the Americas” has reinforced the idea of Costa Rican exceptionalism; one that places the nation in contrast to other Latin American nations and assumes Costa Rica to be more peaceful, democratic, and egalitarian, and an exception to some generalized rule to which all other Latin American nations assimilate. Ironically, the “Switzerland of the Americas” stereotype, popularized in print in 1935, was not originally intended as a complement but as a critique. The stereotype’s author, Mario Sancho, used the phrase to highlight “corruption” and “decadence” – a call for radical change within the nation’s politics (Molina and Palmer 2012: 116).

The genealogy of Costa Rican identity and exceptionalism until approximately the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century reflected, in part, a racialized (sometimes, racist), elitist, but egalitarian sense of pride felt for a lasting peaceful democracy supported by socialist-minded farmers. The nation’s ability to imagine its constituents in terms of their Spanish heritage, maintenance of social justice and reforms, and subsistence and agri-produce practices created the conditions necessary for that national imaginary to occur, constructing a particularly Costa Rican rural communal identity. From the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, this national imaginary has been challenged by the fact that Costa Rica has become increasingly diverse and differentiated, multicultural, multiracial, urbanized, less secure, and more socio-economically focused upon consumption and “modern” notions of competitiveness (Booth 1998; Molina and Palmer 2012: 174). The elements of xenophobia and discrimination, imbibed within this Costa Rican imaginary, are seen within the discrimination against Nicaraguan migrants and mulattoes, for example. Problems such as income inequality, poverty, and unemployment continue to be overlooked in conventional discourse, and pose a threat to the notion of Costa Rica as a paradise. As hesitant as scholars are to identify veracity within the Costa Rican exception, they do note that the sustained peaceful democracy surrounded by the “sad norm” of political violence in Latin America is a triumph (Molina and Palmer 2012: 181).

Despite such triumphs for Costa Rica that do warrant some of the unique qualities that many label upon the nation, there continue to be failures. A ubiquitous and common critique of politics in Costa Rica is that politicians are corrupt, fostering an atmosphere of distrust between people and their official representatives, and, “corruption appears over and

over again as a mechanism for the privatization for socially created wealth” (González and Solís 2004: 338-339). Some politicians were caught in such (or similar) scandals. President Rafael Calderón (1990-94), the son of the former president, and another of his party’s serving presidents, were each sentenced to five years in prison over corruption scandals. President José Figueres (1994-98), another son of political fame, was also investigated for corruption although not formally charged. Many Costa Ricans believe that he was waiting for the charges to clear while living in Europe and conveniently returned when he felt it was politically safe. Molina and Palmer label this the “super-corruption during the 1990s,” and a time of “increasing social inequality” (2012: 174-175), given that each elected president was either sentenced or investigated for crimes and the vertical business models, privatization, made political greed more obvious. Former president Laura Chinchilla’s (2010-14) administration suffered unflattering rumors and an investigation as well. Even Nobel Peace Prize winner, Arias, was accused of favoritism, controversial behavior, and corruption regarding the Crucitas mine and telecommunications infrastructure. Some believe that when the Ministry of Environment and Energy (MINAE) added telecommunications (changing the name to MINAET), the government was favoring certain businesses with family ties that would misuse the public funds for private interests. Near the site of fieldwork, in Golfito, at least two former mayors were indicted on corruption charges – a common occurrence and reason for many regional residents to lose faith in the government.

There is an interesting juxtaposition between the presidencies of the 1990s and the mid-twentieth century, given that the sons of Figueres and Calderón served consecutive terms. Unlike their fathers, who were more concerned with social welfare and creating the foundation of the representative democracy Costa Rica enjoyed, the two sons were not focused on reform, and instead prioritized big business and liberal trade policies. Perhaps also a reflection of global patterns, this marks a shift in the socio-economic structure of Costa Rica and suggests more political interests in large profits and corporate power within politics. This socio-economic trend also complicates Costa Rican nationalism, emphasizing growing trends of consumerism and participation in global markets as now part of an evolving Costa Rican national identity.

But to what extent does Costa Rica make its own history, and how should scholars treat the question of the region's political economy integrally linked to globalization? I propose a balance between recognition of agency within dependent peripheral economies that create their own histories within the structures of global power relations (Molina and Palmer 2012: 182), and acknowledgement of structural injustices that mark such nations as Other to dynamic European hegemony (Wolf 1982). Geopolitics and other forces of domination are integrally linked to making, imagining, and challenging the nation.

Much of the historical perception of nationalism in Costa Rica has been in play with the country's agrarian structure, foreign relations (both violent and peaceful), defining an imaginary ideal – haunted by colonial elitism, and a type of nationalism central to the socio-political powers at hand. Many scholars view nationalism as an inherent quality of the modern era (Hobsbawm 1992; Smith 1995; Anderson 2006; Gellner 2006), a phenomenon that grew with the advent of print capitalism to create an imagined community (Anderson 2006), the homogenizing efforts of state-based education and common literacy (Gellner 2006), and a fluid political entity in transformation (Hobsbawm 1992). Following Hobsbawm, the nation assumes a political claim that reflects the will of a self-contained group of people to reproduce that label, and to be internationally recognized as such (1992: 8). Costa Rica's relatively high literacy rate and the educational reforms reveal, then, construction of a collective *tico* [Costa Rican] consciousness, alongside the claims of the post-Civil War constitution, a centralized public claim for the practice of a particular identity. Whilst the *tico* community is imagined and the arbitrary national borders are products of certain historical processes (i.e., not inevitable), the implications therein structure daily life and socio-political movements, informing a phenomenon like biodiversity conservation – marking it with *tico* patriotism, elitism, and global consumerism.

## **Conclusion**

The account provided here has shown how Costa Rica's emergence differs from that of its neighbors. The chapter has outlined the nation-building process for the country, and complicated common misconceptions and stereotypes that have purported Costa Rica as a

peaceful agrarian democracy free from strife. Roots of such stereotypes share racist and elitist sentiments meant to homogenize the population, and the exposure of this, by Costa Rican historians or other critics, illuminates the constitution of this particular type of nationalism. The lionization of Juan Santamaria, emphasis on social reforms during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and education reforms that date as early as the 19<sup>th</sup> century attest to the efforts placed upon securing a sense of being Costa Rican.

Costa Rica's national imaginary, as shown here, has been integrally linked to resource exploitation and the construction of a landed elite. The politics afforded by such conditions influence the conception of nature and movements like environmentalism that mirror the political economy of resource use outlined above. In this respect, Costa Rica is the realization of an agrarian frontier inserted into the global economy, and entangled with trade liberalization from its inception as a colonial space to its structural adjustments during the 1980s. The development of conservationism in Costa Rica and the political ecology of the Osa Peninsula reflect the shifts outlined in its political history, and continue to demonstrate the integral importance of resource planning as a central defining factor for the citizenry and the conceptualization of Costa Rican spaces.



## Chapter 2

# Political Ecology and the Burgeoning Conservation Movement in the Osa Peninsula

The history of land use and resource extraction within the Osa, especially during the 1970s, shows conflict to be inseparable from land use – reflecting controversy that informs the perception many residents share today regarding resource planning and control. The creation of two state reserves, Corcovado National Park (PNC) and the Golfo Dulce Forest Reserve (RFGD), were initiated subsequently to the expropriation of the United States-based timber company, Osa Productos Forestales (OPF), which occupied much of the same territory. Many of the farmers, squatters, and gold miners on the Osa saw both the timber company and the state-sponsored conservation area as invasive, setting course for a pattern of antagonism between Osa residents and outsiders, whether state officials, foreigners making private investments, or environmentalists claiming to work for the interests of biodiversity. Beyond providing some explanation for skeptical attitudes towards the state and other entities operating in the Osa, this chapter – like the thesis overall – problematizes the notion of Costa Rica as a “green republic,” while simultaneously exploring radical moves within the government to centralize environmentalism as a public concern. More specifically, the chapter introduces contentious entanglements regarding land use and “green grabbing” (Fairhead, Leach, and Scoones 2012) in the Osa since the mid-twentieth century.

As previously noted, I argue that environmentalism – and biodiversity conservation more specifically – in Costa Rica is best viewed in light of at least five themes: (1) the motivation for making a living and financial incentives; (2) capitalism and the commodification of nature; (3) environmentality, “green imperialism” (Grove 1995), and the imposition of a set of values with practical consequences; (4) nature loving; and (5) negotiating, exporting, and promoting a national identity within that environmental

framework. These themes will become more evident below and build on the political context already provided. The local focus shows which actors are implicated and how they are entangled within the tensions regarding land use, illuminating a more complex treatment than the nationwide outline in the previous chapter. This chapter situates the ethnographic work to follow by explaining how conflicts between residents and incoming interests occurred, whose interests were privileged, how the marginalization of residents would be treated, and why some residents would view the state's protected areas as violent impositions and policing.

Costa Rica's political and economic history outlined in the previous chapter is reflected within the chronology provided here, as unfolding events mirror one another, and it becomes clear how the growth of the conservationist movement is entangled within the nation's political agenda. The first section briefly outlines Costa Rican environmentalism in its larger regional context before moving to the particularities of the Osa. I provide an overview of Costa Rican conservation, and move into the thematic connections between nationalism and environmentalism. The following section provides a chronology of notable events within the Osa during the mid-late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Here, the political ecology of the area is explored, representing a consistent pattern of migration, settling, extraction, and imperialism as a quest for resources and protection of state interests. Specifically, the brewing animosity within much of the local populace towards outsiders is better clarified with this genealogy in place. Political ecology is a viable framework for understanding the politics of land use in the Osa, given the map of current interests and planning with regards to priorities set by conservationists, the private sector, and the state.

### **Outlining Costa Rican Environmentalism**

This section briefly introduces trends in environmental policy in order to situate Costa Rica's environmental movement in its relative Latin American context. I then continue and outline the Costa Rican conservation movement in general, showing the important shifts in its logic and practice. Finally, before moving to the specifics of the Osa,

various moments of entanglement between nationalism, patriotic messaging, and environmentalism are explained.

### *Governance and Regional Policy*

Many young Costa Rican environmentalists claim that environmentalism (specifically, biodiversity conservation) is changing from fortress conservation to a community outreach platform; and the shift reflects the variety of environmental governance styles in Latin America. Some of these styles involve varying degrees of commodification of resources. Vandana Shiva discusses two paradigms within biodiversity conservation generally: “the dominant paradigm sees conservation as dependent on financial investments, which are, in turn, linked to increased economic growth, international trade and consumption,” and, secondly, “conserving biodiversity as the very basis of production, which ensures that both nature and people’s livelihoods are protected” (in Vandermeer and Perfecto 1995: ix). The former paradigm suggests nature’s commodification, while the latter seems to anticipate some form of sustainable development and suggests care of the ecological system which includes humans – proposing nature as foundational to production. Similarly, this dominant paradigm parallels the Green Economy (de Castro, Hogenboom, and Baud 2016), and reworks the “model of participation through citizenship” by reinforcing the model of “participation through compensation” (3). Ecological citizenship or governance is practiced and financially rewarded. This ethic, the drive towards a Green Economy, will mark a transformational shift for Costa Rica.

Environmental governance in Latin America, for de Castro, Hogenboom, and Baud (2016: 4), is “the multiple conceptualizations of and claims over nature as part of a contested sphere;” and this framework guides scholars of Latin American conservation towards perceiving multiple natures that reflect the web of interests involved within the practice of biodiversity conservation. This web includes biological understandings of ecosystems and biodiversity, state incentives for various forms of revenue, subsistence farming, the commodification of nature, and affective senses of belonging. The frictions

created within this assemblage give rise to burgeoning possibilities for subjectivity. The implications for conservation as a political act will become clearer below, and the Osa's political ecology indicates that contested sphere. Costa Rican environmental governance is best described as a "hybrid governance model composed by state-centered, market-based and local-based mechanisms" (Ibid: 7). As mentioned above in the series of five themes within environmental practice, conservation is indeed hybrid; and the concerns are not mutually exclusive, but they coexist in tension with one another.

Costa Rica's particular style of conservation governance has become increasingly entangled with widespread ideas of socio-economic "progress," which tends to foreshadow sustainable development. By the 1990s, Costa Rica had participated in debt-for-nature swaps, where foreign entities would buy discounted national debt for the ability to manage a protected area (Evans 1999: 158). The country has been a REDD+ pioneer, reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, and had developed a well-regarded national park system. Costa Rica's payment for environmental services program (PES or, Spanish, PSA), has become a model within communities of environmental governance, especially among agrarian-based societies in the (neo)tropics. There has been a longstanding promise to be "carbon neutral" and achieve 100% clean energy use by 2021 – the bicentennial anniversary of independence from Spain. Paul Steinberg notes, "Costa Rica had a strong environmental regulatory agency, had pioneered concepts like ecotourism and biodiversity prospecting, was home to hundreds of citizens' environmental groups," (2001: 3) and the nation's political leadership has historically centralized environmental policy – increasingly so, as the cash draw from tourism has become clearer. Detailed analysis of environmental governance in Costa Rica has shown the importance of engaging with local complexities in context (Basurto 2007). This thesis will complicate the "environmental success story" and "stark exception to the rest of Central America" (Schelhas and Pfeffer 2008: xv) by revealing, through various practices, what is meant by the creation of this "exception" or "success;" how the greening national image is sold to prospecting and tourism markets; how environmentalism splinters into ambiguous forms; and the role of power and privilege in defining the terms upon which successes are determined.

*In Overview*

It is helpful to view Costa Rican environmentalism in stages (paralleling the nation's political economy), including the environmental movement before the debt crisis of the eighties, and the movement's later stage occurring after the debt crisis. The broad concerns of environmentalism, stewardship and exploitation of resources, and scientific interest in land and biodiversity have deep roots, and the scope of those topics is beyond what can be discussed here. I focus, rather, on biodiversity conservation as it manifested through policy and activism beginning in the late sixties; therefore, much of what may fall under the ambiguous definition of environmentalism in Costa Rica is not discussed.

As a global trend, conservation policies were manifested as political movements during the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Evans 1999: 53). While there is some earlier precedent for national land protection policy in Costa Rica (as elsewhere), it was not enacted forcefully and the movement's momentum builds later with the rise in global attention to pollution issues (Ibid: 53-54). The first use of the term "national park" within Costa Rican legislation occurred in 1945, after biologists recommended the large oak trees lining the Pan-American Highway be protected (Ibid: 55). In contrast to the laws that would follow two and three decades later, this one was not effective and the oak trees were cut. While there is evidence of conservation-minded activities and internationally recognized treaties signed during the 1940s and 50s, many policies did not go into effect until much later. The Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAG)<sup>33</sup> added a Forestry Section division that remained in effect through the mid-1990s, in order to manage wood as a resource, not unlike livestock (Evans 1999: 56). The Wildlife Conservation Law of 1956 was unprecedented in its claim to protect wildlife, and thus biodiversity also came within the purview of the MAG offices (Ibid: 57). Among the most critical pieces of legislation during the sixties regarding struggles over land use are the Forest Law and Law of Lands and Colonizations (see Appendix D for both). The pre-1980 elements of the Costa Rican conservation movement contribute the most to the popular narrative of passionate ecologists and biologists preserving land and biodiversity amidst struggles over land rights.

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<sup>33</sup> Ministerio de Agricultura y Ganadería.

Later movements would contain a more varied approach that includes financial profit incentives and less zeal for conserving “nature for nature’s sake.”

More controls over land meant a change in what subsistence farmers had known, and a clash in practice between the growing desires for increased conservation alongside the need for land to support livelihoods. The Squatter Law<sup>34</sup> of 1942 predated the Institute for Lands and Colonization by twenty years and was meant to address land disputes, which should have functioned to give farming inhabitants rights, while also creating norms for government control and increasing privatization. “Vacant lands” under government control that had previously been available for settlement were increasingly re-appropriated for other purposes. President Figueres identified this as a problem in 1949, and the government finally developed the Land and Colonization Law in 1961 (Appendix D), which established the Institute for Lands and Colonization (ITCO) meant to regulate the exploitation of natural resources, and assign rights to farmers to secure private property (Evans 1999: 59). Evans outlines an early history of ITCO’s effects: “In the first ten years of its implementation (1962-1972), 3.7% of rural families (n=7,174) received ITCO benefits – mainly in the form of obtaining legal rights to land they had already been occupying” (1999: 60). ITCO has had two more recent incarnations: first, the Institute for Agricultural Development (IDA), and currently, the Institute for Rural Development (INDER). With the expansion of ranchland and farming during the sixties and seventies, struggles for legal titles and occupancy were exacerbated.

The importance of the 1970s for the conservation movement and the work of individuals like Alvaro Ugalde, Mario Boza, and President Oduber will be discussed further below. The political involvement in international wildlife conservation developed during the seventies and culminated in 1980 with the First National Congress on Wildlife Conservation. This, “organized by the Biological Studies Department of MAG and the National Wildlife Protector Committee,” was directed by Hernán Fonseca (MAG), Gerardo Budowski (CATIE<sup>35</sup>), and Augustín Rodríguez (Costa Rican Institute for Electricity). Participants and presenters included many important figures for Costa Rican conservation like Boza, Joseph Tosi, and Christopher Vaughan (Evans 1999: 58). Conservation in this

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<sup>34</sup> Ley de Parásitos or Ley de Poseedores en Precario.

<sup>35</sup> The Tropical Agricultural Research and Higher Education Center.

form conflicted with some private interests and with dispossessed settlers; it was more science-based and geared towards wildlife and ecosystem preservation; and it was also less ambiguous (compared with today's movement) when considering the overlap with capitalism.

The establishment of national parks and wildlife conservation areas mark the realization of environmental policies, the desires of activists and scientists, and the connections between conservation and the state. The motivations and interests for establishing the national parks are mixed; while there was some involvement from the Costa Rican Tourism Institute (ICT) and other tourism-minded parties, Ugalde has stated in public appearances that tourism was not at all on his mind when completing the work. The construction of the Costa Rican national park system – from the enforcement of the Forest Law through to the seventies – was a unique achievement for Central America. Individuals like Ugalde and Boza, two enthusiastic and passionate activists aiming to protect the diverse ecosystems and scientific research potential of Costa Rica, were assisted by President Daniel Oduber (1974-1978) and the former First Lady Doña Karen Olsen Figueres (1970-1974). This collaboration was integral to creating the national park system.

The Forest Law of 1969 (Appendix D) created the National Parks Department within the General Forestry Directorate (DGF), a division of MAG (Evans 1999: 72). The Costa Rican Forest Law was a watershed moment, and is especially praised by environmentalists as critically influential. The law has been regarded as the leading factor that influences ecological stewardship and behavior, legal prohibition and management of tree felling that have forced an end to rampant deforestation. The 1969 law (*Ley Forestal 4465*) was in force until it was replaced with a new version in 1996 (*Ley Forestal 7575*). Boza was selected to head the National Parks Department, given his educational background with UCR and a master's degree from CATIE, studying under Gerardo Budowski and Kenton Miller. Boza's passion for conservation was cited as one reason for his selection (Ibid: 73). Like many Costa Rican environmentalists, Boza began with an interest in teakwood production, which transformed into the preservation of biodiversity and ecosystems based upon an understanding of biology. In 1967, he toured U.S. national parks, finding the Smokey Mountains particularly inspiring. He completed a one-month training course in Aspen, Colorado in 1968 and began to think critically about what

constitutes a national park; how to guide the visitor's gaze, what to highlight, the importance of a visitor center, access, signs, and the styles of management. Boza then traveled to what is now Tortuguero National Park on Costa Rica's Caribbean Coast, attending an event that gathered many of the most important conservationists of the late sixties: the turtle expert Archie Carr and his family, President Figueres and First Lady Doña Karen (about to lead a successful bid for a third term), Budowski, Miller, and Ugalde (a UCR student at that time). In 1969, Boza cited what he perceived as successful nature-based tourism in East Africa as one model for what Costa Rican biodiversity protections could aspire to (Ibid: 75), in order to appeal to public support for conservation. When goals for the national parks were set, aesthetics, dramatic features within the landscape, and particularly important biological ecosystems were considered among the most important factors for conservation (Evans 1999: 79).

The inception and subsequent controversies surrounding Santa Rosa National Park in northwest Costa Rica exemplify not only the complexity and struggle within the early conservation movement, but also the negotiation of nationalism and definition of Costa Rican land. Evans writes, "In March of 1971 which happened to be the 115<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the battle against William Walker and the filibusters, Santa Rosa's status was changed from 'national monument' to 'national park' to become Costa Rica's second official national park" (1999: 80). This park, First Lady Doña Karen explains, represented a "symbol for the homeland, a symbol for the future development of Guanacaste, and a symbol for the integration of the entire Costa Rican family because it is here that one finds the past, the present, and the future" (in Ibid).<sup>36</sup> Stretching from the rocky coastline to the place where Walker was defeated, what was once a national monument and war memorial is now a national park. The First Lady's comments link the past and sense of patriotic duty to the future sustained enjoyment and appreciation of Santa Rosa for generations of Costa Ricans. The policy and practice of environmental protection is becoming patriotic here; the defeat of Walker's army is recalled, which was an event that brought together disparate populations of Costa Ricans under the protection of one united banner. The park's grand opening ceremony also called the attention of the international environmental community

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<sup>36</sup> See also: *La República*, March 22, 1971, P. 10.



and was meant to be a momentous occasion that placed Costa Rican environmental successes on the map of important conservation initiatives (Ibid: 79-80).

This did not occur without its contradictions, however, and the new park (as a new concept for public digestion) was the center of some scandal. Even the soon-to-be president and celebrated environmentalist Daniel Oduber was running cattle in Santa Rosa National Park. He had been a rancher and retained many cattle interests in Guanacaste, so he attempted to pass legislation to change the status of the park in order to retain cattle rights. The legislation failed, largely due to Doña Karen's activism, and Oduber would remember the shift in agenda and public opinion when assisting Ugalde with Corcovado National Park's construction just a few years later. The MAG director was also running cattle, and there was little Ugalde or Boza could do, as the perpetrator was their boss. Ugalde began to speak out and his voice became louder when the MAG director began harvesting hay. At this point, Ugalde was moved from Santa Rosa to Poás National Park, and the MAG director accepted the appropriateness of the park regulations that curb agricultural use.

In addition to the appeals to nationalism and patriotism when Ugalde and Boza promoted the parks, international support began to build, and the parks were supported by NGOs, funding bodies, and environmentalist groups abroad, creating international causes of these nationalist symbols (Evans 1999: 88-89). As many Costa Rican officials did not yet share the enthusiasm of activists like Boza and Ugalde, there were not enough resources to manage the parks and continue conserving, so seeking funds abroad was critical (Ibid: 83-84). The fact that Manuel Antonio National Park is named after a Spanish *conquistador* buried there (Ibid: 89) demonstrates the affection held for Costa Rica's Spanish roots enacted through its policy, a homage which some areas of Latin America (Bolivia, for example) avoid in order to protest European hegemony. While there was already some international support for Costa Rica's national parks during the seventies, the international influence during the eighties would greatly surpass this.

The financial crisis began in 1979 and the international debt crisis worsened by the early eighties; Costa Rica had the highest per capita debt in Latin America (Evans 1999:109), and these circumstances greatly impacted how the parks could be operated. Given the foreign debt and structural adjustment changes including attention from the IMF,

UN, and the World Bank, the nation became more globalized. The conservation movement greatly expanded during this decade, and the post-crisis era of Costa Rican conservation shares more with such practices today than the early days: scrambling and struggling, headed by impassioned students, endeavoring to establish a fortress-style conservation area. Most Costa Rican conservation has proceeded in the shadow of neoliberal reforms, globalization, and a built-in financial incentive strategy. Despite the country's economic trouble, government-regulated conservation expanded with outside help because of growing political import (Ibid: 112-113). In fact, every president since Figueres in 1970 would arguably self-describe as an environmentalist.

Some accounts describe conservation during the financial crises (and throughout the eighties) as "thriving" (Evans 1999: 126). Tax incentives for maintaining forest health were issued (Ibid: 124), and debt-for-nature swaps began. Boza promoted new parks with comparisons to Kenyan tourism (Ibid: 123). There was an unprecedented amount of foreign support, including that of NGOs, research institutes, and the UN, which teamed up with the Costa Rican government and local foundations (Ibid: 120). Scientific practice and research, activism, and tourism were not the only motivating factors for foreign interests in the parks, as a secret airstrip was discovered in Santa Rosa National Park where the United States trained militants to oppose the nearby Sandinista government (with scandalously obtained Iranian money). Similarly, in the south, the Noriega government worried the United States, so they used the Osa Peninsula as a military launching pad, which led to the construction of roads and bridges. Strong global ties and the international debt helped create the conditions that made such military campaigns possible.

Costa Rican conservation strategy transformed to incorporate sustainable development as a central concern (Evans 1999: 154-155), which coincided with talk surrounding the Brundtland Report of 1987. This focus had included environmental education and ecotourism (Ibid: 171-173), for the purposes of disseminating awareness of environmental issues, building momentum for the conservation movement, and opening a new economic sector based upon the commodification of nature.

One example of the overlap between corporate interests and biodiversity conservation is the deal between Costa Rica's InBio, National Biological Diversity Institute, and Merk, a pharmaceutical company, in 1991 (Guha and Martinez-Alier 1997:

119-120). The InBio case represents a public and private merger that seeks to protect and research biodiversity. With access to conserved areas in Costa Rica, the group collected samples and sold some rights to Merck for that company to profit from their research. Guha and Martinez-Alier argue that workers in poorer countries are dispossessed of their lands, and, in hopes of employment in agriculture or extractive industries, “forced to sell their labor and their health cheaply, if not gladly” (1997: 120). Guha and Martinez-Alier believe the deal was completed too much in the favor of the pharmaceutical company and did not fairly represent the interests of Costa Ricans due to the difference in cost when paying for InBio’s access versus the potential profit when selling the drugs. The authors continue, “The poor sell cheap. But future human generations, and other species, cannot even come to market” (Ibid). The essentialization of the workers and the nation aside, Martinez-Alier and Guha critique an important aspect of the commodification of nature by explaining that economies with less room to negotiate too often not only undersell rights to resources, but also become laboratories for bioprospecting simultaneous to claims of conservation.

Not long after the Brundtland Report (1987), during Rio’s Earth Summit (1992), Agenda 21 (as in, planning for the 21<sup>st</sup> century) also suggested sustainable development be a part of future environmental initiatives. Costa Rica began Payments for Environmental Services (PSA)<sup>37</sup> during the nineties, and the FONAFIFO<sup>38</sup> (National Fund for Financing the Forest) program was initiated. Carbon sequestration tactics were proposed in accordance with REDD+ (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation), since 2005, which included the new market for carbon credits. Costa Rica was one of the two countries to propose REDD+ and has taken a leading activist role. The use of renewable resources and initiatives like these work towards Costa Rica’s goal for 100% renewable energy by 2021.

The influence of environmental NGOs and associations has increased since the early 1980s. ASCONA, the Association for the Conservation of Nature<sup>39</sup>, was the most important Costa Rican environmental NGO during the seventies and eighties because of the strength of their advocacy and their influence on public opinion. ASCONA’s 21<sup>st</sup> century

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<sup>37</sup> Pago de Servicios Ambientales.

<sup>38</sup> Fondo Nacional de Financiamiento Forestal.

<sup>39</sup> Asociación para la Conservación de la Naturaleza.

rebirth (and alteration of its mission statement) in the Osa was initiated by the daughter of one of its original founders and will be discussed later; and should be viewed as a different organization borrowing the famous acronym. By the time ASCONA began to dissolve due to inner turmoil during the nineties, the Costa Rican Ecologist Association (AECO)<sup>40</sup> surpassed as the most prominent regional advocacy group for environmental causes. The relevance of this group, especially regarding the Golfo Dulce and Osa region is discussed below.

In 1996, the updated Forest Law (7575) empowered the Ministry of the Environment and Energy (MINAE), to facilitate environmental governance, working closely with the president. MINAE grew from several previous state initiatives, most notably; the Ministry of Industry, Energy, and Mines in 1982, and the Ministry of Natural Resources, Energy, and Mines in 1988. Within MINAE, the National System of Conservation Areas (SINAC) oversees all of Costa Rica's protected areas including wildlife and forestry, which totals over one quarter of Costa Rica's landmass. SINAC is split into geographic regions, of which the Osa Conservation Area (ACOSA) has been the main area of focus for this research. Although ACOSA is split into numerous refuges, parks, reserves, and wetlands, the thesis focuses on Corcovado National Park (PNC) and the Golfo Dulce Forest Reserve (RFGD). These two areas best exemplify the socio-political complexity of the region's conservation efforts and cover roughly 80% of the peninsula (Cuello, Brandon, and Margoluis 1998).

There is clearly a shift in conservation policy towards a globalized and commodified nature. The state's emphasis on resource exploitation alongside environmental governance clarifies that, from earlier initiatives in environmental planning and forestry, industry has been central to the government's concern. While this is reflected in movements elsewhere, it is particular to Costa Rica due to its pioneering environmental practices within a place with an impressive amount of biodiversity per unit area and radical early interests in conservation relative to its neighboring countries. While Panama, for example, has now surpassed Costa Rica in its percentage of legally protected landmass, Costa Rica remains a pioneer for ecotourism, PSA programs, REDD+, and other

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<sup>40</sup> Asociación Ecologista Costarricense.

environmental initiatives that mark the evolution from fortress conservation to the various forms of practice today.

*Nationalism, Environmentalism, and Space*

It is difficult to fully grasp the contemporary Costa Rican state without some examination of influential environmental rhetoric, which, especially since the 1990s, has taken on a tourism-centered logic. Environmentalism has developed into less of a niche interest and more of a central theme embedded within the ever-changing sense of Costa Rican national identity. This type of eco-identity is produced by various interests (e.g., corporate, ecotourist, agricultural, and environmental) and carries various political implications for the economy, natural resource exploitation, land use, agriculture, tourism, environmental ethics, environmental education, and popular phrases like “sustainable development” and “community involvement.” Several historic moments stand out as examples of constructing nationalism, infused with natural imagery and environmental policy. This context was greatly influential in structuring the passions of policy makers, activists, and residents who have gathered in the Osa over recent decades.

What follows is a series of examples of rhetoric that has reinforced nationalism and environmentalism as integral to a Costa Rican sense of place. In 1976, in his acceptance speech for the Animal Welfare Institute’s Albert Schweitzer award after his role in protecting Corcovado National Park, President Oduber proudly solidified the connection between nation and environmentalism:

Our respect for our people extends to future generations, and our respect for diversity in human society includes a desire to maintain and preserve the diversity of nature. This is the reason why Costa Rica firmly and emphatically rejects the point of view that preservation of the natural environment is a preoccupation of privileged nations, and a benefit that poor nations and developing nations cannot enjoy... respect for nature is essential to our development policies, as it is to our philosophy of human society (in Wallace 1992: 75).

Oduber was a surprisingly radical ally for environmentalists in Costa Rica during the 1970s, when conservation was just gaining momentum. With statements like this, Oduber was both claiming an importance of environmental protection for national wellbeing and recognizing that that importance placed upon protecting nature has been primarily an elitist concern. He asserted that Costa Rica, too, despite its position outside of “privileged

nations,” can and should take part in the preservation of species and ecosystem health. Additionally, President Oduber created a vision of society that is constituted by both development and respect for nature, suggesting the two are not mutually exclusive. No president previously had taken such an interest, nor had one pushed such sweeping policy changes that actually created the conditions for the Costa Rican environmental movement’s empowerment. Importantly, this president, among other like-minded advocates, described the practice of environmental ethics not only in terms of speaking on behalf of nature alone but also in terms of what he believed was best for all of “human society.” His statement essentialized the “human” and “natural” as distinct but co-determinant entities, identified the preservation of biodiversity as both important for Costa Ricans and all of humanity, and suggested that a conservationist ethic inspires national pride and wellbeing.

Other Costa Rican political leaders have also constructed environmental policies and pathologies that linked socio-economic development and wellbeing with ecosystem conservation. President Arias stated, “our system of national parks and wildlife areas protects individual ecosystems that are of vital importance not only for present and future generations of Costa Ricans, but for all of humanity” (in Evans 1999: 12). Here, the president adds a quality of temporality to the claim by arguing that conservation policy does not just protect the interests of those alive now but generations yet to be born. With philosophical assumptions for an essential “humanity,” linked to the ethos of environmentalism, the president suggests that there is an innate goodness involved within ecological stewardship that applies to everyone.

Although such romantic statements on the philosophy of nature and of being human are fairly common for many environmentalists and politicians supporting such an agenda, there is a nuanced argument that forces practical concerns that do not directly engage these philosophical underpinnings. Politicians stress health, community, and economic stability in order to raise ecological awareness. Environmental advocates are increasingly attempting to pull environmental concerns from their assumed elitist roots and make them applicable to everyone, especially rural communities. Part of this extension of interest and communal understanding is supported by nationalism, and mirrors the call for patriotism and the manner in which such rhetoric has disseminated over time.

President Carazo (1978-1982) wrote in his memoirs, “The Creator gave us an important responsibility: to take care of that environment so wisely prepared as our home” (in Evans 1999: 110). Carazo configures the home as pre-given rather than a relationship with place that is constantly negotiated. With the pre-given ownership of the environment as home, the president professes a reverence of nature and God-given duty to protect it. Through this process of protection, regimes of value are enforced. Establishing ethics of responsibility based upon a particular order of morality regulates what is understood as wrong behavior.

Just as the home references the political entity of Costa Rica, home is also the biotic environment that happens to sit within those arbitrary boundaries. Environmentalists in Costa Rica use similar strategies to unite people to the cause of environmentalism out of patriotic duty. Ugalde ponders, “the parks are part of the Costa Rican soul” (in Wallace 1992: 127). Nature is appropriated for the Costa Rican state. For Ugalde and others in the movement, the aesthetic connection with one’s environment is filtered through a patriotic commitment to being Costa Rican. This sense of belonging is not only put forward as a philosophy, but also as a practice and set of guidelines for behavior that have become goals of environmentalism.

Former park director Vernon Cruz spoke about working late hours with Ugalde and Boza: “we liked the problems, the feeling of responsibility for the nation’s resources...All anybody thought about was how fantastic nature was, and how important it was to protect it for everybody” (in Evans 1999: 92). Famously, Ugalde has talked about the passion that Costa Rican environmentalists had in the late sixties and seventies, and Cruz’s statement exhibits some of that passion. Boza and Ugalde, pioneering the national park movement, were innovative and radical, changing Costa Rican biodiversity conservation. Throughout some of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Costa Rica had some of the world’s worst deforestation rates, and such threats to the country’s biodiversity fueled much of that passion.

Even with the introduction of national parks and protected areas in the 1970s, deforestation did not slow until later. Between 1985 and 1988, the rate of deforestation was 100,000 hectares per year, comparable to deforestation in Amazonia, and the highest rate in Central America – thus complicating the “green-ness” of Costa Rica. (Evans 1999; Molina and Palmer 2012: 160-161). Incentive programs like FONAFIFO were established and

provided cash to farmers who conserved land rather than cut, harvest, or develop. With greater controls on logging during the 1990s, in addition to incentives such as FONAFIFO, reforestation and recovery began. Blaming subsistence farmers for deforestation would be misguided because the rise in global investment, urbanization, and industrial development each played a great role within the new force of Costa Rica's liberalizing economy during the 1980s and 90s. Costa Rica's intense urbanization of the Central Valley throughout the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, alongside population growth that reached two-thirds of the nation's 4.3 million people in 2005, was the major contributor to environmental degradation (Molina and Palmer 2012: 160-161).

Activists like Ugalde and Boza were reacting to what they understood as destruction of their Costa Rican landscape, and they believed that action was imperative. The two were influenced by the U.S. National Park System, having toured many of those parks, spoken with rangers and activists, reached out to other scientists, and begun lobbying for change. While the phenomenon of this environmental movement in Costa Rica had international influences, it became localized and unique to the country itself. Ugalde explains:

It's my impression that [the U.S. National Park] Yellowstone was created to protect the landscape and give citizens a place for recreation. We started with a system to protect biodiversity. The world was speaking more about biodiversity than recreation. We were influenced by biologists, not just a few park planners from the U.S. So recreation and scenery were secondary (in Wallace 1992: 126).

Here, Ugalde sets the Costa Rican park plans apart and explains that the primary goals were research and ecosystem protection. Ugalde was not concerned with tourism at that time, while Boza did anticipate this economic role. Influenced more by the scientific rhetoric, Ugalde was attentive to the differing ecosystems of Costa Rica and its biodiversity. He sought to understand what places were the most unique and critically endangered. In order to put advocacy into practice, however, Ugalde and Boza needed the backing of the government. Help came in the form of the 1969 Forest Law amidst peaking deforestation levels, which carried social (political and economic) implications in addition to the more obvious environmental concerns within the law (Evans 1999: 72).

The character of the Costa Rican environmental movement stayed zealous and ambitious. Ugalde affirms, "no evil forces can win when confronted with motivation and determination" (Ugalde 2008: 691). The overtly ethically charged statement was meant to enlist and inspire others. Environmentalists frequently used polemic and fatalistic language



to generate support. Upon the successful momentum of land and biodiversity conservation, Evans explains, “a system was now in place to conserve the nation’s natural heritage, it was functioning with responsible personnel, and conservation in general was gaining in popularity with Costa Ricans” (Evans 1999: 93). Enthused biologists, idealistic environmentalists, and government officials meant to broker compromises with regional inhabitants were met with resistance and encountered a complex situation that required more political sensitivity.

It is impossible to separate Costa Rica’s political history from the anthropogenic aspects within its landscape. The Osa Peninsula is one particular area where its remoteness from the urbanizing Central Valley invited a continuous series of land-grabs, which reinforce the contentious character of land use and anticipate the frictions evident within the environmentalist movement. This section has illustrated some important links between nationalism, geopolitics, and environmentalism by outlining important shifts in the practice of conservation. The centrality of conservationist ethics to Costa Rican national discourse, outlined here, explains some of the complexity under examination in the Osa – those involved in environmental practice – and the regimes of value in tension.

What follows is an outline of the history of the Osa Peninsula’s political ecology and a more detailed overview of the major players and events that have shaped local politics of land use. During field interviews with *campesinos* who lived in the Osa throughout the seventies, it became increasingly obvious from the agitation they expressed how important the Osa’s tumultuous past has been for influencing current perceptions of intervention with the landscape. These individuals have suffered bullying, wrongful imprisonment, and bullets at the hands of the hired guards who violently protected land rights and profit claims for the multinational timber company, Osa Productos Forestales (OPF). The controversies surrounding OPF receive particular attention in this chapter due to the prominence that research participants placed upon these events.

### **Conservation Practice and Political Ecology in the Osa Peninsula**

There are some biases within the literature on the Osa’s historical ecology that favor conservationism, emphasize scientific “solutions,” and neglect the significance of settler

families and injustices within the region's political ecology. Christopher Vaughan (2012) and Catherine Christen (2008), for example, portray the conservationists as heroes and pay less attention to the power dynamics that demonstrate privilege in political operation to remake spaces towards particular ends. Similarly, Wallace's (1992) narrative centers around the efforts of environmentalists like Olof Wessberg, Ugalde, and Boza; upholds conservationists, scientists, and researchers as protagonists; and refers to the settlers as invasive, neglecting a critique of the violent logging company, OPF. He describes the Osa residents: "armed, aggressive, and supported by the Communist party of the nearby United Fruit towns Golfito and Palmar, the squatters had only to occupy land for three years to get legal title. Local property disputes were accompanied by occasional shootings and murders" (1992: 56-57). Acknowledging such methodological shortcomings, Christen suggests that further research should address the dynamics of power and privilege represented within the clashing interests that surround PNC's inception (Christen 2008: 675), prompting questions that regard how benefits are shared, whose interests are exercised, and how ecological knowledge becomes politicized.

Because individuals in the Osa discuss environmentalism as a controversial subject, it remains important to understand how and why discussing the environment has become inseparable from the memory of conflict. The recent history of land use in the Osa represents one such conflict, as property ownership is contested and resources are competitively sought. Land use in the Osa has been both a political and ethical domain, and best understood with a background of the various interests entangled in attempts to carve definitions for the future of the Osa's landscape. Christen identifies three moments that demonstrate change in land use: first, the period from 1961-1972 when a professional forester and OPF employee tried to create an integrated Osa forestry operation for sustainable long-term practice; second, 1969-1970, when the Organization for Tropical Studies (OTS) actively explored possibilities for its own private research reserve; and finally, the *Cuenca del Corcovado* campaign which precipitated the creation of PNC in 1975 (2008: 676). The park and subsequent forest reserve would take ownership of the same land previously used for timber exploits, signifying, for many residents skeptical of attempts at institutional or corporate control, the same general label of foreign encroachment upon the lives of farmers. It is in this vein that I proceed and provide a

counter-narrative to the “naturalist” accounts that neglect interviews with farmers affected by the conflict and privilege conservationist narratives over the local politics of land use.

### *Budding Conflict in the Osa*

I have provided some introductory context for understanding the Osa and Golfo Dulce at the outset, but offer details here that further explain particularities and complexities for this relatively distant peninsula of Costa Rica’s southwest. Although “*osa*” is a Spanish word that means, “bear;” the peninsula was named after the chief of a community of Coto or Chiricano, during the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The name “*golfo dulce* [sweet gulf]” is a mistranslation from an Italian cartographer who wrote “de Osa” as “*Dossa* or *Doce*,” and therefore the Spanish understood it as “*dolce*” in Italian, which means “*dulce*” in Spanish (Barrantes 2014: 3-4). Some early European exploration, from the 16<sup>th</sup> through the 19<sup>th</sup> century, is characterized by buccaneers and pirates, chronicled in accounts that parallel those of many gold miners who were lured to the Osa during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. There is a noticeable continuity in describing the Pacific South as an untamed space that fits the modern imaginary perception of a lawless jungle with its exploitable riches (Barrantes 2014). By the 19<sup>th</sup> century Costa Rica’s south was on the map of global economic imperialism,<sup>41</sup> and the space became one of heightened geopolitical interest. Osa historiography suggests promises of treasure, danger, adventure, and liberation, in addition to a trans-national space inscribed with an identity that includes competing multinational interests (Barrantes 2014).

The Osa’s past unfolds as a genealogy of resentment and animosity between institutions and *campesinos*. Other migrants included gold miners (*oreros*), who, since the 1930s, were drawn to the gold within the forested hills and rivers. Much of the violence between *oreros* has been retold as legend or rumor, mirroring the image of Hollywood’s Wild West frontier, and stated almost as freely by residents as foreigners. The Osa frontier became the horizon in which to expand and called forth private interests, Panamanian settlers, gold prospectors, and others looking for “free” land. Many people travelled to

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<sup>41</sup> Barrantes has included an advertisement from the 1850s written in French that describes a “new passage between two oceans,” (2014:110) suggesting the effort to expand Europe’s economic interests, and suggesting also that there may have been a Central American canal built from Golfito rather than Panama.

Golfito, situated on Golfo Dulce, to work for United Fruit's subsidiary, The Banana Company, during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Political unrest in Panama during the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century brought many migrants to the Osa in addition to the growing number of banana workers.

United Fruit owned a large portion of the Osa Peninsula, but did not exploit that area as much<sup>42</sup> because Golfito was better connected to the main land by road. The Osa, for United Fruit, was a dense jungle which was too difficult to navigate and which could not sustain a lasting banana plantation (Vaughan 2012: 59-60). When United Fruit decided that business would be more efficient elsewhere, they sold a large section of the Osa Peninsula to another multinational corporation from North America, the infamous timber company, OPF. OPF acquired over 60,000 ha<sup>43</sup> of the 160,000 ha<sup>2</sup> Osa Peninsula-Sierpe Wetlands region from United Fruit, and owned the land from 1959 to 1976. This company was primarily interested in extracting timber, and it rigorously and violently protected its land rights from previous and incoming settlers, labeled as *precaristas*.

The most tumultuous years were the early 1970s, as many residents recall. Vaughan, a biologist, Peace Corps volunteer, and planner employed in the Osa during the early 1970s, summarizes the regional historical context as “marked by a proliferation of anti-imperialist activity from the Costa Rican Socialist Party to which many of OPF ‘squatters’ obviously belonged” (Vaughan 2012: 62-63). Some of the migrant settlers, had lived in the area for over 40 years by the time OPF arrived in 1959. Under Costa Rican practice, the worked and lived upon lands were *de facto* owned by the occupants; therefore, there was no need for them to seek legal titles. Upon securing legal ownership, OPF suggested farmers inscribe their lands with ITCO, and some were requested to sign a “rental contract” with OPF, paying \$0.12 per year (Ibid). While “most didn’t comply with either the inscription or the rental contract,” OPF still insisted on control over their land tenure, noticing that by 1973, there were 1,160 farmers occupying about 10,162ha, or 21% of OPF lands (Ibid). Most settlers did not accept the rental contracts nor did they want to register their farms with ITCO, the government branch set to deal with such land disputes.

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<sup>42</sup> There is some evidence (Vaughan 2012: 59-60) of timber being sold by United Fruit in the Osa from 1930-1950, but this has not been considered substantial.

<sup>43</sup> About 13,000ha of this total was state land, but completely surrounded by OPF, therefore, the company retained some control over it (Christen 2008: 676).

This is likely due to mistrust and the lack of a clear relationship between OPF, ITCO, and the settlers.

The reasons for tensions between the North American timber company and Osa settlers greatly accelerating during the seventies were likely due to a few factors: the new waves of migration from Panama, Nicaragua, and elsewhere in Costa Rica; increased scientific interest in the ecosystems of the Osa; and a change in management for OPF. The more cooperative previous manager left with the understanding that forestry was too physically, politically, and financially difficult in the Osa Peninsula. The new manager hired armed guards and took to bullying tactics in order to chase the longtime ranchers from the land that OPF legally owned. These problems culminated with violence in the mid-seventies and captured widespread national attention. Highlighting the conflicts with the *precaristas*, Evans illustrates the situation, “Many aggressively defended their territory with guns, creating a truly violent mid-twentieth century ‘frontier’ atmosphere on the Osa Peninsula” (1999: 97). Shootings and unreported or unsolved killings were fairly common, but not as commonplace as rumors suggest. OPF guards were known to harass farmers, imprison without cause, bully and frighten them from the land, and at times shoot to kill.

*Campesinos* near Osa towns like Puerto Jiménez and La Palma corroborated that the 1970s were more violent than the 1960s in terms of conflict between residents and OPF. This is a reflection on the North American forester Alvin Wright, manager from 1961 to 1972, who was “a forester and not an ecologist;” Wright’s interests in the Osa were that of “rational exploitation” (Christen 2008: 677). He frustrated other Osa stakeholders by saving trees for future harvest rather than providing immediate revenue. By challenging the norm that clearing timber equated to land improvement, Wright defied the popular land use ethos, and soon untitled settlers and politicians alike disapproved of his actions due to what they labeled landhoarding by not immediately overcutting (Christen 2008: 678). After Wright’s departure, the next manager, who reputedly had an “unsavory character and dubious intentions” (Christen 2008: 680), hired guards to police the OPF property and constructed a strategic road<sup>44</sup> meant to disperse the unwelcome resident population and “force evictions” (Vaughan 2012: 63). It was at this time during the early 1970s that most

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<sup>44</sup> Vaughan was walking the road with colleagues at that time and turned away after being accused of spying for OPF (Vaughan 2012: 63-64).

of the threats, arguments, and violence began, coinciding with an influx in migration. Not until after cases of violently harassed *campesinos* were made public did it become clear that bullying, criminal activity, and other human rights abuses should be included to the charge of U.S. tax evasion and added to a case for the company's expropriation.

By 1973, the Costa Rican legislature recommended expropriating OPF and creating protected lands that would include Corcovado National Park and the Golfo Dulce Forest Reserve. Additionally, settlers would have to be compensated for their removal as part of the expropriation deal. Vaughan explains, "After an exhaustive analysis, the congressional committee concluded that OPF was a typical case of land hoarding and tax evasion and recommended immediate expropriation of its lands, except those dedicated to tourist development" (Vaughan 2012: 65). This telling passage clarifies that tax evasion carried more strength during expropriation talks than stories of hiring armed men to chase peasants from their land.

In 1974 OPF's new manager fled the country, taking with him a recently placed down payment for a massive hotel project. Criticism continued to build within the government over the OPF problem. When congress overwhelmingly voted to expropriate OPF land, President Oduber vetoed the decision. Even with forty-five congressmen in favor and only four against, Oduber "reasoned that it was unconstitutional to expropriate land and he would not condone taking away foreigners' properties during his administration" (Vaughan 2012: 66). This fact was corroborated by the stories of many *campesinos* who mentioned that President Oduber and OPF were very close and had some shared interests – "*muy amigos*," as research participants stated.

The president was then placed in a situation where pressure on a potential congressional override of his veto, advocacy from foreign and domestic conservationists and researchers, and criminal concerns over OPF conduct weighed heavily on the crisis over Osa management. Not wanting to upset his business-friendly reputation and close ties with OPF, Oduber proposed a land swap where OPF would swap the most contested land in the Corcovado Basin for the less coveted Sierpe Wetlands area. In this manner, Oduber continued to maintain a neoliberal precedent in Costa Rica while gaining protected areas for the government, thus taking ownership over OPF's "*campesino* problem" as well.

The land swap was not enough, however, and more funds were needed if all the *campesinos* were to be paid fairly. The government did not have immediate solutions for this and a national state of emergency had to be declared in order to quell the heating turmoil. This emergency comes not only as a response to the conflicts with the farmers and new migrants, but also a response to the international scientific community and burgeoning Costa Rican environmental movement.

*President Oduber's National Emergency: Creating the PNC and RFGD*

This “national state of emergency” should be highlighted as such because it is an event – that is, a break in time when matters become urgent and therefore special measures are taken. Money appears where there was none, and time collapses into the immediacy of the present. A national emergency like this exhibits not only the priorities of the nation, but it also shows that the nation itself is being characterized; measures are not only taken based on their importance but they are taken *for* Costa Rica. Vaughan summarizes the emergency considerations after President Oduber declared PNC a “disaster zone” in January of 1976:

This provided emergency funds normally assigned for catastrophe relief to deal with the settlers in [PNC] and its protection and management... needed to: maintain settlers until their lands could be assessed, assess their ‘improvements’ (deforestation, constructions, crops- bananas, corn, beans, fruit trees, pasture, fences), pay them for their ‘improvements’, provide land and/or money to residents who had farmed in the region over 3 years (‘possession rights’), pay off outstanding bank loans, move all 250+ residents, and protect and manage [PNC] (2012: 66).

The problem has shifted from how to expropriate a detested timber company to how to “deal with the settlers,” since Oduber’s land swap was agreed upon. There is a political emergency for Oduber: appease friends at OPF with the land swap; appease the conservationists and researchers with the national park and reserve; and appease the settlers and the socialist groups with new lands and payoffs. In fact, the Osa was no more a “national disaster” than it was President Oduber being political, avoiding a congressional override that might have painted him as favoring multinational companies over Costa Rican farmers and environmental researchers.

The *campesinos* were organized and wanted to reject the money in protest. Ugalde gives a telling account of the exchange between ITCO, the conservationists, and the settlers. He remembers a “big mistake” (Ugalde 2008: 687) made during this encounter,

arriving to the Osa with police guards. Ugalde was told, “if those police don’t stay here with the airplane, we won’t meet with you” (Ibid). The settlers, weary of policing, were not willing to cooperate within an atmosphere of such explicit use of force. The conservationists and ITCO had not thought about this vulnerability beforehand and underestimated the animosity felt for government (or other) controls. Ugalde describes these meetings as “very turbulent,” and explains:

They disagreed with the creation of the park and then, after they agreed on this with their communist congressman, the arguments were about how much money each one of them was going to get, where they were going to get new land, how they were going to get their cows and pigs, their families, chickens and everything else out... The squatters were very rough with us, because most of the time they didn’t agree on the initial appraisals... (Ibid.).

The *campesinos* quickly became aware that the government was taking control of this land either way and, for many, being paid would be the best of the unfavorable choices. Because of the Osa’s unique qualities and biodiversity, environmentalists like Ugalde and researchers like those in OTS targeted the Osa as an immediate object for preservation. Ugalde discussed his position at the time, “my role was to clean the park of human activities, and my personal principle was to do it as humanely as possible, because they were terribly affected” (Ibid). Preservation, as proposed here, demands practices based upon values that are counter to those of the farmers. Increasingly, the environmental rhetoric in this situation is ethically charged and creates a moral regime where to “clean the park” means to remove the “dirty” or unwelcome *campesinos*. This problematic logic relies on a normative sense of pollution, where the farmers are the contaminants of “pristine” nature protectionism.

Ugalde states that the meetings were usually quite long and very heated. He highlights ITCO’s role as more intensely involved with negotiations, while his interests included familiarizing himself with the people he met there. Despite Ugalde’s claims to a comparatively humane agenda regarding the settlers, he states, “their presence there was not only legally impossible, but also detrimental from the ecological perspective and the objectives of the park” (Ugalde 2008: 688). Like the establishment of so many parks and protected areas, PNC’s conception was embedded with tensions over proper use of space and the power to make those claims.

Ugalde continues to explain the fickle attitude of the protesters once he and other government employees returned for more negotiations. Maintaining previous agreements,



their job was still to deliver money and land, in many cases, to those that were to be expelled from the new park. Ugalde states, “some [protestors], mostly the loud ones, were screaming, ‘Nobody takes a check. Nobody takes a check. We don’t accept those checks.’ I sat under the tree on the ground, just waiting. They were insulting the [ITCO] people, everybody” (2008: 690). Then, patience escaped the settlers and the protesters submitted to ITCO’s plan, the majority of them following suit once acceptance was initiated (Ibid).

The declaration of a national emergency appeared to work as the government and environmentalists had hoped. Successful advocacy also drew on private funds from the Central Bank of Costa Rica and international conservationist groups, including the World Wildlife Fund and The Nature Conservancy, totaling \$1,000,000 (Vaughan 2012: 66). Land was set aside near Golfo Dulce for the settlers and many moved there, while others just took some money, and some were never paid. ITCO was known to be the face of interaction between farmers and the government, and its history seemed to demonstrate more promises than resolutions. Only after the emergency was created did the settlers receive new plots of land, sums of money, and more attention from the government.

Oduber’s successor, President Carazo, finished what congress had begun and OPF was expropriated by 1979. Most people feel it was a true example of expulsion and a win for both the settlers and the conservationists, but it also appears that, by 1978, OPF was prepared to leave regardless and without much culpability. Perhaps OPF left of its own accord after conditions became too difficult, and after the new president’s decree that the contested lands would be state-managed. Rather than definitively remembered as an instance of corporate imperialism, OPF’s exit is more ambiguous; and national decisions were carefully crafted not to upset a future precedent for free trade.

*Campesinos*, such as those I spoke with, certainly feel as though they ultimately won the battle to rid the Osa of OPF, and they also credit President Carazo. These farmers remember OPF’s conduct and transgressions as the Osa’s worst land use conflict. They recall the events as a land grab and an example of foreign aggression (discussed in Chapter 4). The new state controlled and protected areas, RFGD and PNC, inherited a contested and controversial landscape – one where the concepts of ownership, protection, and exploitation would be slippery and divisive terms.

President Oduber's national emergency, the advocacy of conservation and tropical research, along with the escalating conflicts between hired OPF guards and *campesinos* left the Osa with a new reserve and national park. Specters of a timber industry and other forms of foreign exploitation still haunted the peninsula, as conservation became the new policing structure for the Osa's growing population. Private control over the Osa changed to public control from 1975 to 1978, and this power dynamic would be inherited and contested in various ways.

### *Scientific Researchers*

A multinational group of researchers joined the web of interests in the Osa and the burgeoning environmental movement, each making claims, and posturing for the right to define the socio-natural landscape. The Organization for Tropical Studies (OTS) was a critical player in establishing PNC and the RFGD, both of which precipitated socio-political changes along with the promises for protecting biodiversity. OTS, a consortium of U.S. universities in partnership with UCR, began sending students to their Osa station in 1965, after forestry professors, Joseph Tosi and Leslie Holdridge, leased land from OPF the previous year (Wallace 1992: 56). This introduced such North American biologists as Daniel Janzen and Christopher Vaughan (noted above) to Osa biodiversity and forests. OTS influenced many Costa Rican biologists alongside its advocacy and practice of conservation. Not long after OTS established itself in the Osa, Ugalde and Boza created momentum for the construction of biodiversity preserves and collaborated with OTS, bridging interests with the international scientific community.

Regarding the effects that both OTS and OPF had upon the Osa communities, the researchers and environmentalists "did not fare well in conditions that seem to have required coalition-building for success" (Christen 2008: 681). The teams of researchers that came to the Osa simply did not inspire much trust from the local settlers. Many of the *campesinos* saw new foreign interests in much the same way that they had perceived OPF and therefore did not really have a precedent for trusting outsiders. Bonds were not well established, and foreigners would typically enter without much knowledge of local history and politics. OTS has been accused of "scientific imperialism" (Evans 1999: 28), in

reference to the nationalities of the researchers, the construction of a private reserve as a research area, the condescending sense of privilege placed upon scientific knowledge of neotropical forests in relation to knowledge of agricultural practice, and the policing measures taken to ensure the area as private property.

Since the mid-sixties, the Osa has become a researchable space for OTS and like-minded scientists, redefining the possibilities for the area's environmental treatment and adding a new interest to the resource extraction already practiced by national and international groups. It is here we see "nature loving" in practice in the ecological research that is completed, which lays foundation for conservationism. It is also a form of imperialism, environmentality in practice; that reasserts, through the force of the state along with the private interests of researchers, a particular way of relating to the environment that excludes many agricultural and extractive practices. I consider one example below of an international conservationist whose death highlights the importance of foreign-born conservationists to the central political efforts of Costa Rican environmentalism.

### *Wessberg in the Osa*

In the effort to historically and politically situate Osa residents and the intertwined environmental discourse, it is critical to understand the impact and legacies of certain famous environmentalists within Costa Rica. One such Swedish environmentalist is Olof Wessberg, whose story collides with the political ecology of the Osa in revealing ways, both before and after his murder. Wessberg established Costa Rica's first nature preserve of its kind at Cabo Blanco on the Nicoya Peninsula in 1965. He did so by securing funds from international conservation organizations, and taking a proactive role in managing the preservation efforts. The government, via ITCO, became the vehicle for appropriating the funds and sending a warden (Wallace 1992: 7-8; Evans 1999: 61-63). The Cabo Blanco reserve is widely regarded as the first attempt at exclusive governance over an area for biodiversity preservation, and Wessberg's efforts earned him the reputation of an unflinching and enthusiastic naturalist.

Wessberg was killed while touring Corcovado in 1975 in a random act of violence that was likely robbery. Wallace dedicated his book to Wessberg, memorializing him as

someone who died for the cause of Costa Rican conservation, and focusing primarily on Wessberg as a martyr within his brief chapter titled, “The Osa Peninsula.” Karen Wessberg, Olof’s wife, stated, “enemies of conservation of the great natural resources of Costa Rica killed my husband” (in Wallace 1992: 63). This quickly became national news amidst the efforts to establish PNC. Even President Oduber opined on the tragedy:

‘The foreigner who died to defend natural resources deserves a monument,’ declared President Oduber to a question from our reporter concerning government policy on defense of resources. ‘Hugo [Olof] Wessberg, a foreigner, dedicated most of his life defending the forest reserve of Cabo Blanco from ranchers and loggers. He was assassinated by one of the big landowners of the region... When one sees one of the films about the Middle East and compares it with our country we see that the situation is not that much different. Here we kill people for defending a tree, an animal, a plant. This is very grave’ (in Wallace 1992: 66-67).<sup>45</sup>

Although the reference to the Middle East clumsily (and offensively) essentializes violence as an infamous stereotype of the region, Oduber is attempting to point out that violence occurs everywhere. Quickly, many thought the murder to be a conspiracy and that it was a contract killing. The lead suspect gave vague confessions and changed his story a number of times. Wessberg’s widow was convinced of conspiracy. She held her husband as a representation of Costa Rica’s environmental movement, someone enamored by Costa Rica’s animals and landscape, and a warrior for the protection of the environment. For her, it could not have been a random killing because of the passion they both had placed upon creating the Cabo Blanco private reserve in Guanacaste and the animosity that construction had generated. For this reason Oduber believed, as well, that it was a contract killing, but he placed emphasis on wealthy adjacent landowners rather than “enemies of conservation.”

Many others believed, however, that killing Wessberg was a random act of robbery. The motives of the assailant were ambiguous, and no real leads were found. The idea of conspiracy is attractive to those who view Wessberg as a martyr for the cause of conservation, a way of generating more support for the growing environmental movement in Costa Rica. Of all the dozens of unsolved killings in the Osa, this famous incident – especially given the fact that President Oduber proposed a monument – reveals a new evolving attitude in both the national importance of conserved spaces and the quality to which biodiversity can be a symbol of patriotism.

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<sup>45</sup> See: *La Republica*, “Monument for Foreigner Who Died to Save Forests.” August 21, 1975.

Wessberg as a martyr also reveals the uneven reception of tragic events. Given that countless disappearances had occurred throughout the Osa's stigmatized outlaw-history, and other shootings were reported but given relatively no national attention, the fame of Wessberg's murder stands out as a unique media event. The fact that he was a foreigner and a conservationist intensified the response to the killing; unfairly overshadowing other tragic events that have taken place on the Osa. According to President Oduber, the work of a conservationist like Wessberg is of great national importance and should be memorialized as such, making clear the political weight of ecological stewardship. The shooting of at least one *campesino*, a research participant of mine, is not explicitly mentioned in the literature, while a killing of an OPF guard is. This exemplifies that, at least within accounts mentioned thus far, the environmentalist narrative and the killing of a white European conservationist take privilege over shot *campesinos*, disappeared gold miners, or even the dead OPF guard.

As an impassioned pioneer of Costa Rica's environmentalist movement, Wessberg was an advocate for creating PNC and, like Ugalde, quite enthusiastic about the Osa Peninsula's beauty and importance. The literature on the park's creation has normally described the event as a triumph for conservation and focused less on the removal of farmers and land title disagreements. Wallace writes, "Despite the trouble Corcovado [National Park] caused, and would continue to cause, I didn't encounter anybody who doubted in the least its value as a park" (1992: 73). In fact, many of the settlers, gold miners, and others removed from their land or faced with new regulations did indeed express anger towards the park's creation, and carried a different system of values. Certainly not every Osa resident's interests were reflected in the creation of PNC or later with RFGD.

The fact that president Oduber would react to Wessberg's murder in a way that laments the loss of a conservationist and extolls the cause of environmentalism demonstrates that the new conservationist movement was becoming a politically central concern by 1975. The relative ease with which environmentalism entered the national stage increased the power of the movement itself. Additionally, the willingness of leaders like Oduber not only meant that Costa Rican environmentalists had greater chances to realize their goals but that the country itself was beginning to set a precedent for ecosystem

preservation to be taken seriously at a national level.

### *The Debt Crisis and Gold Miners*

Gold mining has held an allure within the Osa Peninsula since the 1930s, especially for those willing to venture into the forested hills to live and work long enough to profit from it. Some of the largest reserves and best quality gold in Costa Rica have been found inside the borders of PNC. *Oberos* [gold miners] and outlaws steadily wandered into the Osa's rainforest during the mid-late 20<sup>th</sup> century, normally increasing in number during times of economic hardship. For example, the economic crisis of the eighties and the closure of the Banana Company plantation in Golfito that same decade both reflected economic instability that led to increase in mining. Even more recently, during the annual rainy season when tourism dips to a low, mining and poaching usually increase. Since the establishment of PNC in 1975, there have been conflicts between rangers and *oreros*, due to the prohibition of gold mining inside the park and the fact that miners establish camp by building *ranchos* [huts] and hunting ("poaching," for environmentalists). Over the course of the first decade since PNC's inception, proponents of environmental governance realized the damage *oreros* could do and developed a strong response.

In 1980, the park extended 7,700 hectares in order to incorporate natural boundaries including rivers where many miners were active (Wallace 1992: 129). This meant that, suddenly, miners unaware of being in the park were engulfed by it, and therefore their presence became a national concern. A gold rush followed the economic crisis of the early eighties, and thousands of *oreros* flooded the park (Ibid: 130-131). This clash of interests precipitated a struggle between the *oreros* and the rangers and environmentalists. Ugalde stated, "gold is gold... it creates a frontier kind of culture. There's freedom there, there's no authority. If you come and establish authority, you immediately get reactions and especially if it's a park" (in Wallace 1992: 132). Reminiscent of *conquistadores* and the El Dorado myth, Ugalde assigns an allure to gold that somehow creates a wild frontier. He also notes how strange the concept of a national park was for many in the rural south, prompting the question: what is protection for if not extraction? The environmentalists would have to address this conflict carefully if they were to reestablish authority for PNC. North

American biologist Daniel Janzen surveyed the environmental degradation within Corcovado during the early eighties and created an influential report that bolstered environmentalist pleas to expel the miners by force (Ibid: 136-137). In 1985, Ugalde rallied his advocacy expertise and petitioned the government for a solution to “save” Corcovado (Ibid: 138-139). His nationwide campaign succeeded, and in 1986, the government agreed to forcefully expel *oreros* from Corcovado, making arrests and burning many of their *ranchos* (Ibid: 140). In response the following year, hundreds of *oreros* marched to San José to demand justice in the form of payments for lost livelihood and property, to which the government finally responded with 45 million *colones* (Ibid: 143). Osa residents informed me that this was relatively little, not everyone was paid (yet again), and not everyone was given enough. Although some environmentalists take a regretful tone while remembering residents’ mistreatment; the value system being enforced was clear, as Wallace called the series of events the “desecration of Corcovado,” we should note the differing views on the “sacred,” the defacement of the sacred (Taussig 1999, 2009), and the privilege exercised through the political consequences based upon such labels.

Beyond financing reparation, the resolution signified the assertion of moral authority and established a particular regime of value backed by the government’s power in its legitimate use of force. The village of Dos Brazos de Rio Tigre, for example, is mostly composed of gold miners and the site of much of the conflict between MINAE and such illicit activities. Gunshots, arrests, and increasing clandestine activity have come to characterize the discourse surrounding Dos Brazos and gold mining on the Osa. Many rangers and environmentalists believe they are protecting the “jewel of the national park system,” as PNC acts as a symbol for the Osa’s great biodiversity and unique status as the only lowland rainforest on Central America’s Pacific Coast. For many miners, selling gold is their only source of income and necessary for their family’s subsistence. Some interlocutors discuss the situation as a question of ignorance regarding environmental concerns and a lack of economic alternatives for places like Dos Brazos. More nuanced accounts, however, neither assume that an externally delivered economic fix will solve the externally defined gold miner “problem,” nor that the miners themselves would not also hold a perception of their surroundings comparable with some environmentalists.

The creation of the gold miner as the target of state controls may also be a question of “easy targets” and lack of political connection. Although Costa Rica has made mining illegal throughout the country, exceptions were made for foreign mining companies with large open-pit operations. Miners operating by hand view this as hypocrisy and corrupt politics that many have come to understand as status quo. Critics of environmental governance assert that resource extraction driven by global markets in addition to consumptive economies are the main reasons for environmental degradation, and the *oreros* are unfairly targeted.

### *The 1990s and Activism*

The Osa Peninsula has witnessed intensifying environmentalist activism over the course of recent decades; it has been established as a central and effective political fixture since the seventies and eighties. One notable environmental conflict materialized between a number of local and international environmentalists and Ston Forestal, a subsidiary of the transnational Stone Container Corporation that proposed a paper pulp plantation on Golfo Dulce. Heleen van den Hombergh (2004) documented the struggle and maintained a long-term presence in the area, completing participant observation and open-ended interviews. Her work illustrates the close relationships she achieved with local activists and the intimate understanding she obtained of the land’s importance to residents in nearby communities regarding Ston Forestal’s plans. The Ston Forestal conflict, perhaps the best of the earlier examples of environmentalists opposing corporate operations, set some precedent for the practice of activism in the Osa today.

In 1992, Ston Forestal violently removed squatters from a large farm that the company had leased and planned to place its pulpwood production on, including a large harbor on Golfo Dulce (van den Hombergh 2004: 21). This removal had much in common with the case of OPF, as *precaristas* were harassed, *ranchos* were burned, and violence was regularly threatened (Ibid). According to records, this forced removal included at least twenty-two families, and “most of the squatters were held at the police station for several days” (van den Hombergh 2004: 22). Osa residents remembered OPF’s violence twenty years prior, and that memory served to fuel outrage at yet another transnational corporation



displacing *campesinos* in the Osa region. With parallels to the political ecology outlined here, van den Hombergh summarizes:

The sudden withdrawal of United Fruit, the clashes with Osa Productos Forestales, the establishment of the Corcovado National Park with all the limitations on its use, including the prohibition of gold panning and agriculture, all left a feeling of deep resentment as regards the intentions of foreign companies and their preferential treatment by the government – the final solution offered to OPF being an exception (2004: 20).

Such resentment has been aimed at the state, NGOs, foreigners, extractive industries, and other incoming conflicting interests. Indeed, the state supported Ston Forestal's project at first. The company's plantation provoked regional environmentalists to act, and the leader of one group with roots in forestry, the United Neighborhood Land for the Environment (TUVA), sought help in San José from an established group – the Costa Rican Ecologist Association (AECO).

A campaign against Ston Forestal formed, and in 1993, AECO officially initiated a protest campaign in the Osa. As local residents gathered to discuss what this meant, a committee formed known as the Committee to Defend Our Natural Resources of the Osa Peninsula (*Comité Pro Defensa*). In addition to AECO's national network, the group sought international help, which later included German ecologist groups, Greenpeace, and the Rainforest Action Network (van den Hombergh 2004: 25). During this campaign, protesters and Osa residents marched and blocked the Pan-American Highway where the peninsula dissolves into the mainland, and, as van den Hombergh documents, "the protest alliance under the leadership of AECO fiercely attacked Ston Forestal through paid advertisements and articles in the papers, on television and radio, and the company responded with counter attacks" (2004: 26). Greenpeace's boat, dubbed the "Rainbow Warrior," even made an appearance in Golfo Dulce during 1994. By the end of that year, activist campaigning saw the fruits of its labor and Ston Forestal was convinced to move its project to Golfito and scrap the main industrial plan.

This agreement was reached by the winter of 1995, and arrived with apparent retribution against the environmentalists involved in the protest campaign, leading to a particularly short-lived victory celebration in the Osa. Three activists were killed in a fire in San José, which included the most engaged leaders of AECO. Another AECO activist "died in strange circumstances a few months later" (van den Hombergh 2004: 33). While each death was ruled as accidental, most Osa residents and environmentalists believe these

were assassinations and acts of revenge for Ston Forestal's lost time and profits in addition to its damaged image.

Three types of environmental practice are identified within van den Hombergh's work: conservationist, environmentalist, and ecological. She credits the successful fight against Ston Forestal to the ecological type of environmental activism; and classified AECO and others as practicing "*ecologismo* or *movimiento socio-ambiental*" (van den Hombergh 2004: 36), which distinguishes itself from more normative forms of land conservation as being inclusive of surrounding communities, economic concerns regarding subsistence farming, regional politics, and respect for historical conflicts over land use like *orereros* in PNC or *campesinos* versus OPF. Socio-environmental movements [*movimientos socio-ambientales*] do not assume a distinction between environmental and social problems, regarding activism meant to improve quality of life; meaning that such an initiative would not draw a boundary between protecting flora and fauna and protecting established ways of life for locals, in most cases, rural peasantry. Also key to this movement were Marxist-Leninist and other left wing or populist groups that became influential in the area, organizing cooperatives and unions to protect workers' rights. Some members were known as *sandillas*, but none of my interlocutors advertised this information. Based upon her interviews with AECO, van den Hombergh writes, "ecologismo has been an explicitly political stand, being distributionist, anti-imperialist, favoring the decentralization of power based on a vision of enhanced citizen participation in the management of natural resources" (2004: 37). Distinguishing this from another two types of environmentalism, the environmentalist (*ambientalista*) and the conservationist (*conservacionista*), the former responds to "social reform" and "capitalist accumulation" while proposing "sustainable use of natural resources." The latter is the more standard practice of fortress conservation, or one that "focuses purely on nature protection" (Ibid). The conclusion, for van den Hombergh, is that the ecologist model of environmentalism does the most of the three to include local voices, build alliances, respect the history and politics of the region in question, and create a lasting social life for the environmental initiative under discussion.

There are limitations to this framework, however, and the strict structure of this triad has not seemed to catch on for many academics or practitioners. What is more widely

acknowledged is environmentalism as a global project that shifted from practicing fortress conservation, concerned mostly with flora and fauna under protection, to questioning *how* a project should be carried through that includes a more egalitarian relationship with nearby residents. The terms “conservationist” and “environmentalist” are often used interchangeably, but do suggest the latter to be the more all-encompassing term for the global social movement, while the former more often refers to a geographical area of protection; sidelining other related concerns of the movement, but nonetheless a part of the larger movement (i.e., conservationists are environmentalists). The AECO and ecologists van den Hombergh mentions are similar to the “new school” of environmentalists that many of my research participants describe; those who argue that fortress conservation failed, and that socially integrated approaches must be pursued if environmentalists are to reach their goals. Such movements also parallel many sustainability initiatives, resting on the argument that to be sustainable in conservation also means to have a lasting socio-political life for the region’s residents; in other words, to be socio-environmental.

This section has surveyed the Osa’s political ecology through the decades, revealing major transitions from resource extraction to state-imposed environmental preservation. A multitude of interests are represented, including those of the *campesinos*, *oreros*, and *precaristas* who have come to symbolize the area’s migrants with the most justified claims to land use, based upon length of time spent in the region and experience living within the Osa landscape. These residents have proven to be obstacles to national and international extractive industries, as well as the environmental movement as realized during the seventies and eighties. As the implications of a resource-based economy and environmental movement integrally linked to the national body politic transform, so do the implications for the actors entangled within these systems.

## **Conclusion**

The environmental history provided here, situated within the larger context of the political economy of resource extraction provided in the previous chapter, explains some of the processes at work that have influenced the lives and interests of the many actors involved within socio-environmental conflicts. For most research participants in the Osa,

history is not merely background; it constantly informs daily life and perceptions of outsider intervention within the Osa. OPF's presence and the conflict with settlers actually precipitated the transformation of Osa lands to fortress conservation, in a move that shifted private ownership to public. Most Osa residents, however, did not see the new labels as *their* public lands, and animosity remained directed towards the new source of imperialism – the new governing power.

The Osa has a history of being a fought-over and transient space, shifting from being a site of resource extraction to becoming a site of preservation through state governance along with funds from abroad. It has been a global space; generating capital and becoming a meeting place for international research, science, and activism. These past events did not only lay foundation for resentment between parties, but they established a protected area – 80% of the peninsula – within the most biodiverse spot in the country, which helped create the particular Osa nature experience exported to the global public today. Chapter 3 will build upon this political ecology by examining top-down conservation initiatives and the talk of community integration practiced by both NGOs and the state.

## **Chapter 3**

# **Institutionalizing the Strategies for the Greening Republic**

Conservation practice in the Osa has been shifting from the top-down model to more integrated forms, a move that mirrors many recent developments in the global conservation movement. The centralized state approach shifts to a decentralized approach and includes a mixture of private interests. Conservation in Costa Rica has taken a number of forms, and outlined here are the politics of the top-down approach, or the buy-and-protect form of conservation, that has characterized most previous efforts to protect biodiversity in the Osa. The top-down approach manifests as a strategy of both the state and of NGOs; and therefore, this chapter focuses first on the public sector, demonstrated by the president's office, PNC, and institutional outreach programs, and then the private sector, including NGO activity in the Osa. Some central questions are: what maintains the "green" republic's status as environmental, what does it mean to be a citizen within the enviro-nationalist structure, and how do "environmental values" shape the everyday practices of residents and conservation practitioners? Specifically, this chapter outlines how the institutional response to environmental concerns is entangled with residents, visitors, and practitioners, demonstrating how and why it became vital to transform the top-down or fortress-style conservation strategy.

There are countless environmental projects, associations, NGOs, and other entities with interests in the Osa and Golfo Dulce region, but the most prominent are Fundación Corcovado (FC), Fundación Neotrópica (FN), and Osa Conservation (OC). The NGOs have great influence in the area, given the importance of land use and regulations for natural resource extraction. Additionally, local associations like the Association of

National and Environmental Community Service (ASCONA)<sup>46</sup> are also politically engaged with conservation. Dos Brazos, for example, has a conservation association rather than the more common development association to act as the community's major body for political and economic decisions. Some themes throughout various public and private interests in ACOSA territory include concerns for the preservation of Costa Rica's biodiversity; political engagement with small communities; negotiating various visions for future generations; competing notions of privilege within the Osa's political ecology; and tensions between all actors involved – especially between longtime residents and those seen as foreigners. Both state and NGO practices, when performed in the institutionalized top-down fashion, represent an imperialistic logic similar to environmentality. The move towards integration represents an incorporation of this logic within the practice of quotidian forms of subsistence and a more egalitarian approach to socio-environmental relations.

After some initial framing for fortress conservation, this chapter begins with the newly elected president's visit to Puerto Jiménez and Dos Brazos on World Environment Day, demonstrating the administration's intentions regarding environmental issues, and generally, the politically central urge for Costa Rica to pursue conservation. Similarly, the symbolic value the state holds for the Osa Peninsula's biodiversity and landscape suggests one way that the politics of conservation are entangled within the environmental narratives embodied by the Osa. The following section details some perspectives from the rangers of Corcovado National Park – the site of much of the Osa's socio-environmental tensions. I then discuss maritime interests and an important meeting in Golfito that exemplify state attempts at community outreach and more inclusive politics. Moving to private sector initiatives, I discuss some previously attempted environmental plans, how they have come to be perceived, and how NGO workers are discussing the success or failure of certain projects. This will draw contrast and inform the manner in which conservation is changing to include a wider variety of voices. The ethnographic portraits that follow portray moments when large-scale environmental planning seeks traction on the ground.

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<sup>46</sup> This is the new iteration of ASCONA, the famous pioneer environmentalist group, begun by the daughter of one of the original founders. This Osa-based iteration keeps the acronym but has changed the name from the Association for the Conservation of Nature.

## **Fortress Conservation and NGO Reputations**

Historically, the most widespread type of conservation (both globally and reflected within the Osa's early environmental history) has been fundraising to secure ownership over the area in question and maintain its ecological integrity through establishing a legal boundary. In the Osa this style of conservation has been viewed negatively, and as an example of top-down politics. Similarly, buy-and-protect or fortress conservation strategies mean preservation of large areas without any community involvement. Before progressing to the nuanced networks of conservation, I will outline some of the problematic tendencies that have led to the unfavorable reputations of many NGOs in the Osa. The purpose is not an attempt to portray all environmental organizations as monolithic entities with no specificities in personnel or policy, or a polemic critique of conservationists in favor of negative perspectives that always disseminate through common gossip and discourse, but to remain critical of conservation initiatives that maintain an imperialist logic and override many social practices of people already inhabiting the territory.

Both state and NGO practices are implicated by fortress conservation. The establishment of PNC and RFGD, among other preserves, is an example of "alienating land and defending the resultant conservation 'fortresses'" (Brockington 2002: 7), widely critiqued on the basis that surrounding communities often disagree with the values and practices assumed by the preserves (Ibid: 7-8). Many Osa residents, like Igoe's Maasai and Tanzanian informants, "described conservation as indistinguishable from any of the other global processes they confronted in their daily lives" (2004: 9). The commonalities between conservation and globalization appear most evident through methods of control and border maintenance. Other works (Anderson and Berglund 2003; Brockington and Duffy 2011; and Grove 1995) explain that the origins of environmentalism can be traced back through the expansion of European hegemony (Grove 1995), and that issues of privilege, value systems that circumscribe the Other, and politics of disempowerment and dispossession are expressed "not within colonial offices but within the cafes and meeting rooms where environmental consultants meet" (Anderson and Berglund 2003: 2). Although fortress conservation has the power to marginalize competing interests and dispossess locals of their lands, initiatives based upon sustainable development strategies

also employ the logic of globalization that can reproduce the inequalities it seeks to address.

In the Osa, with 80% of the Peninsula conserved (inclusive of the state forest reserve, national park, and small private preserves), strict state-operated biodiversity preservation has been the rule, leaving little opportunity for market-based approaches to work (Fletcher 2012: 307). Contrastingly, this type of environment makes ecotourism very attractive and successful due to the lack of competition from mainstream tourism and prevalence of state preserves (Fletcher 2012). With a forty-year history of state-sponsored conservation and a growing interest in market-based conservation, Osa residents perceive conservation as a major trending interest that means external controls from San José or elsewhere, reminiscent of the common sentiment that “the park is only for foreigners.” Although natural resource extraction by large companies differs in practice from either fortress conservation or more integrated approaches, residents view control as *control*; meaning that they often conflate extraction and conservation because of who has sovereignty over the space in question, and because of the fact that they are, in either case, the ones marginalized.

Osa Conservation (OC) is one example of a beleaguered NGO with which I built the closest relationship, due to access and connections made during fieldwork, and this organization is likely the largest landowner out of the three key environmental groups within the Osa. NGOs like Fundación Corcovado (FC) and Fundación Neotrópica (FN), in addition to those involved in the Osa Campaign, are also critical actors within the conservation efforts in the Osa, but will be focal points elsewhere in the thesis. OC was formerly known as “Friends of the Osa” [*Amigos de Osa*], and commonly maligned as “Enemies of the Osa” [*Enemigos de Osa*], rhyming the words in Spanish. The buy-and-protect style of conservation has been popularly seen as land hoarding. Many residents from a variety of neighborhoods and backgrounds have shared the view that land bought on such a large scale negatively impacts farmers in the area.

Employees of OC are also critical and skeptical of the NGO encounter in general. All are aware of the imperfect OC reputation. One employee described casual instances when mentioning that he works for OC became a “conversation ender.” This employee also reiterated the ubiquitous critique that simply buying land and protecting it is not



enough, and that the NGO must engage with surrounding communities and farmers. A change in this policy would not only improve community relations but also more efficiently reach the goals of conservation. Unprompted, a mechanic from Puerto Jiménez expressed his dislike for conservation initiatives like OC, that have, in his view, taken land from farmers and challenged the sovereignty of used trails. Just the word “conservation” seems to evoke passionate reactions in Puerto Jiménez, attesting to its controversial history. Many people in town, hotel employees, guides, and farmers expressed opinions on the importance of speaking with “the people that *live here*,” concerning what they think about conservation. Mentioning “conservation” provoked diatribes against the state and the NGO sector that always reinforced the importance of longtime residents and their interests.

Even though it was clear that my presence was that of an anthropologist not an environmentalist, many individuals were cautious about what to say and do when confronted with questions. One ecolodge employee tried to hide the fact that he made an “illegal ceviche” with prohibited catch, demonstrating such catch regulations were not popular with some residents. On another occasion the same employee expressed with passion how happy he felt to live and work somewhere where he could see an impressive *terciopelo* [fer-de-lance] crossing the road as he arrived at work. His amazement with the snake, on one hand, and the illegal shellfish on the other, attest to the common balance struck by many residents between nature loving and practical engagement with resources. Another employee described, shrugging, a fifty-fifty attitude: “some people think about conservation, and others don’t.”

Conservation as controversy translated as a difficulty for obtaining some detail for how NGOs had upset nearby farmers. One interview with someone I had spent a lot of time with persistently evaded specifics. He did not feel comfortable explaining how one NGO gained advantage while negotiating purchase of his family’s farm, and left the family with less than the agreement stated. After the interview, his British girlfriend told me that he withheld damaging details, meaning that he did not want to say too much, hurt the NGO’s reputation, or implicate himself in disseminating a negative portrayal. The presence of what is unsaid suggests controversy and some compliance.

NGO work is often critiqued from two angles: not doing enough on one hand, and leaving without finishing the job, on the other. Some believe that any group who arrives in

the Osa with a project should actually be working towards finishing the project, or as one employee states, “we should be working to be unemployed.” Resentment has built where NGOs have had a large and longtime presence with little result, or unknown results. This forces many residents and workers to believe that conservation is a business and that claims to be “making a difference,” implying improvement in the Earth’s wellbeing and ecological health, are not so sincere. Coupled with a lack of dialogue between the NGO sector and residents, a longtime presence without many visible results allows for rumors and gossip to spread through Puerto Jiménez and bolster a negative opinion. The charge of “not doing enough” also refers to the manner in which the work is practiced; that NGOs do not integrate their initiatives and satisfactorily communicate with residents; not enough is done to elicit trust; and socio-economic concerns are largely ignored with statements like, “that’s not our job.”

These vignettes and the description of fortress conservation above serve to frame the interaction between the institution of conservation and Osa residents. With this in place, I explain, through a few examples, what the state and some NGOs are doing in the Osa and Golfo Dulce, how that practice reflects the shift in conservation strategies more generally, and the implications of critiquing the top-down model.

### **World Environment Day, Puerto Jiménez**

The newly elected president of Costa Rica, Luis Guillermo Solís (2014- present), arrived in Puerto Jiménez for the World Environment Day, June 5, 2014. Created by the United Nations in 1974, the World Environment Day has been a call for political leaders to reflect upon sustainability and environmental protection. It was inspired by the 1987 Brundtland Report and subsequent 1992 global summits where environmental changes and threats to life on Earth were discussed. President Solís’ administration made a careful and symbolic choice to come to Puerto Jiménez. Because of the town’s location on the famed Osa Peninsula, he was using the unique locale to celebrate the area’s biodiversity, making prominent the enforcement of environmental protection, lauding the efforts of local rangers and MINAE, and also bringing a message of personal responsibility meant to maintain itself inseparable from the surroundings and ecological stewardship.

Solís' election had marked a political change from Liberación, now a right-of-center party, to the new center-left Citizen's Action Party (PAC). Many in the Osa region support PAC and its politicians as they promise social and economic reforms that favor rural areas. Residents spoke highly of Solís, and commonly called him "humble," supporting the popular notion that he would be a different type of politician and listen more carefully to the needs of the citizenry. The event in Puerto Jiménez was surprisingly casual in the sense that there was virtually no security. The president was open and greeted everyone he could, as the crowd packed into the *salon comunal*. The event was complete with vendors, dancers, and music to celebrate the World Environment Day. During a performance led by an environmental educator and musician (discussed in Chapter 5), the dancers were wearing costumes that included a "reformed" gold miner/hunter, a lowland paca, a peccary, a white-faced monkey, a tapir, and a jaguar; representing the biodiversity of the Osa and purposefully including the human, reflecting the social traditions of the area.

After a brief celebration, the president approached the lectern with members of his cabinet standing at his side. Solís not only underscored claims that the Osa Peninsula is a place of ecological importance but also asserted that the residents were stewards of that place and its biodiversity. This was not just an environmentalist message, however, although it was World Environment Day; cast as an environmentalist statement, there were clear economic underpinnings. Maintaining the Osa as a product sold as part of Costa Rica's increasing nature tourism industry carried particular importance for the official visit. Solís wove together the economy of tourism, importance of community participation, identity of the nation and state policy, concerns for rural poverty, and environmentalism. Moments like this clarified the fact that – especially in Costa Rica – policy, environmentalism, nationalism, tourism, and the country's image are entangled.

The "development of the Osa Peninsula," in the president's words, is about helping nature and communities simultaneously. Solís' collective message refers to "who we are, where we come from, and where we're going," and speaks of humans in conjunction with nature as a "universal family." When he talks of climate change and species preservation he refers to younger generations and generations to come, explaining the importance of making choices now to better the lives for grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Solís called upon the audience to "reflect upon the great diversity" that is Costa Rica, that

“conservation is a beautiful cause,” and that Costa Ricans should feel happy and proud that there is so much natural beauty to enjoy [*mucho que disfrutar*]. Children are used politically as symbolic of the future and the nation, and here, equilibrium with biodiversity conservation.

Solís continued and discussed various well-recognized problems. These included bad roads, pollution in the rivers, poaching, and illegal gold mining, among others. Given these problems as the president has identified them, he said, “*patrimonio sigue vive*” [our heritage lives on]. While it is difficult to decipher the complete intention, it seems that Solís was saying that regardless of the challenges to Costa Rican biodiversity and the aesthetic value of the environment, national heritage survives and should continue to persist with the help of all citizens. His statement also suggests a quality of immortality within the country’s national/natural heritage. After discussing how special and unique the Osa is, followed by listing threats to biodiversity, Solís suggested solutions to the problems and important strategies to achieve those goals.

Community development was a parallel theme to environmental appreciation, a message that better resonated with people, as they believed the benefits to be more immediate and tangible. Solís spoke enthusiastically and passionately, captivating the crowd as he explained, “we can’t do it without the people’s help...it must be a group effort.” Highlighting the importance of World Environment Day and the protection of Osa ecosystems, Solís exclaimed, “the president of the republic doesn’t come for nothing.” Importantly, he was not only there to deliver familiar rhetoric of the environmental activists and concerned biologists, but to demonstrate that he cares about the wellbeing of rural communities this far from the capital. As he stressed the importance of “community development,” President Solís emphasized the importance of working together, making sure everyone is involved; the government working with the community rather than a one-sided approach; and that “we lose it all, if we don’t work well.” Calling on a “committee for sustainable development that works with the people it serves,” he promises a better future for all with “the right kind of development.”

President Solís then took questions from the audience. Several community leaders stood up to explain an issue that they have been facing and to ask the new administration for help. They explained that Puerto Jiménez and other small towns on the Osa Peninsula

lack necessities enjoyed by much of the rest of the country. They argued for a better health clinic, improved roads and bridges, more schools, and for the Osa Peninsula to be its own municipality. This has been a long battle for Puerto Jiménez residents as the clinic has minimal facilities, meaning that most healthcare needs require boarding the ferry to Golfito. In Carate, there are still no municipality-provided utilities like water and electricity; the road condition is poor and a new school is needed. Thus, the community has felt that its own municipality would create the political entity necessary and appropriate for the area's geography, bringing in more state money to places with access concerns. The president noted that such problems were "grave," and that the administration would work "closer to the people and closer to communities." He called for citizen participation as well – suggesting that just as his administration works with people, the people should also work with him. The type of participation Solís was aiming for was one based upon the understanding that healthy ecology reflects social wellbeing and that arriving at such a point requires a knowledgeable and engaged citizenry, which should place the various individual interests together into a collective. The crowd responded well, and one person exclaimed, "We have so much hope in the new government!"

One statement I found quite paradoxical was the president's exclamation, "we must civilize ourselves to be one with the animals and with the environment." The neotropical environment had been viewed as a wild, lowly place to be conquered by human needs, throughout much of Costa Rican popular discourse. Even the Costa Rican land use rhetoric and legal coding reflected this by labeling wilderness "vacant," and that only harvesting, producing, and exploiting natural resources would alter the land's label to then be considered useful and worthy. In contrast, President Solís is calling the nonhuman world civilized, alluding to a sense of harmony, and that all of us as citizens and visitors to Costa Rica should check our moral behavior in order to better suit what the administration has identified as the environment's needs.

Many in the Osa were surprised by the president's visit, and it was only the second official visit in the country's history. President Óscar Arias had been to the Osa on an unofficial visit, however, and the town was renamed Puerto Jiménez after president Ricardo Jiménez (1910-14) visited in 1910. Despite these previous instances, there was still the element of novelty throughout the day. The most unprecedented event was certainly the

president's visit to the gold mining village of Dos Brazos (population of approximately 300) later that day, a place where much of the tension between resident gold miners and MINAE emanates from – somewhere that no other president had visited. The most fascinating qualities were the sincerity and the power with which nation, citizenry, and ecology were folded into one. This folding is something the Costa Rican state does on a large scale that imbibes a certain sense of patriotism, beyond pandering to environmentalists or making popular claims to generate public support; it is more of a statement of national purpose coupled with environmental purpose. Politicians like Solís have foregrounded the concern for ecological stewardship in new ways that do more than make a claim on ethical behavior; they facilitate identifying oneself in relation to the state. If we understand that environmentalism, rather than merely being a side issue, is central to Costa Rican political discourse, then the president's visit for World Environment Day demonstrates the particular importance the Osa Peninsula holds within Costa Rica's socio-environmental history, as well as the idea that social wellbeing is inseparable from ecological health.

### *In Dos Brazos*

I followed the presidential entourage to Dos Brazos in order to make the second town hall gathering. Roughly ten minutes north from Puerto Jiménez is a well-worn and bumpy dirt road that leads past African oil palm plantations,<sup>47</sup> and finally disintegrates into two different two-track paths once crossing the bridge and arriving at the small *pulpería* and school – where the *Rio Tigre* splits into two (hence the name, Dos Brazos). Because Dos Brazos (in 2014) did not yet have a *salon comunal*, the large crowd crammed into one of the school's classrooms (see Figure 4.1). The setting was more intimate and the mood eager compared with the previous town hall. Many groups were prepared with presentations, posters, decorations, and pamphlets – a sight that engulfed the entrance to the classrooms. The entourage of cars lined the dirt road next to the school. There was an emergency helicopter waiting in the football field for security measures, and when the president was not in the town halls he was in the MINAE headquarters at either Dos Brazos

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<sup>47</sup> This is an agro-export that has grown in significance recently, especially for southwest Costa Rica.

or Puerto Jiménez. After a brief introduction of the president and cabinet, public presentations were made in order to inform the president on what proposals the village could achieve.



Figure 4.1. The football plaza, security detail, and school in Dos Brazos.

Using the unique opportunity to appeal to the nation’s president and cabinet, several groups with interests in the area prepared presentations that aimed to inspire beneficial change. Most groups claimed to have an interest in sustainable development, accounting for providing economic alternatives to the Dos Brazos community while preserving the surrounding rainforest. The town’s major goal is to secure an official entrance to PNC from Dos Brazos, bringing in countless new tourists to hike the park. One initiative, Caminos de Osa, stated in reference to the entire peninsula, “2.5% of the world’s biodiversity, 100% of the culture of the inhabitants.” The groups discussed connections between tourism, conservation, and development. They mentioned that locals want their basic needs met, and that they would like cell phone service and other such types of “development.” The conservation association, acting as the town’s political leadership, identified five challenges: “tourism as the motor for development,” “empowering communities,” “value/ethic [*valor*] of sustainability,” “generating alliances,” and “local

organization.” Maintaining his humble and approachable demeanor, Solís accepted pamphlets and other reading material from the presenters.



Figure 4.2. President Solís wearing a MINAE/SINAC shirt in Dos Brazos.

The president covered numerous talking points while promising improvements based upon people’s needs, including health, education, roads, bridges, technology, security, and (alluding to gold mining) “more dignified work that does less damage.” Hearing the disappointment that Dos Brazos is without a *salon comunal*, Solís assured, “the next time we meet here will be in the new *salon comunal*,” followed by thunderous applause. The goal for some of the groups was to advertise, secure a photo with the president, and maintain a particular appearance that would elicit donations and further their respective causes.

All in attendance felt the great significance of Solís’s visit to Dos Brazos. The small village near the PNC limits is normally the object of MINAE’s criticism, as most of



the illicit gold mining done within the park stems from this population. With a political gain by his administration, Solís can now boast about his sympathy for a marginalized, “off-the-grid” community and make the case that no Costa Rican village is outside his constituency. The visit was also a confidence boost for many residents because their voices were heard and the many ideas for improving the wellbeing of Dos Brazos seemed more within grasp.

This event has served to exemplify the centrality of environmental initiatives within the Costa Rican state at its highest levels. Additionally, the interaction between the president and gathered crowds on World Environment Day demonstrates the potency of environmental rhetoric, the ease with which sustainability discourse is inserted into various aspects of public life, the general acceptance of ecological stewardship as an appropriate consideration in future economic planning, and the juxtaposition of the government’s claim to know what is best for its citizens and those citizens’ acceptance of moral responsibility for ecological health in return for the state’s investment in new public projects or improvements. Not all were delighted by the president’s visit, however, and some remained very skeptical, expressing that all could have been just for show. Some reason for the mistrust of the state and of environmental rhetoric dates to previous state impositions in the Osa, especially during the seventies and eighties. An understanding of what it means for environmental initiatives to fail will help explain some of the reasons for mistrust and lack of communication that Osa residents feel towards “big” conservation.

### **Corcovado National Park (PNC) as a Case of Fortress Conservation**

Conservationism has already been discussed in the previous chapter, along with an explanation of the ways in which PNC was constructed. That discussion continues here, with information provided by rangers and current context for understanding what the park means for those within the Osa, with reflection on Costa Rican national parks more generally. The creation of PNC (see Figure 4.3) has generated a certain degree of controversy since its inception. There are many perspectives on the park, but two interviews in particular deserve some attention: one with the park’s chief manager (also a ranger), and the other with a ranger who has a leadership role at the Dos Brazos station.

The latter, especially, provides a fresh perspective for the aging debate between economic versus ecological priorities. Largely inaccurate and over simplistic, this popular notion supports the dichotomy that places socio-economic concerns in opposition to the interests of environmental protection. The following accounts complicate the problem and clarify our understandings of both those in support of PNC and those opposed. This practice of fortress conservation by the state carries some unexpected vulnerabilities.



Figure 4.3. E. Anissimova 2014. Hikers entering and returning, Corcovado National Park.

After PNC was created in 1975, the RFGD was established in 1976 (although more practically in 1978) and the park's borders were legally expanded in 1980. The controversial talk surrounding PNC has had no impact on tourism's growth. In fact, the notions of the Osa as rugged and conflict-ridden play well into the allure that attracts many backpackers and younger nature enthusiasts to the park. Overall tourism was on a steady increase for the region but fell drastically during the recession of 2008/09. PNC, however, was unaffected by this and the number of its visitors has only increased. According to the director, there were 38,500 tourists who visited the park in 2013, and they predict 40,000 for 2014. 80% of the tourists who visit the Osa visit PNC. 90% of the park's visitors are foreign and the majority of the Costa Rican nationals who visit are not from the Osa. The

visitors' log at La Sirena camp contains names of people from all over the world. The majority of visitors who make it this far into the park are European. The largest (without a close contender) nationwide contributor to Costa Rican tourism overall, however, is the United States.

PNC is perhaps the only park with its own private bank account in addition to the general account constituted by public revenue. All the money raised through entry sales and permits is placed in a government account that oversees all national parks. This means that money raised by PNC does not necessarily become reinvested in its own upkeep. The private account, as the director explains, is meant to cover operating and management costs. Many feel, however, that this is unprecedented, and the high prices charged for food within La Sirena camp attest to a profit-making scheme that does more than merely provide for operating and management.

In addition to the PNC director, I was lucky to converse with one particular ranger while at the MINAE station in Puerto Jiménez. He has had fifteen years of experience as a PNC ranger and is the head of ranging stationed at the Dos Brazos office. This ranger began his career by accident, as a friend who knew he was looking for work suggested a meeting, which turned out to be a psychological evaluation. After passing this, he went on to pass the shooting practice evaluation, and – without ever planning ahead for it – became a ranger. The ranger told me that he enjoys the work, adding that someone could never do it otherwise. This led to a comparison between people from the country and people from the city. He constructs this distinction in order to explain why some rangers can't perform well in the job, become burnt out, and leave. The ranger told me that most of his colleagues (himself included) are *campesinos*, and therefore accustomed to a certain lifestyle in the country that greatly helps endurance for ranging. This distinction also claims a certain identity for the region, and characterizes southwest Costa Rica as a place where individuals maintain an intimate relationship with the environment that urbanites lack. He described the work as “tough, ugly, dangerous, and uncomfortable,” making sure that I understood that the work is not romantic (nor would it be helpful for it to be romanticized). He explained that part of what it means to be accustomed to the country is being familiar with what to expect, a skillset learned through years of practical engagement with the landscape.

The ranger said that he learned later about the importance of biodiversity and other various aims of conservation. His major voiced concern during the interview was securing a fair salary. He mentioned that MINAE pays him only \$450 per month, relatively low compared with the average monthly salary in Puerto Jiménez at about \$600. In order to argue for better pay, this ranger is involved in public workers' and park rangers' unions. The rangers are expected to work more for less pay. When they are out on patrols for days, they are still only paid a workday salary rather than overtime. His patrols are four to five days at a time from any given station. Rangers go out for sixteen or twenty-day tours with subsequent eight or ten-day breaks, respectively. This does not include time spent at the MINAE office. The ranger explained that hunters make the best rangers because they would know what to look for and how a poacher thinks. A ranger with hunting experience would look for changes in vegetation, excrement, and tracks in order to discover where animals might be that would likely attract a group of poaching miners. Likewise, former rangers would make the best gold miners (something he was particularly worried about), as they would know the patrol routes and how to navigate the avoidance of being caught.

Keeping away from snakes and mud, rangers sleep in hammocks with little covers for the rain. It is too muddy for tents, which had been tried in the past. The ranger maintained that rangers' stories comprise untold histories and unheard voices. He spoke of sacrifices such as not seeing his family for weeks at a time each month, in addition to the physical requirements of trekking through the rainforest. He believes that a country that boasts such a "green" reputation should take better care of its park rangers. I also listened to an exchange between him and a female MINAE employee. She was older and explained to us that she does the work because she enjoys it and believes in it rather than for the money. The ranger expressed that he and his colleagues are underpaid regardless of how much they believe in what they are doing. He later expressed to me that she represents an older generational way of thinking. The interview, overall, demonstrated that rangers are not simply park police doing the bidding of the state, but an exploited workforce of *campesinos* who may, as in this case, also feel marginalized.

One young former-ranger, environmentalist and Osa enthusiast, is a wildlife photographer and documentarian who spends days waiting in the forest for the perfect shot. He expressed, through one narrative, how his environmental ethics conflicted with those of

other rangers. Working in Santa Rosa National Park on the northern coast of Guanacaste, he would frequently see boats illegally fishing the waters. When reporting this to his supervisors, the ranger received no response. He persistently tried to warn the boats and send someone to remove them from Santa Rosa waters. This annoyed the other rangers who apparently wanted him to stop reporting the fishing boats. At that point, the ranger's only conclusion was that the fishermen had struck a negotiation with several other rangers and had some sort of deal (whether financially motivated or not) that prohibited the park service from acting. The young ranger, acting as the whistleblower, was clearly an obstacle in this arrangement. This conflict resulted in banning the young ranger from Santa Rosa, and his colleagues communicated to him that he was not welcome back.

As we discussed the meaning of this story, we developed possibilities that reflect some commonalities within conservation practice: the possibility of bribes and the consequences for whistleblowers, the inability of park regulations to create change in behavior, the neglect of certain regulations by those extracting resources, and a sense of apathy, or sometimes compliance, vis-à-vis extraction. This ranger explained that even if all are not bribed financially, there is a desire to fit in to the group, and if the group ignores fishing boats then it is expected of other rangers to also ignore the boats. He reasoned that it might have been a family member or a friend of one of the other rangers who was illegally fishing. Regardless, there is a rationale to assimilate to the politics of the group, constituted by some rangers in Santa Rosa, in this case. This research participant highlighted the fact that conservationism in Costa Rica has this vulnerability and greatly depends upon the actors involved and the group dynamics therein.

PNC's managing director and I did not spend much time discussing the settlers removed in 1975, but instead focused on the perceived threat of the gold miners. Only fifteen miners were found in PNC in 1975, but after 1982 the rangers noticed over one thousand miners. Estimates for miners within the park limits during the mid-eighties debt crisis have been upwards of 3,000 individuals. The director explained that by the mid-eighties the government realized that it had to act if the park was to be protected and paid *mejoras* to approximately 850 miners as relief for being ordered to leave. Some mining settlers, once again, had to prove that they had been living there for at least ten years prior to the creation of protected lands in order to receive payment or prove a right of possession.

The director admitted the difficulty proving this given that earlier settlers would have had no reason to demonstrate legal and documented ownership at that time. This situation was even more difficult for illiterate farmers who lacked written documentation regarding occupancy. IDA (similar to ITCO or INDER) had difficulty discovering the names of the property owners and the property boundaries. The director calls the newly protected lands, “*patrimonio natural del estado*” [natural heritage of the state], reiterating the importance of the park boundaries and the meaning for Costa Rica. These are boundaries, as he believes, that should be protected for the good of the nation, which means that *oreros* selling gold are not acting in the nation’s best interests.

The director acknowledged links between the socio-economic interests of the gold miners and other nearby residents and the weakness of the Costa Rican economy regarding opportunities for residents in the rural southern region. He mentioned that many turn to gold mining when events like the closure of the Banana Company’s Golfito operation or debt crisis have taken place. He also mentioned “gold fever,” a common description of gold mining in the area and a staple of the discourse on the subject. Those who evoke the gold fever factor entertain possible motivations for the gold miners and freely suggest the activity as an addiction rather than an economic necessity. Not only the mechanics of mining, but also the psychology of it becomes an interest to many who interpret the activity in the Osa. Importantly, the gold miners themselves refer to it as a fever at times and demonstrate that this type of rhetoric is not just a matter of the outsider’s gaze. The park director offered the disparaging stereotype that many miners are just trying to make enough money to party and buy “*guaro*” [homemade alcohol], rather than support their families. He believes there to be roughly 400 people currently moving through the park to mine/pan for gold. As we discussed where these individuals entered and how they moved undetected, it became clear that the park director was aware of the routes from Dos Brazos and which rivers were used as trails. He explained that having any sort of *rancho* [hut] within the park limits is illegal and therefore miners’ camps would be destroyed or raided. The rangers capture about thirty to thirty-five people per year and miners face jail time upon their second offense. There were, at the time of the interview, eight individuals in prison serving sentences from six months to two years.

One common critique leveled at MINAE for ranging and policing the miners, suggests that the government should be more sensitive to the socio-economic conditions of villages like Dos Brazos, and perhaps provide economic alternatives to gold mining rather than only punishment. In response to this, the park director explained that it is simply not his job to provide economic alternatives, and rangers are meant to conserve biodiversity within the park. This means that activities that compromise the integrity of rivers, cause erosion, and poaching are targeted and policed. The director explains, “We’re working for the happiness of future generations,” and identifies this happiness as fitting the environmental narrative and top-down approach even if it contrasts with what neighboring residents believe.

When I inquired further about conflict between the gold miners and rangers, the park director was candid throughout his response. He admitted that there are problems (meaning fights, injuries, and potentially dangerous altercations) but people aren’t normally killed. Although there are attacks, he mentioned that they are relatively uncommon. Rangers did shoot a miner some years ago who died from his wounds. The director denied that the death was a direct result of the wounds but instead thought it was due to an infection that could have been avoided. We also discussed negative perceptions of the park’s administration. The director explained, “[people in the area] have bad conceptions of this – that the government wants the gold for itself.” A number of nearby residents told me that PNC is just for foreigners, implying that *ticos* (Costa Ricans) are not welcome, do not share in the interests of the park’s stewards, and were not included in the park’s vision. Such notions are only slightly popular, and serve to reify a divide between environmentalists and tourists and the longtime inhabitants of the Osa. By promoting the simplified idea that those ignoring environmental regulations must view natural resources in materialistic terms and terms of self-interest, the director shares the stereotypical view that nearby residents do not have an aesthetic and intimate relationship with the environment that could be compared with other environmentalists. He constructs a hierarchy of values to assist in his case for fortress conservation, but fails to show the complexity within the environmental stewardship practices of rangers and *oreros* alike.

## Fishing Meetings in Puerto Jiménez and Golfito

The following ethnographic portraits provide some detail into initiative planning and community outreach. These are state-supported or sponsored meetings that exemplify what transition from fortress conservation to a more egalitarian approach might entail in practice. The occasion of each meeting offers a window into the process by which future environmental strategies are negotiated, and portrays the evident ethical mistakes made by more powerful actors (e.g., the state, various NGOs, and large land owners), reasons for distrust towards such actors, the politics of power at work, and how more democratic strategizing forms to implement a different future for ecological stewardship.

A meeting on sustainable fishing in Puerto Jiménez's *salon comunal* brought together a mix of conservationists, tourism interests, and artisanal fishermen. The main objective for the meeting was to educate the audience about the dangers that fishing can impose on sea turtles. Signs read, "yes to sustainable fishing" [*sí a la pesca sostenible*], and a billboard in the front remarked on by-catch, "within fishing, there are not just fish" [*dentro de pescado, no solo hay peces*]. The first presenter, a Costa Rican turtle conservationist, addressed the crowd of roughly twenty people and began with disclaimers regarding his intentions. He felt it necessary to prequel that this presentation was not aimed as an advertisement, nor was it a political ploy, addressing common critiques of conservation and such presentations for promoting in forms of marketing and personalities of manipulation. The speaker qualified his position as a conservationist and assured the crowd of selfless intentions before launching ahead into the planned talk regarding the importance of sea turtles and their safety.

The speaker discussed the four different species of sea turtles found in Costa Rica, their level of endangerment [*estado de conservación*], methods for assisting the injured, and elicited responses from the audience to create participation. With enthusiasm, the speaker quizzed the audience and passed around t-shirts with conservationist logos. The audience was excited, and many were raising their hands to try and win a t-shirt. While advocating the protection of sea turtles and making the presentation fun for the audience, the speaker also resorted to generalizations regarding the traditional consumption of turtle eggs. He referred to those who eat turtle eggs and poach nests as "bad people." The message was



presented in an ethically charged manner meant to convince the crowd that sea turtles have suffered too much and must be cared for, even though there were – without a doubt – individuals present who had consumed turtle eggs.

Once the subject within the sustainable fishing talk changed to the “economic role,” the crowd became fiercely engaged and animated. People participated by asking challenging questions, sharing opinions, calling out, and using strong language. Many residents were angry that the community has not been more involved in the decision-making processes regarding sustainability regulations. Further complaints were that foreigners have seemingly been able to bypass controls while small-scale fishermen have not, suggesting that the gaze of punishment has not been equally shared. One idea was that tourism could help fishermen and turtle egg poachers by giving them work. It became clear from the reactions that a turtle conservation project that would not involve the community was impossible. Due to the historic lack of community involvement within such sustainability initiatives, this crowd (like others) has viewed conservation as foreign to the area. Many residents voiced discontent at not being included or invited to participate in these vast socio-economic changes.

A conversation with one of the fishermen in attendance will be provided in the next chapter; but here, it should be noted that this public meeting is one representation of the transition to community outreach, and the meeting described below is an example of a private gathering (by invitation only) that seeks similar aims. Outreach is an area where state and NGOs have worked together, and both meetings involve such collaboration.

### *Golfito*

The meeting in Golfito brought together fishermen of various kinds, and aimed at improving the Costa Rican Institute of Fish and Aquaculture (INCOPECSA). INCOPECSA, since 1994, has been the government’s administrative institute for sustainable fishing, with a stated purpose to “modernize” Costa Rican fishing (*Ley 7384*). An unprecedented attempt at outreach by INCOPECSA, fishermen and others were prepared to launch critiques at the institute and offer decades worth of complaints. President Solís’ promise to involve community members in state planning is partly the

precedent for organizing this meeting. Additionally, Solís' sister is a well-known marine biologist and conservationist, and it is widely rumored that she influences many of the president's maritime policy decisions. I was invited by members of OC who arrived with the representative of Sierpe's *piangua*<sup>48</sup> clam fishing association. OC has had extensive experience working with *piangua* fishermen (*piangueros*) through their wetlands initiative that has sought to empower the fishermen, improve their financial efficiency (raising *piangua* prices, for example), establish environmental regulatory norms, and create a sustainable practice. Entering the meeting with OC allowed for an opportunity to better understand the perspective of small-scale fishermen from Sierpe. This section exposes problems within the state-level (top-down) administration, illuminates how the state hopes to address these concerns, and reveals power dynamics at work throughout these interactions.

The day's workshop was spent lambasting INCOPECSA and detailing how it has failed on all fronts, apart from finally opening a dialogue. The workshop opened with the question "what would make the day the most productive," followed by collectively brainstorming best and worst-case scenarios, and ultimately, focused on creating the most productive atmosphere possible. Along with the representatives from INCOPECSA, participants began discussing problems of the Osa and Golfito areas. The major issues exposed by the group were as follows: extreme poverty, unemployment, inter-institutional lack of coordination, health and education, a critically deficient fishing sector, no representation within the board of directors for INCOPECSA, no central meeting place, lack of institutional support, lack of coast guard and local government support, lack of support for organizing cooperatives, lack of government support for local fishermen concerning responsible practice (sustainability in accordance with protected areas), planned regulatory services, non-potable water, lack of implementation of alternatives, deficient driving chain for commercialization and production concerning INCOPECSA, many excluded areas, and lack of studies on new forms of fishing in Golfo Dulce (and relevant surrounding areas). The task was to identify, through involving everyone's opinion, the problem of fishing controls and the issues that the controls would concern.

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<sup>48</sup> *Piangua* is the most popular mollusk for consumption in Costa Rica.

We were then split into groups to discuss strengths and weaknesses, leading to potential solutions. The groups included those representing small-scale fishing, medium-scale fishing, sport fishing and tourism, and the environmentalists, NGO representatives, and institutional sector workers together. The list of weaknesses we generated in groups was similar to the one completed at the start and also emphasized regulations with “social consciousness” [*conciencia social*], the lack of a more representative board of directors that responds to public interests, and that INCOPECA is run without clear biological vision. Many discussed lack of rules and structure for fishing laws. The laws that have established INCOPECA should also be accompanied by specific regulation objectives, guidelines for how the laws will be implemented. All the workshop’s participants felt that these regulations should be vastly improved, as the rules had not been created in dialogue with many fisherman and fail to adequately represent the populace of the Golfo Dulce area.

After we listed the strengths and weaknesses of INCOPECA and the maritime issues of the southern zone, we split into different groups and were charged with the task of outlining possible causes for these issues and their imagined solutions. While the day ended on a positive and optimistic note, some were disappointed and felt that there was too much to do in the course of one day. Most realized, however, that the meeting with INCOPECA was a first step in a process of creating dialogue between the state institution and fishermen of Golfo Dulce. Future steps would include events like an upcoming symposium and gathering of fishing interests; the latter warranted some conversation and prepping throughout the workshop. Important conversations with the OC participants and *pianguero* association leader will be discussed later for another look at environmental practice, and below, I focus on the NGOs and private sector.

These two meetings reflect dissent from the mainstreaming and more influential sectors of the fishing industry. Costa Rica’s recent stance on liberated trade policies has favored large international tuna interests. Shrimping has been a controversial activity in Golfo Dulce, and was eventually limited to outside the gulf’s waters. Growth in the sport fishing industry has paralleled the increase in tourism, and boasts an impressive gain to 4% of the nation’s GDP in 2014. As the participants within each of the two meetings have expressed, many do not feel that their needs are met by the institutional regulations, sustainability initiatives, and maritime state planning. There is a communication

disconnect between the more powerful entities including the state and large businesses and the smaller scale artisanal fishermen that not only leaves growing economic inequality, but reveals a national transformation that creates new divides within places like Golfo Dulce.

### **The Osa Campaign and Top-Down Approach**

This section discusses the Osa Campaign, a fairly top-down approach to preserve biodiversity on the Osa Peninsula, and offers general critique of the strategy from one of its practitioners, Maria. The Osa Campaign, covering the years 2003-2008, was a collaborative initiative for biodiversity conservation between the Costa Rican government (MINAE and SINAC), international environmental NGOs, and various funding bodies, which sought to create lasting mitigation of environmental degradation by hiring more rangers, establishing a bio-corridor between parks, and gaining a better understanding of regional conservation needs. Talk of the Osa Campaign circulates through NGOs like OC, associations like ASCONA, and various residents who expressed their doubts to me regarding the potential successes of environmentalism. Before introducing Maria, I briefly outline the intentions and results of the Osa Campaign as noted within the “Osa Campaign Summary” (English version) written for the purposes of community outreach (Appendix B), which I include for discursive analysis. This pamphlet is analyzed as a primary source along with information gathered through relevant interviews.

The pamphlet’s summary starts with the following claim: “The Osa Campaign serves as a model to replicate in Costa Rica since it is the first experience where efforts by public, private, and entrepreneurial organizations come together for the conservation of biodiversity.” The committee in charge of the campaign believed to be responding to “an emergency that threatened biodiversity in ACOSA.” The committee’s primary activity was to “provide funds for conservation and sustainable development” based upon several specific priorities. The committee would spread the funds among partners who were identified as critical for implementing various conservation and sustainable development projects throughout the Osa. The campaign, active from 2003 to 2008, involved a partnership between Conservation International (CI), the Costa Rica-United States of

America Foundation (CRUSA), The Nature Conservancy (TNC), MINAET,<sup>49</sup> and SINAC. The initial goal was to raise \$32,500,000 and the partners raised \$17,169,561, spending under \$2 million on administrative fees – although some informants contradicted this.

The committee's summary provides a familiar overview of the environmental characteristics of the Osa Peninsula and Golfo Dulce region usually stated by all environmentalists that discuss the area. Following the claim that "ACOSA shelters 2.5% of the [species] biodiversity on planet Earth," numbers for present bird, mammal, reptile/amphibian, fish, and insect species are given. The summary praises the great amount of endemic species, and the fact that the Osa is home to "50% of all the animal species found in the Costa Rican territory." The privileged status given to animals rather than plants is common among such pamphlets created for public consumption, resting on the belief that tourists and potential donors are less inspired by plants. Marine life is boasted about as well; the unique quality of Golfo Dulce being one of only four tropical fjords in the world and the expansive mangrove structure that constitutes Terraba-Sierpe National Wetland.

This value of biodiversity is assumed as an inherent virtue of the land. Such natural qualities, described as pure and precious, are positioned as something that gains the "attention of thousands of tourists and scientists" but run contrary to threats identified as "fish and wildlife poaching, illegal logging, unsustainable agriculture, and unplanned development." Viewed in this binary, the antagonistic relations between scientists, environmentalists, and the tourism industry, on one hand, and poachers, loggers, subsistence farmers, and other residents, on the other, only worsen. The Osa Campaign is diagnosing the problem and managing its prognosis without considering many sociopolitical challenges embedded within pursuing the prevention of human activities like logging, hunting, farming, and, the vaguely defined, "development."

Narratives of uniqueness are commonly employed to discuss the Osa, and, when used by environmentalists in such cases, the problems of threats to the "purity" of the environment become fuel for environmental activism. PNC (and by extension, the rest of the Osa Peninsula), often proclaimed the "jewel of the National Park system," has received

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<sup>49</sup> The acronym "MINAET" refers to the same governing body as MINAE with the addition of "Telecommunications."

special attention from Costa Rican environmentalists given that it is the only lowland rainforest on the Pacific Coast, contains an impressive array of biodiversity for its size, and marks one of Costa Rica's least industrially developed and most remote areas relative to the Central Valley. For those reasons and others, influential environmentalists like Álvaro Ugalde supported the Osa Campaign and further efforts to reduce human impact within ACOSA lands. Looking ahead at what the Osa Campaign imagines future generations will be able to enjoy, campaign practitioners cite conservation and sustainable development as critical to preserving biodiversity. In order to do this, the campaign has listed four primary objectives: (1) protect the biodiversity of all ACOSA lands by "improving how the private land in the parks [is] managed and paid for," (2) "establish a biological corridor between the Corcovado and Piedras Blancas National Parks and the Térraba-Sierpe National Wetlands," (3) "establish a comprehensive protection program for the marine and coastal resources on the Osa Peninsula," and (4) "strengthen the ability of the local organizations and communities to ensure conservation activity sustainability." To achieve these goals the campaign split responsibility between fundraising and carrying out initiatives locally. Depending on their expertise, the organizations involved would oversee the execution of various programs and the "committee did not function as the project executor." This meant that the donor and the executor were usually different for each pursued activity. The pamphlet then provides a lengthy chart that illustrates the categories for different actions, activities carried through, donors, executors, and the amount invested per activity.

It elaborates that one of the activities in the chart known as "Osa On Your Skin" was meant to raise money for biodiversity protection by selling tattoos of animals from the area. Similarly, I witnessed face painting at nearly every environmental festival I attended in the Osa. This practice was very popular with children and was used to celebrate the area's animals in a familiar and fun way. The hope for many environmentalists is that spreading awareness in such a way will translate into biodiversity protection or hindrance of environmental threats.

Even though debt-for-nature swaps began about fifteen years prior to the Osa Campaign, the committee explains that the campaign was integral to finalizing the deal and brought an extra \$5 million to be invested in the Osa over a period of sixteen years. This amount, while in coordination with the Osa Campaign, is not included in the total amount

raised as noted above. The Osa Peninsula was noted as one of only six places,<sup>50</sup> identified by its biodiversity, in the country to benefit from the total amount raised during this round of debt-for-nature swap negotiations.

The final section of the pamphlet details the Osa Campaign's achievements. One of the clearest impacts of the campaign was success at hiring many new rangers, increasing security for the parks, and assisting the overall maintenance and administration of the protected areas. "Control and protection activities" more than doubled, and filed reports of encroachment increased 369% from 2006 to 2007. Encroachments like poaching and gold mining in the park are seen as "a detriment to the area's natural heritage." Job conditions and quality of life was said to have improved for the rangers as well. Important to note is that jobs created for rangers lasted only as long as the campaign's finances. The government failed to pay the rangers once the funds were exhausted and eventually dismissed them, leading to subsequent unemployment.

Management plans and regulatory plans were drawn. The "emergency situation" that was once again utilized as a label for the Osa, was mitigated by the campaign's efforts. The committee members of the campaign have felt that since the success of the Osa Campaign a precedent has been set for certain public-private partnerships with the aims of conservation. Environmental awareness increased during the Osa Campaign, and published articles concerning the Osa in *La Nación* grew from four in 2001-02 to eighteen in 2007-08. In creating a bureaucratic network for conservation, the Osa Campaign supported "more than 10 organizations that work in ACOSA on institutional strengthening and strategic planning." They created a "heritage fund" meant as a trust that gathers interest to be spent on both public and private initiatives for years to come. "1,704.9 hectares were purchased from private owners for the amount of \$3,312,202" in order to bolster the bio-corridor connecting the two major parks (PNC and Piedras Blancas). This purchase, donated to the government, was only the beginning and more land was continually added in "strategic spots" to buttress the bio-corridor. Finally, the pamphlet's summary reiterates that securing the Costa Rican debt-for-nature swaps were achievements largely indebted to the hard work of Osa Campaign committee members.

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<sup>50</sup> The other five locales for protection are La Amistad International Park, Tortuguero, Maquenque, Rincón de la Vieja, and Nicoya.

The portrait of the Osa Campaign is meant to demonstrate that the private sector and international environmentalist community work with the state to manage and impose environmental regulations. This campaign's strategy mirrors that of other initiatives like BOSCOA, an "integrated conservation and development project," which failed to establish lasting community-based conservation and left residents with the impression that conservation was a business (Fletcher 2012: 309). As we will see from one of the Osa Campaign's practitioners, the top-down model of environmentalism is not sustainable, and lack of regional integration is clearly unpopular.

### *Maria*

One woman in particular, Maria, has intimate knowledge of working with OC and within the Osa Campaign. She is about fifty years old, from San José, and provided invaluable insight to me throughout fieldwork. Maria worked tirelessly on the Osa Campaign and was one of the activists "on the ground" in the peninsula rather than tucked away in an office in San José or out on the fundraising trail. She told me that Ugalde himself, among others, urged her to return to the Osa to "save it." Such an instance would have followed Ugalde's lamenting statements that "Corcovado is dying," also signifying a metonym for the Osa's entirety. Affable, direct, energetic, and enthusiastic, Maria explained about her experience working in international development and her views on the NGO world today. She was influenced by her grandfather, whom she describes as "a visionary," and has been working on conservation and sustainable development initiatives in some form for most of her professional life.

Maria was candid about the state of international development NGOs and the actual potential for facilitating socio-political change. She pointed out that too often NGOs enter into an area (usually rural) from somewhere else (usually urban) and make moral and political claims that would influence the lives of the many residents without bothering to understand the socio-political landscape they seek to navigate. A quite common critique of NGOs in this area is that they do not appear to be asking enough questions in order to understand what residents generally feel are problems. Instead, many NGOs come already equipped with an idea of the "problem." Maria explained, "It has to be subjective. You



have to include people's personal needs – can't treat people like cattle.” She envisions a collaborative effort where the incoming NGO and communities involved would define problems together and develop solutions that would make sense to the majority involved. Maria, based upon her experience with international development, critiques the top-down approach. She laments mistakes made and marginalized communities: “This is not right, not ethical – not the way we should proceed.” The NGO encounter has too often been, as James Ferguson notes, an “anti-politics machine” (1994). Worried that, through implementing NGO solutions, the plans carried out will assimilate various socio-political nuances into one sweeping narrative, Maria calls for a better understanding of specific cases with their own specific prognoses. She proposes, among many other ideas, for future activism to “have to treat each of those situations on its own terms – cannot cage many different situations into one.”

Maria was on the ground during the Osa Campaign and acted as a valued asset for goals that environmentalists like Ugalde were promoting. Discouraged with the ease with which the funds raised had vanished, she admitted that she is “still trying to figure out what we did with the 22 million dollars.”<sup>51</sup> She enthusiastically reiterates, “I cannot tell you [what happened]... and it's my job to know!” As I probed further, she assured me that it was not a case of massive corruption or one where she could pinpoint a theft, more just bureaucratic failure and mismanagement. Maria continued to say that upwards of around 6 million was paid to consultants at TNC, even though the summary discussed above shows a much lower figure.

Many residents were, and have continued to be, skeptical of large NGOs like TNC and CI who have tended to rent “the nicest house in town” and drive relatively expensive vehicles. It has remained difficult for many residents to believe that the NGOs are truly acting, as they insist, in the interests of the communities or biodiversity rather than their own interests. Even mentioning the type of car or the type of house from which NGO employees appear has remained a prominent part of the discourse surrounding these issues of communication disconnect, suggesting that trust must be established on a more familiar basis and over a longer period of time. Maria offered a number of examples from her previous work in the international development sector in addition to her work in the Osa

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<sup>51</sup> This figure likely refers to the 17 million raised plus the 5 million from nature-for-debt swaps.

that make similar claims and emphasize the importance of understanding not only the problem to be solved but also (and more importantly) the people with whom the work will be carried out and sustained, those most affected by the proposed projects.

The lack of integration with nearby communities is the most prominent critique of fortress conservation and the top-down approach. Maria remembers, “We never took into account those social aspects...” “Social aspects” could mean anything from the variety of desires and economic requirements of local residents to the political and historical nuances that would guide almost any undertaking that could affect many communities. When Maria states, “the whole process should integrate,” she is referring to a necessary collaboration between the incoming NGOs (or an imposition from the state) and those most affected by the proposed work. The question of integration assumes differing groups and boundaries between them. These groupings are not just referring to the foreign urbanite and the rural locality, but also the human and nonhuman.

Given that most of the environmental work and policy in the Osa is oriented towards protecting biodiversity, the defining characteristics of biodiversity are important. Environmentalists have historically meant biodiversity to include species other than humans. Many, including Maria, now suggest that biodiversity include humans and that local residents are part of the ecology. Maria states, “humans are part of the biodiversity... unless I’m crazy.” With this statement, Maria asserts that preserving the area’s biodiversity should include the wellbeing of residents. This marks a changing attitude amongst environmentalists in the Osa (and elsewhere) one which has shifted from an interest solely in conservation to one that includes economic sustainability of nearby communities.

Maria maintains that the “NGO community is becoming a bureaucracy like any other government,” implying that NGO governance entails similar properties of disconnectedness as those found within the discourse on government. There is an irony within NGO project success that exists within the following contradiction: NGOs, according to many experts and Osa residents, should be working to achieve a project’s goals, and then promptly leave, but it also takes time to make connections, build trust, understand the needs and desires of a certain community, and create a meaningful contribution to what is collectively identified as the wellbeing of a community of both nonhumans and humans. When critics of the NGO sector and environmentalists, such as

Maria in this case, make statements like, “if you cure the illness then you can’t sell the drug,” they allude to the fact that NGOs are also businesses, to the ambiguous nature of the “illness” at the outset, and to the desire to prolong an effort rather than resolve whatever is imagined as the problem. The “drug” depends upon the presence of a problem, which becomes a necessary condition of radical intervention; there must be a moment of crisis in order to maintain the business of dealing with the said crisis. Simultaneously, she and many others support the idea that conservation should be a business in the sense that raising money means employing more people and sustaining a project long enough to get enough work done. Conservation in this sense will (or should) be more successful with more funding support, and therefore better address the issues identified. Returning to her point about the “useless 22 million dollars,” even when a substantial amount is raised, success is far from guaranteed.

The language of environmentalism is also an important consideration. How the problem is described and explained holds implications for the type of discussion that would follow. For example, environmental regulations prohibit hunting in Costa Rica. When conservationists entered the Osa, they tended to arrive with the mindset that poaching is wrong, but those who stay – marry and adopt the Osa as their home, for example – hold a more nuanced view that considers hunting for subsistence different from hunting for sport. Maria advises, “you can’t tell a parent to stop hunting to feed their children without providing an economic alternative – so why call them illegal hunters?” Environmental efforts that lead to antagonism, like that between rangers and poachers or between NGO projects and neighboring farmers, are often fruitless and unsustainable. Maria warns that environmentalists who succumb to antagonistic relations may end up “fighting a ghost – like the illegal hunter,” something impossible to catch and never accurately understood from the top-down perspective.

Maria instead advises conservationists to “sleep with your enemy – understand your threats,” in order to become better acquainted with what environmentalists and state planners view to be hindering forces for the protection of ecosystem biodiversity. “Enemy” is a loaded term and relates to the antagonistic relationship between locals and NGOs in the Osa. Through a more intimate understanding of the socio-political landscape, environmentalists would overcome some of this antagonism, create bridges of

communication, elicit trust, and attempt more collaborative definitions for concepts like ecology and biodiversity, a reconceptualization that alters the political consequences of such claims towards a more democratic approach. “Sleeping with your enemy,” perhaps, includes community-based natural resource management, grassroots campaigning, or other iterations of more egalitarian measures of pursuing environmental initiatives. On a peninsula where the fortress has created the “enemy” rhetoric to begin with, Maria’s critique aptly illuminates disappointment with the top-down fortress model of conservation and does not provide a panacea solution but suggests investigation of specific contexts.

It is important to note that Maria is critiquing the system from within its practice. The integration for which she advocates rests on the belief that “it’s *their* biodiversity!” as she has emphatically reiterated many times. Maria places the land’s ownership with the longtime residents and not the ownership represented by the government seizure during the seventies. The best claims to the environment are those of the region itself.

## **Conclusion**

Many environmental initiatives have transformed into efforts for community outreach and sustainable development, signifying an attempt to include previously overlooked interests of local residents. This encounter between residents and both the NGOs and the state is precisely where key tensions are located, helping to explain how environmental initiatives are negotiated. If there are problems of power imposition and disenfranchisement within both fortress conservation and sustainable development or community-based conservation projects, then how might conservation be carried out in a manner that avoids such traces of imperialism? Such broadly concerned guiding questions are addressed throughout, but this chapter has served to outline conservationism as an institution. Next, Chapter 4 provides reactions to that institution; not only concerning environmentalism, but land use and political ecology of the Osa in general.

Environmental practice as imperialism, a top-down approach, or fortress conservation has demonstrated an agenda of particular subject-making and enforcement meant to assimilate behaviors deemed improper. That practice, however, is not without its own fissures, contradictions, and vulnerabilities.

## Chapter 4

### Dissenting *Campesinos*: Reactions to the New Mainstreaming of Land Use

The contentious political ecology of the Osa Peninsula has been established in previous chapters. This chapter exposes ethnographic accounts that detail dissent from the mainstreaming of land use in the area, which includes the management of PNC, RFGD, incoming private investment, activism, and regulatory initiatives that oversee rural space. The term “mainstreaming,” here, refers to the process through which land use is regulated, policed, and incorporated into ethical and economic regimes that seek to force the assimilation of other practices. Accounts of violence during the 1970s reflect how that contentious atmosphere continues to affect residents. Although the interests of extraction companies are clearly not shared with those of the environmental reformers in the Osa, many residents have viewed incoming groups in much the same light. Continuing the discussion of the critique of government and NGO initiatives in the Osa, the focus here is on what many *campesinos* and other residents are saying regarding large incoming interests – those of the state, private sector, environmentalists, and others. Dissent from these regimes of land use illustrates what powerful initiatives in the Osa have meant to those most notably marginalized.

The discourse of longtime residents concerning incoming interests provides another set of interactions and competing meanings concerning the environment. The first section introduces three *campesinos* who remember violence during the 1970s, disagree with RFGD management, and have remained skeptical of large-scale land use strategies. I briefly describe senses of nostalgia and offer generational perspectives. Then, the Forest Law and ITCO Law are considered for the affect among migrating settlers dubbed *precaristas* and *campesinos*, in addition to the importance of the grievances that portray RFGD’s implementation as illegal. The Forest Law’s rhetoric, in particular, details

priorities for the green agenda and the manner in which the realm of the “social” is circumscribed from the perspective of environmental policy. The following section, “Displacing the Rural and the New Order of Conservation,” advances evidence for dissenting *campesinos* and adds scenarios where various types of knowledge clash. Finally, examples from two local entrepreneurs and a public service worker are offered in order to display the variety of opinions towards the new mainstreaming of land use, and to illustrate how strongly some feel with regards to state and foreign impositions. Exemplifying a critique of environmental initiatives that have replaced large-scale private investment as the governing body of the Osa, one man’s term, “*conserbullshionista*,” captures the mood well and demonstrates some residents’ resentment and mistrust concerning new orders of land use.

### **Remembering and Inheriting Conflict**

Jacques Achen,<sup>52</sup> an elderly Costa Rican man whose German and French name resulted from a love story decades old,<sup>53</sup> accompanies me to interview *campesinos* who were affected by the violence perpetrated by Osa Productos Forestales during the 1970s. Jacques is excited because he has been collecting data for years that supports his case against the legality of La Reserva Forestal de Golfo Dulce that replaced OPF in ownership over a large portion of the Osa Peninsula. Charismatic and ambitious in his assertions over RFGD’s illegality and his ability to challenge that authority, Jacques insists that I should use real names, journalistic accounts, forceful language, and a political message of resistance to what he has learned to be the source of trouble over land entitlements and government overreach. I rebutted with my take on anthropological ethics and the importance of anonymizing informants only to be cut off by an exuberant “no!” Jacques explains that real names and real events put together in the form of an academic thesis will be just the subversive device to critique RFGD’s dominance over previously inhabited land, potentially deliver land titles to people who have lived for decades on their untitled

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<sup>52</sup> All names are pseudonyms unless published authors or public figures. Jacques Achen’s multinational name, changed from the original French and German name, reflects the global aspects of Puerto Jiménez and the Osa Peninsula.

<sup>53</sup> Jacques’s father had had a French lover in the past, and wanted to pay her respect by giving his son a French name.

property, and thus challenge the government's authority. He gestures and punches the air to show what he wants to do to the management of RFGD. I chose not to argue further about the presentation of information, knowing that I would have to disappoint him in many ways in order to complete balanced research. Although I struggled with the ethics of Jacques' request for real names and a polemic document that could be used for purposes that align with his political agenda of demanding justice, the demands of research were such that maintaining distance from activism proved important. Using pseudonyms protects research participant identities in many cases and helps distinguish research from other types of ethnographic writing.

The *campesinos* we visited, Doña Silva and Don Zoraba, vividly remembered how their livelihoods were threatened by OPF. They have both lived through the subsequent scandals over land titles, something that Doña Silva calls “a really tough fight with OPF.” A few other people in town had referred me to Jacques, noting his reputation as an outspoken *campesino*. He is known to advocate farmers' rights and to challenge the dominance of government agencies like the Ministry of the Environment and Energy (MINAE) and the Institute of Rural Development (INDER) [*Instituto de Desarrollo Rural*]. After we met and began discussing the issues and complaints surrounding land rights and uses in the Osa, he explained that he had printouts of the Forest Law and various other documents. Jacques was keen for me to have copies of all of these documents and to have them with his notes attached. He had highlighted sections and articles he felt were very important. It was clear that he had spent a long time looking for the exact rules that the government ignored while establishing the RFGD. We photocopied all of his documents with his handwriting, exclamations, and notes covering many sheets. The goal of this collaboration for Jacques was to share and create what he felt would be a better platform to admonish the government's practices. Given that the land in question was owned by OPF before the government took control, both periods of ownership are seen as instances of invasion that have left many *campesinos* in precarious circumstances.

Jacques is not only concerned with the practices of such incoming interventions, but also with the discourse used. He uses the conventional phrase “blah, blah, blah” to describe misleading information, lies, and a type of enviro-speak or language that may sound promising, but has negative or unimportant consequences, according to Jacques. Similarly,

he does not have a great deal of patience for discussing sustainable development, environmentalism, and many other ideas aimed at improving the wellbeing of Puerto Jiménez and its surrounding communities. Jacques spoke out during a talk with a group of environmentalists and argued that action should be taken to empower rural communities and that if nothing changed then the whole discussion would only be “blah, blah, blah.” Addressing famous Costa Rican environmentalists like Alvaro Ugalde who have publicly expressed regret for the displacement and mistreatment of rural families, Jacques also describes such apologies as “blah, blah, blah.” The distinction between talk and action is an integral part of the common critique of NGO work in this area. Jacques and other *campesinos* question the sincerity of environmentalists from large cities like San José, and claim that someone who has not experienced a life of subsistence farming is immediately unqualified for making demands of farmers. Given the history of OPF and the state’s involvement resettling *campesinos* to establish PNC, newer interventions – whether they involve conservation, tourism, or “sustainable development” – are compared with the events of the 1970s and met with skepticism.

Passing the rural communities of La Palma just twenty-five minutes outside of Puerto Jiménez, we began to look for the farmhouses we were visiting when I asked Jacques: “what does MINAE think of what you’re putting together, and what have they said to you?” He began, “that’s the best question you’ve asked so far,” alluding to the suggestive and loaded nature of the question that probed the controversy and the animosity that usually accompany such issues of state policy in rural Costa Rica. Jacques explained that it looks bad for the government to have a vocal “old *campesino*” like him bashing government land policies on television and other media. “They don’t like me much,” he said, but added, “I still have good relations with them... we can talk.” Despite being able to communicate with MINAE workers, Jacques was not optimistic about getting land titles without a fight, nor was he optimistic for a more relaxed policy regarding permissions for various land uses unless some drastic changes were made, including a candid acceptance that the government did not follow protocol written in the Forest Law while establishing the RFGD. We knew that the cases of Doña Silva and Don Zoraba would illuminate some perspectives regarding the history of violence and land use in the Osa Peninsula.



As we approached the *finca* (farm/ranch) with a unique mailbox that marks Don Zoraba's residence, Jacques instructed me to wait in the car so he could make the introduction and briefly explain what I was doing. Noticing me behind the wheel and Jacques's questions about OPF, Don Zoraba immediately turned to me, asking: "colleagues of yours?" Don Zoraba was equating me with a North American man named Peter or his accomplices who had taken leadership of OPF in the 1970s. "No, he's *British*," Jacques continued, "I wouldn't be hanging out with any *gringo*<sup>54</sup> [North American]." I had already mentioned to Jacques that I was studying at the University of London but am a native to New York. I chose not to correct the misconception at that time, as I didn't want to compromise the interview. Jacques really did think I was British at that moment and the misconception allowed for his unfiltered opinions of *gringos* to appear. After another minute of explanation, Don Zoraba allowed us to enter, sit, and converse with him about the past experiences of living there.

Don Zoraba told a story of OPF violence, of being forced from his own property, of local corruption, of petitioning the government to remove OPF, and finally, of the company's exit. Don Zoraba was chased down by a small group of individuals led by the North American he called Peter. He was shot three times and bullets scraped his head, knocking him to the ground. The perpetrator then approached and shot once more at point blank range through his torso, missing Don Zoraba's spine by an inch. After being shot a few times in the head and once in the body, he was lucky to be alive. He was rushed to care, but still forced to cross the gulf by ferry, and he survived his wounds after being told how close he was to being paralyzed at the very least. Doña Silva remembers that a "brave guy" disarmed the assailant with a stick and held him down, and that eventually this assailant found care in OPF's own facilities nearby while Don Zoraba was left for dead. Don Zoraba lifted his shirt to reveal the scars, "These are from draining fluid out... this is where he shot me." He also told us to feel his skull where the bullets hit. He guided our hands along through his hair in order to find the grooves and the scar tissue. He seemed to speak with a sense of pride and without fear or regret.

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<sup>54</sup> This common but derogatory term is used for people from the United States and sometimes Canadians or Europeans – referring to an "American attitude" and charged with memories of U.S. imperialism.

On the day he was shot, Don Zoraba was taken first to Golfito, accessible by ferry, and later to San José where he would spend three months in recovery. Don Zoraba recalled losing consciousness in Golfito by the end of the day due to blood loss, and awakening for a lengthy battle of official retribution. During this time, he attempted legal action against the assailants, but the regional judge in Golfito was under the influence of OPF and ordered that Don Zoraba be arrested instead and placed immediately in prison. After finding another court in San Isidro, Don Zoraba was successful and was able to generate an arrest warrant for Peter instead. The judge in Golfito was later relieved of his position. Additionally, Peter is understood to have fled the country after the attempted murder went public, his influence was lost, and the arrest warrant issued.

In Jacques's words, our interviews were to "*renacer un conflicto*" or to bring new life to the historic conflict. When Doña Silva told us about the infamous attack, she referred to OPF as "terrorists," "crazy," "*hijos de puta*,"<sup>55</sup> and "dogs." For most of the *campesinos*, the problems started when, as Don Zoraba explains, OPF "seized the land" where many residents were born and raised. He explains: "what began as exploration in timber prospects, became exploitation." Competing definitions for ownership and property were at stake, following the tensions between the settlers and the timber company. Definitions for foreign and domestic are also contentious, as they are clearly charged with morally and politically useful drives, representative of each opposing interest in land claims. The *campesinos* view themselves as "*hijos de patria*" – as being within their own homeland. According to the government, researchers, conservationists, and OPF, the *campesinos* are *precaristas* – illegally occupying land to which they have no right. The truths of the latter group exist on paper, through recent legislation, and within the speculation of what the contended landscape of the Osa should become. The truths of the former group are claims rooted within the experiences of living and working on the land.

Although there were many attacks and unsolved conflicts during this time, Don Zoraba mentions his as the "most grave." One of the Costa Rican OPF guards was murdered; however, Don Zoraba claims it was not his group of neighbors who had anything to do with the crime. Contrary to what most OPF and other interest groups believe, Don Zoraba explains that the fight was "between the employees themselves," and likely over

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<sup>55</sup> This is translated as "sons of bitches/whores" or "motherfuckers."

some money the victim was paid before being robbed and killed by other OPF guards. Doña Silva remembers details of a grand shootout between thirty or more individuals when she was sixteen. Each of the interviewed *campesinos* remembers being policed and bullied through town and on their land. Doña Silva was imprisoned without just cause – a very common occurrence. Jacques was probed with questions and escorted to Puerto Jiménez, perhaps to keep him out of nearby farms. As the number of migrant settlers in the Osa increased during the early to mid-1970s, conflicts over land use escalated to a national problem, and the government took a larger role in attempting to mitigate the conflict.

Jacques calls INDER, which functions today as ITCO did previously, “the state’s mafia.” ITCO, the government’s branch responsible for overseeing how migrants should be compensated for losing their land, became the middleman between San José and the *campesinos* of the Osa during the seventies. Many *campesinos* harbored mistrust for ITCO and remembered constantly being told that there were no funds or legal measures available to mollify disagreements over land use. Doña Silva and Don Zoraba also made their distaste with ITCO abundantly clear. They were especially critical of the current INDER, even charging the director of hiring hit men and going after farmers with machetes. I listened to a brutal exchange between Jacques and Don Zoraba describing INDER, its lack of communication with residents, and the charge (amidst much rumor of criminality) that “they don’t help anyone.” Jacques believes that “all the power over the land went from OPF to ITCO and became a government bureaucracy;” the bureaucracy has continued, leaving many feeling disconnected and beholden to the interests within government offices.

While criticisms directed towards either ITCO/INDER, MINAE, or contemporary manifestations of the environmentalist movement should be treated as separate cases and examined on their own terms, there are similarities within these criticisms that illuminate a prevailing attitude. This attitude appears most clearly when discussing the history of land use and the present changing character of interactions with landscape. As the Osa Peninsula adopts globalization, becomes more cosmopolitan and becomes more central to the growing tourism industry and to many environmental and research interests, longtime residents are struck with socio-economic transformations that include the powers of governance, legality, and regulation.

*Nostalgia and Violence*

The perspectives that older generations of Osa residents offered became vital to understanding the history of settlement and the socio-economic transformation of the Osa in the mid to late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Taking this generational approach has helped to illuminate what such transformations have meant to many farmers and other residents. While the memory of violence concerning OPF is noted above, here, I will briefly introduce themes of nostalgia and other tensions that arose from conversations with elderly residents. As ecological interplay between individuals and the Osa environment has been central to social life, these stories situate current understandings of land use.

A care center for the elderly proved to be an ideal place for gathering oral histories and spending time with former *campesinos* and gold miners who remember what it was like to be among the first residents to settle much of the Osa. While many have said that the area has grown more violent and that life was generally more peaceful, egalitarian, and “simple” in the early-mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, some residents disagree and tell stories of robbery and violence that speak against the popular narrative. One man in his nineties told me that he was repeatedly robbed while gold mining and that there was certainly a dangerous aspect to the work. He thought his small stature might have made him an easy target.

Another elderly farmer from the care center invited himself into our conversation, while eagerly landscaping and completing yard work. As we conversed on land use, changes in the Osa, and what the land means, he mentioned what he felt were differences between foreigner and *tico* [Costa Rican] practices. He candidly told me that only foreigners buy land here for “nature’s sake” and that only foreigners would buy a property and “do nothing” with it. This is a popular sentiment that another key interlocutor, Carlos, the head of the RFGD, agrees with and was not surprised to hear. It was expressed to me that the *tico* sense of land ownership has meant working the land, producing, and planting. Owning property without running cattle or producing crops is therefore a foreign practice and strange to many locals. “Appreciating nature” or “protection and enjoyment” do not necessarily have translatable meanings in this context. The elderly farmer demonstrated this ethic as he continued the yard work for the elderly center; something he enjoyed doing and something he felt was the right thing to do.

In Puerto Jiménez, many recall that approximately thirty years ago the area was “*pura selva*” [pure jungle], and that the paved main street and energy infrastructure are new phenomena. Longtime residents talk of the mud and dirt tracks and mention that access to the peninsula was more difficult given the lack of connection to the Pan-American Highway and the lack of bridges. Older residents often evoke the halcyon days of the past to distinguish Puerto Jiménez as they knew it from the bustling hub it is today. One pastor near Golfito lamented about today’s youth and the increases in drugs and crime. A café owner portrayed Puerto Jiménez and the surrounding areas as more simple, egalitarian, and other bucolic conventions of thinking that would create the Osa’s past as one of wealth and harmony – sharply contrasted with the tense and complex Osa described today.

Contrastingly, the Osa of the early-mid 20<sup>th</sup> century is also portrayed as a “wild frontier.” The stories generated and shared among gold miners boast of danger and violence. Family feuds that spanned generations were common, and strong alliances were important for maintaining territory claims. Lack of medical care and important anti-venoms meant that a major infection or treatable snakebite normally would have been fatal. Although they do discuss the chaotic temperament of early gold mining days, elder miners maintain that there was still more of an egalitarian social atmosphere than today. Turning to the changing regulations of land use and their impact on Osa residents, talk about the past informs local attitudes towards imposition and changing socio-economic structures.

### ***Precaristas, Campesinos, and Facing Regulation***

Both ITCO and the Forest Law have been introduced in Chapter 2 (with some discussion throughout), but here the entanglements between residents and these regulations are discussed in more detail. Because the controversial institute played such a profound role in the lives of early Osa settlers, it is critical to outline ITCO’s intentions and briefly explain what it means to be a settler in precarious standing. The settler families that arrived in the Osa during the early-mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, commonly known as *precaristas*, practiced subsistence farming in accordance with the established Costa Rican norm for land occupancy: claiming *de facto* rights to land meant working, growing, and “making improvements” for at least three years. How is authority negotiated for labeling some

residents as squatters, and what meaning could be drawn from that assertion as it regards the power dynamics of which Osa farmers have intimate knowledge? The settlers, too, have an environmental ethos and a practical everyday engagement with land that has faced a history of marginalization.

ITCO was an institution devoted to managing land settlement that promised to finally quell the increasing problems generated by land disputes (see Appendix D). Within the seven main objectives of this law, the language is heavily suggestive of sustainable development, identifying “progress” and “efficiency” for the farmer and the “socio-economic development of the nation.” Every objective refers to the nation, in the sense that land and farming management should reflect national values and interests. It asserts and reaffirms state power over disputed land and farmland in general. It clarifies the terms for private property, supports cooperatives, and upholds the importance of a just distribution of wealth, which is meant to curb exploitation of farmers. It asserts the importance of conserving natural resources and the development of a “healthy possession of land,” which anticipates sustainability (1961: 2825). Although the law and the state institution’s current iteration, INDER, are meant to help farmers secure legal ownership of their land, the regulations have been burdensome for many, and have created another bureaucratic layer within the process of obtaining legal titles.

For many of the *campesinos* of the Osa, ITCO legislation did more to legitimize government controls than to assist agricultural livelihoods. Among the subsistence farmers, *precaristas* bore the majority of the effects from the land ownership changes in the Osa, as United Fruit sold the land to OPF that eventually became PNC and the RFGD. It was this time of peaking intensity during the 1970s that informants expressed to me was the most notable cause of resentment aimed at incoming interests and regulations. Since the late-seventies, *precaristas* and *campesinos* have been dispossessed of their lands and in need of legal titles. Since the nineties, the issue over land titles shifted from a legislative one to a judicial one, and *campesinos* have had to sue for legal status and prove that they had occupied the territory in question for at least ten years prior to RFGD’s creation.

Jacques’s complaints about the RFGD, environmental management schemes, ITCO/INDER, and the various stories surrounding the violent timber company OPF are related by the way in which policing Osa land use is widely and conventionally known as

controversial. Whether the practice is extractive or concerning conservation, it is seen by many as an intrusion upon the land that settlers have used to grow food and raise cattle. In order to understand the disputes over land titles, problems of squatters, and the animosity many farmers feel for environmental governance, I follow Jacques's advice and examine the Forest Law. As noted previously, laws like this one were invaluable for establishing the nation's national parks and protected areas. The state has assumed the role of both diagnosing the problem and providing its solutions. Such laws should not be read as merely "environmental" because these regulations have far-reaching socio-political implications within their practice, and the objectives clearly outline the forest as a socio-industrial and regulated space.

Like ITCO, the Forest Law asserts the importance of sustainable exploitation of the land, forests or forest-associated vegetation in this case. It clarifies that its proposal is an "essential function and priority of the state" and follows the "principal of rational use for renewable resources" (Appendix D). There is a concern noted for the employment and wellbeing of rural occupants. The law creates an inventory of forests; empowers the DGF to define "fit" forests; empowers a forest regime to set legal, economic, and technical provisions; creates a national forest development plan to regenerate and reforest; and establishes a forest management plan. It is concerned with the "protection, conservation, use, industrialization, and administration" of Costa Rican forests. The government defines all relevant terminology, establishes technical norms, goals, and indicates what it means to practice and achieve "conservation, improvement, and development" (1969: 4465). While this legal coding is, again, proposed in order to offer rights to people and forests, the consequences have mostly empowered the government's rights of regulation, and changed the implications for the ways *campesinos* have historically interacted with the landscape.

The various drafts and paperwork surrounding the Forest Law that Jacques had me photocopy are marked with notes, highlighted sections, exclamations, and suggestions towards the most important of the language as it has related to the experience of residents living within the RFGD boundaries. Jacques requested that I place considerable attention upon Article 36, which outlines the creation of a forest reserve.<sup>56</sup> Within the seven ordinances are the understandings that reserves like the RFGD would define the area's

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<sup>56</sup> The Article also includes provisions for any protected area, national park, reserve, or refuge.

objectives and location, provide a preliminary study of the possession of land, provide a preliminary census of the inhabitants, create a minimum budget for its protection and management, prepare plans, establish the respective decree, and set necessary regulations (*Ley Forestal 4465: Artículo 36*).<sup>57</sup> Most vocal *campesinos* like Jacques believe that at least the first four ordinances were ignored. Even the current head of RFGD corroborates this and admits that the reserve was established illegally, not in accordance with the details of Article 36. Even if the illegal and unjust inception of RFGD is known by the reserve's head administrator and *campesinos* alike, this is not enough to change the government's claim to reserved land in the Osa and to mitigate burdensome restrictions on land use.

As conflict between settlers and OPF peaked and President Oduber established a state of emergency in order to create PNC and the RFGD, the arriving settlers and those who had been farming for years witnessed a change in ownership from largely private to “public” or state-protected. This change, however, held more meaning on paper than in practice for the many *campesinos* living within the Osa. When individuals like Don Zoraba, Doña Silva, and Jacques discuss unjust treatment from ITCO/INDER and MINAE they recall the transformation of ownership and governance that unsettled their relationship to the land.

*Campesinos* are not the only residents concerned with the influx of outside interests, and I return to one fishing meeting to illustrate this point. One notably outspoken fisherman continually reified the foreign-domestic divide repeating, “*somos ticos*” [we're Costa Ricans], while making his points. This was a small-scale fisherman who was angered that “foreigners don't give us the opportunity,” and that “*gringos* are ruining everything...” I spoke with this fisherman after the sustainable fishing talk in Puerto Jiménez, and he explained that both tourism and sustainability regulations have been damaging to his livelihood. Although he made repeated emphasis on communal identity, “*somos ticos*,” he admitted to me that he has lived in the Osa thirty-nine years and is originally Panamanian. He further explained that most early settlers in the Osa were Panamanian, like himself. Interestingly, this fisherman was using national identity as a political device to create a sense of community and collective concern. The politicizing of national identity serves as an effective way to land his argument for the audience, and it

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<sup>57</sup> my translation.



demonstrates the importance of nationalism within the politics of conservation. The fact that he knew how to make his argument more convincing reflects the common understanding that tensions between incoming interests and longtime residents are inseparable from the animosity surrounding conservation initiatives.

The fisherman continued and began describing himself as one of “*los pequeños*” [the small-scale fishermen], in contrast to the larger more connected interests of sport fishing and commercial shrimping. He listed well-known areas for heavy tourist traffic like Papagayo, Tamarindo, Quepos, and Jaco, and asserted that Golfo Dulce would be next. The inference was that over-developed tourism not only changes the aesthetic of the Costa Rican landscape but negatively impacts local economies. This fisherman explained that laws are being enforced by the “big guys” and imposed upon the “little guys.” He was worried that more business and more regulations would only mean less opportunity for fishermen like him. This fisherman was simultaneously marginalized by global market forces and by conservationist practices, as supported within the rhetoric that challenges his means for livelihood.

### **Displacing the Rural and the New Order of Conservation**

This section, through visits to several farms, outlines areas of friction between *campesinos* and more recent interests including the growing tourism industry and environmentalism. Competing notions of knowledge become prevalent throughout many of these encounters. Additionally, varied forms of living and ideas regarding normative interaction with landscape appear throughout such conversations with *campesinos*.

There are some important variations in the types of subsistence farming in the Osa. Many farms have opened their doors to rural tourism after the disappearance of popular farmers’ markets and the fall in business due largely to cheaper imports from elsewhere. The farmers near La Palma and farther north tend to be more involved in cooperatives and agricultural production, and are rarely open for tours. The farms southwest of Puerto Jiménez towards Carate are larger, tend to be open for tours, and are situated in more coveted land along the Pacific Coast. Some of these farms are worth millions of U.S. dollars today, yet many of the farmers do not entertain the idea of selling, preferring instead

to remain working their land and operating tours. Much of the dissent from mainstreaming land use practices is reflected within differences in lifestyle, and competing understandings of environmental discourse.

One *campesino* in a *finca* near Carate welcomes many researchers, volunteers, and tourists. He explained to me that he is happy to welcome outsiders and share his property and cattle operation. When I asked him what he enjoys about living there and the difference between this area and the more urban parts of Costa Rica, he replied, “you can’t walk around a city with your shirt open like this.” He expressed a visceral connection to the environment that, for him, was best explained through the comfort and familiarity of clothing choice. It was generally difficult and strange for my informants (or anyone) to articulate the meaning of an aesthetic connection to their immediate environment, but through certain humorous comments like this, feelings became more apparent.

Indicating differences between city and country and the logic of such borders has particular meaning for Osa residents. Many farmers treat “private property” signs as foreign in both their message and in their right to claim land. Doña Silva claimed she does not understand the “private property” signs and that it is much more common for her to see “*perro bravo*” [angry dog] signs. As land ownership was already disputed in many instances, new ownership tended to bypass and rewrite traditional property boundaries. Several *campesinos* (among others) expressed that some of their lands had been taken when conservation areas were established. One man was known to have signed a contract and agreed to a land sale, but somehow ended up with much less than he previously imagined. Situations like this occurred in many instances due to the difficulty negotiating boundaries when one party may be illiterate but has a practical understanding of the landscape. The other party enters with a different type of knowledge altogether: surveys, maps, and contracts. The differing understandings of space may not translate well here, and the result has been growing resentment directed at buying and protecting large pieces of land.

On another day, I visited a *campesino* whom I had met in Puerto Jiménez’s pharmacy. After overhearing talk of politics, I injected myself into the conversation, and moments later, was invited to visit Don Mateo’s *finca*. When we were not sitting, talking, and drinking coffee, Don Mateo gave me a tour of the property to show what he had planted. He also told stories of previous foreign visitors, such as the U.S. Army. He

explained that the United States built many of the major bridges along the road from Puerto Jiménez to the Pan-American Highway in Chacarita, greatly altering the accessibility of the Osa Peninsula. Don Mateo spoke positively and proudly regarding the U.S. intervention, and he even hung many photographs in his house documenting the army's presence. He showed me those and several other photographs depicting U.S. soldiers and their time in the Osa. Don Mateo led the way to his rice field where he said the army buried a secret container that he is looking forward to opening one day. Instances like this one sparked other stories of conspiracy and controversy. Don Mateo told me that he is convinced of a conspiracy where the U.S. (and possibly other) military has an ongoing operation underneath the Osa Peninsula. He believes that there is evidence of secret underwater passages<sup>58</sup> that lead from Golfo Dulce to the Pacific Ocean, and that these passages are of interest to the military. While he fondly remembers socializing with the military and supplying them with food during their road building operations, Don Mateo remains skeptical of foreign interventions.

Similarly, Don Mateo views the recent surge of NGO and environmental activity as a foreign intervention, regardless of whether it is an intervention by the state or an NGO from San José or abroad. He believes, as many do, that the NGOs do not come for the sake of the flora and fauna, but are operating in their own interests. Don Mateo told me that the idea of endangered species must be a hoax – because there are so many different and abundant animal and plant species in the Osa, he finds it difficult to believe that any would be in danger. Rather, Don Mateo argues that environmentalists only talk about endangered species to receive attention from donors. It is, for him, a way of raising money, increasing support, and continuing with the business of conservation in a more self-serving and non-charitable fashion.

What is evident here is competition among differing forms of knowledge and ways of understanding one's environment (see Scott 1998). Environmentalists generally rely on scientific data and surveys to support their claims. The classification of endangered species is a complex and somewhat bureaucratic process that accounts for habitat loss, speed of decrease in animals, and former data regarding species population and behavior. Don

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<sup>58</sup> Don Mateo explained that the tidal pools and lagoons move with the tide and therefore suggest a link to the ocean.

Mateo's knowledge in this case is more qualitative and based upon his direct experience. Because he has witnessed corrupt politics and invading self-interests from companies like OPF, Don Mateo is skeptical of others' intentions. Upon discussing environmental governance, he explains, "the reality is something else. Food and agricultural development are primary."

State regulations were another structural issue for Don Mateo. He believes that state imposed environmental regulations unfairly target *campesinos* while corporations are able to strike free trade deals or pay off politicians. Don Mateo built a fence and extension to his house from fallen timber, which he extracted illegally. If the process for obtaining permits were easier (i.e., less expensive, easier to access, or available to an illiterate person) then there would be more incentive for Don Mateo and others to obtain the permit, but as the process stands now, he has found it much wiser and less time-consuming to extract the fallen wood immediately, ignoring environmental regulations. Many landowners throughout the Osa ubiquitously echo such complaints. MINAE's regulations do not provide enough incentive for residents to obey regulations and obtain permits as the process may be more time-consuming and expensive than going ahead in the traditional manner before regulations were imposed. MINAE is seen as a police force in the Osa, and even rangers and other officials agree.

Don Mateo's views should not be placed as anti-environmentalism in the sense that he, too, would not exhibit an environmental ethos, as there is ample evidence that his life in the Osa reflects an aesthetic connection to landscape and biodiversity, which is indeed one type of environmentalism in practice. While it was odd for him to be asked to elaborate on his reasons for moving to the Osa and clarify what the land means to him on a personal level, I persisted, and Don Mateo finally answered, "well, I've been here forty years... so there must be something!" He added, "there's more nature here." As he showed me around his farm – sharing fruit and sugarcane, telling stories of close calls with snakes, and explaining farming techniques – Don Mateo pointed out impressive trees and exuded a particular sense of pride. He was thrilled to tell of the time he and his son saw a tapir walking through the rice field; they both expressed their excitement for the sighting and spoke with awe, revealing the tapir tracks photographed with his telephone. Don Mateo has a pet parrot that he found when it was injured. He took the parrot to MINAE, where they

were unable to take care of it, so Don Mateo assumed responsibility for the parrot himself and keeps the bird as a pet. He questioned human separation from nature, stated that “we are all animals; we’re part of nature,” and explained differences between the city and the country. Don Mateo found the country to be more beautiful and peaceful, expressing his feeling that cities were too dangerous. Ultimately, he is able to farm, join an agricultural cooperative, advocate his mistrust of foreign and state interests, and maintain a quotidian relationship with the environment that reflects his own set of environmental values, which are shared by many other *campesinos*.

Many longtime Osa residents disparage MINAE for its lack of support for the community, petty micromanagement at the cost of profound environmental research and protection, bullying *campesinos* and cowing to big interests, lacking strong leadership at the top level, and corruption. Complaints thematically range from MINAE not doing the job well enough, to overreaching. Conservation, as the new governing force, fails to elicit trust and has yet to align itself with community needs. As many conservationists know this, the workings of environmentalism are in the process of change in the Osa and seek to empower and respect community desires going forward. MINAE is well-suited to respond and participate within the economic shift towards a dominant tourism industry in the Osa. While rural tourism and ecotourism are responding to popular trends and creating new forms of yet-to-be mainstream tourism, there are still many participating *campesinos* who do not trust some aspects of the MINAE leadership. Tourism has the ability to normalize a certain environmental ethos and marginalize many *campesinos* and *precaristas* in the process. In this sense, growing interests in tourism parallel new environmental initiatives and regulations; they both participate in the mainstreaming that heightens the marginalization of the shrinking agricultural sector.

### *Conserbullshionistas*

As the Osa landscape has shifted from one of extraction and agriculture to one of conservation, many residents view the environmental initiatives as an incoming police force. State environmental policies and private sector conservation efforts are both treated as foreign to the major concerns of farmers. Animosity brews in such a climate where

subsistence strategies are suddenly challenged and governed by more powerful and legally protected forces. Similarly, residents who do not describe themselves as farmers also harbor resentment for the new norms of conservation and largely foreign-owned tourism operations in the Osa Peninsula. Here, I offer the views of two entrepreneurs, David and Lucas, and one community service worker, Don Diego, to highlight this dissent.

One of the more outspoken informants, David, is critical of most conservationist projects around the Osa and skeptical of their intentions. He labels the conservationists, *conserbullshionistas*, merging the English word “bullshit” with the Spanish “*conservacionista* [conservationist].” The suggestions are clear, and David explicitly disagrees with what he sees as an insincere imposition of values and a hidden agenda within many conservation initiatives including those within MINAE and the private sector. He is also quite proud of his new word, correcting my mispronunciation, “*conserbullshista*,” with the added syllables “*conserbullshionista*” because it sounds “prettier.” David explains that many of the NGOs represented in the Osa have selfish motives and are only trying to make money. He charges conservationists with transforming protection of public space into an exclusive business, and he questions their messages of benevolence and action on behalf of nature. The boundaries established between local communities and the foreign and San José-based NGOs anger David. He believes that those who have not grown up in the Osa, as he has, should not arrive making demands but instead should ask questions and offer help. Incoming environmentalists, whether from San José or abroad, should empower and interact with the local communities, he elaborates, rather than add to the growing animosity between residents and newcomers with projects. For David, creating economic alternatives and increasing opportunities for residents would begin to address this problem.

When David first explained his thoughts on *conserbullshionistas*, we were sitting in his family-run hilltop hostel surrounded by rainforest. In one interview, he shared many other stories as we spoke about economic and political problems in Puerto Jiménez and other small towns of the Osa. He offered an interesting analogy regarding the European/North American style of development compared with the Costa Rican style. He explained that there are two crates of crabs, one is European/ North American and the other is Costa Rican. The crabs want to leave the crate, but when both lids are removed only the

European/North American crabs escape and the Costa Rican crabs stay inside the crate and cannot escape. He explains that this is because the European/North American crabs help one another out of the crate, and the Costa Rican crabs keep pulling each other back inside, preventing any escape. The moral of David's story is that, here in the Osa, (and Costa Rica, more generally, in his view) "if it isn't good for everyone then it's not good for anyone." Moving beyond the false essentialization of cultural characteristics here, David exposes some insight into his worldview. On one hand the Costa Rican crabs represent egalitarian society, but on the other hand, they suggest a failed measure of progress compared to the European/North American example. Underscored with modernist notions of "development" and "progress," the story is a lament for the perceived failure of Costa Rica to profit from tourism or resource extraction the way foreign investors have. It was common for some Costa Rican entrepreneurs to remark that "progress" was hindered because of jealousy.

Elsewhere David has spoken of the success of urban newcomers with resentment and envy, calling them "*hijos de putas de San José*." As moderately demonstrated already, the sentiment that David expresses is a common one among many in Puerto Jiménez and other Osa towns. The gossip and rumor that circulate targeting urban newcomers reifies the rural/urban divide and places a boundary between locals and newcomers.

Lucas, who has partnered with David for many tourism ventures, agrees with the *conserbullshionista* analysis. He adds that foreigners and urbanites that take up projects in the Osa view locals like "*Indios*" [Native Americans], meant as derogatory and backward. Lucas clarifies that "we are the *Indios*," and that NGO workers and other invasive foreign interests are like "*conquistadores*." Although polemic, Lucas's metaphor describes the animosity felt by many local residents. Many feel that external interests (from San José or elsewhere) enter the area with means, money, and connections, without much regard for local politics and desires. These foreign interests, in the shape of timber extraction, environmentalism, or tourism development, have transformed the previously agrarian economy, altered the social structure of the Osa, brought activist initiatives that complicate the way the future is imagined, and have exploited financial opportunities that many locals find controversial.

Lucas and David's sentiments are not only germane to the environmental activist sector but also to the tourism development sector. Don Diego, who leads youth and athletic programs in Puerto Jiménez and has great experience in "community development," also charges that there is an outer perception that projects an "*Indio*" identity upon the town and its residents. In Don Diego's critique, however, he is referring to the development of tourism and the way the town is portrayed as an attraction. He is critical of the way visitors and the tourism industry itself have circumscribed a static identity for Puerto Jiménez and Osa residents, as he sarcastically states, "all I need is feathers in my hair!" while excitedly waving his hands above his head. He, like Lucas, wants to be counted as a person and not an attraction, or respected rather than marginalized.

Don Diego recalls an incident with a biologist during which he was told to "consume less," as a solution to environmental problems. Don Diego quipped, "[we] have the bad habit of eating every day!" The incident highlights the disconnect between incoming environmental interests and everyday life of the communities. The biologist's imposition struck Don Diego as an imperialist assumption regarding superior environmental values based upon biology and theories of scarcity, while *campesinos* are relatively never major contributors to nationwide environmental degradation. The environmentalist events and festivals, similar in the elitist sense of exclusivity which he critiqued, tended to be populated with the same activists each time and did not convince Don Diego of transformative and profound work. He questioned, "how many of the locals actually participate in these activities?" and remarked that incoming environmentalists "repeat like parrots [*repiten como loras*]: 'the Osa is a paradise.'" He is looking for a different type of change, and it is not necessarily antagonistic with *all* environmentalisms.

The tone within some of Don Diego's comments is reminiscent of a time when I overheard a man at a bar making fun of tourists venturing into PNC to see tapirs by teasing, "I want to go to Corcovado and see a tapir... and eat it." The sarcasm, in this case, only works if there is already an acknowledgement of what an ethical approach to a tapir in Corcovado would be. After that ethical assumption is agreed upon, the comment is able to be teasing or sarcastic rather than literal. More than a comment against conservation, the comment is reinforcing that conserving wildlife is a national norm and breaking it, therefore, would be an aberration. Such sentiments and ideologies are fluid and continue to



evolve for Osa residents, demonstrating a tension with environmentalism, an economic incentive to practice it, and a variation of an environmental ethos in itself.

Throughout our discussion, Don Diego reiterated the theme that it is impossible to have poverty and conservation occupying the same space. His vision of development is one that must include an egalitarian ethos. He advocated for a more powerful socio-economic position, “I’m a part of the public but not a real actor... [we] should be actors! [*soy parte de publico, no soy actor... que sean actores!*].” Don Diego’s plea assumes that agency is directly linked to economic power, and he suggests that residents of Puerto Jiménez and the region in general should play larger roles in determining the peninsula’s economic structure in addition to being treated as co-actors and not as marginalized “victims.” Don Diego wants a more socio-economically empowered populace and more egalitarian politics between longtime residents and various large interests.

Our conversation returned to several important themes where tension between mainstream interests in land and the *campesinos* and other residents is evident. The shift from an agricultural economy to a service-based one has troubled many, and Don Diego blamed “lack of incentive” as the main reason for inability for farmers’ markets to return. In view of private and large public reserves, he exclaimed, “who is this land for? People are starving!” Adding, “where is the work?” regarding what environmentalists are busy doing during festivals and events, the criticism continues to question whether there are actual accomplishments that Don Diego can consider as worthy of leaving the Osa a better place, or whether it is a case of groups of environmentalists creating an image and a career in support of that image, but no realization of the promises therein.

Each of these cases has advocated for less invasive and unfair land use regulation, better fulfillment of NGO promises, and empowerment for the local economies. Many of my interlocutors in the Osa critique conservation and other large interests along similar lines to those above, but it is still common to agree with some sense of ecological sustainability and protection of – as many refer to them – the “*animalitos* [little/cute animals].” David, Lucas, and Don Diego have evidenced the resentment felt towards imperialist logic, incoming impositions from the Central Valley and abroad, elitism embedded in scientific practice, the privileging of some interests more than others, and the marginalization (“abandonment,” in Don Diego’s terms) of the *campesinos* and *precaristas*.

## Conclusion

This chapter has surveyed localized impressions of incoming interests that range from a multinational timber company, to state reserves, to environmental interests in general, to state initiatives for agricultural planning and land management, and shifting economic paradigms. The previous chapter offered a portrayal of the institution of environmentalism within the public and private sectors that included responses to shifting aims of conservationism. I have built upon that work by illuminating the voices of dissent that reveal tensions within co-existing variations of environmental practice. Next, an in-depth discussion of environmental education will explain how one form of environmental initiative interacts with many residents throughout the Osa.

The *campesinos* and longtime residents introduced here have expressed skepticism in governmental, private sector, and environmental activist forms of intervention. Likewise, they have demonstrated one form of interaction with the land that relies on a particular ethos of its own. Don Mateo cares for a wounded parrot and is proud of his trees and the wildlife that sometimes enter the rice fields. In fact, most of the critical voices will still defend the reasoning for living in the Osa rather than San José; they prefer farming and rely on a particular relationship with the land that industrialization and urbanization would greatly alter. Even David, despite how proud he is of his term “*conserbullshionistas*,” has confided several times how he feels badly for what people (in general, but speaking specifically about what he has seen) have done to the environment, lamenting that development means destruction. David expresses such sentiments, that socio-economic “progress” and capitalist notions of economic improvement are the only viable routes for increased well-being and making a living, as a tense mixture of believing capitalism leads to pollution and inequality, that it is still his only option, and that he is responsible for maintaining balance. This sentimental dissonance informs quotidian environmentalism, subsistence practices, and conventional attitudes that argue for egalitarianism within interactions between longtime residents and incoming interests.

## Chapter 5

# Implementation at the Local Level: The Case of Environmental Education

Given that environmental education is the most prominent and profound example of community outreach in the Osa, this chapter details several events that illuminate Costa Rica's environmental agenda in practice and the significance for children, families, and practitioners entangled within that practice. Environmental education has been among the most effective strategies used by conservationists to disseminate ecological awareness and create young activists based upon the terms set by the environmentalist and scientific communities themselves. The case of El Progreso reveals how the most currently active NGO on environmental-community outreach, Fundación Corcovado, navigates this educational endeavor and what the degree of community acceptance (or rejection) means for environmental education as a tactic of conservationists. The case of Dos Brazos details how games are used to encourage participation and thus motivate a certain type of eco-citizenship. Regarding Puerto Jiménez and the Peninsula at large, I provide various examples of educational initiatives, and what their success or failure means for the momentum of environmentalism in the Peninsula. From Paolo Freire's progressive pedagogy to the nuances of "ecopedagogy," growing out of the institutionalized concerns for sustainability and learning, the trajectory of progressive education throughout Latin America finds common ground with environmental education, and these cases situated in a "marginalized" zone within the greening Costa Rican republic demonstrate the stakes for those new recruits into the eco-mentality proposed nationwide. This example of environmentalism in practice, beyond the concerns of what does or does not work, examines how pedagogy operates as a strategy of conservation politics.



Figure 6.1. COTORCO and an environmental education event in Puerto Jiménez.

Just as Costa Rica's green reputation should be scrutinized, given the amount of conflict and controversy surrounding the history of land use, so should the processes by which environmental education operates be interrogated to better understand the actual strategies of environmentalism in the Osa. New initiatives in environmental education mark shifts in the practice of both pedagogy and education policy. In one sense, activism becomes more democratic by opening channels of dialogue and engagement, and in another sense, the education initiatives reinforce the power of conservationist ideology. The young Costa Rican mind is the target of environmental education, activism with a certain definition of ecological awareness meant to create the type of consciousness necessary for the imagined future and place environmentalists seek to create. Importantly, this is not a matter of the "dynamic" NGO or state acting upon the "static" student body, as students and other community members actively negotiate, accept, and reject the proposed education.

The most noteworthy ethnographic study of environmental education in Costa Rica is Nicole Blum's thesis (2006). Maintaining the focus on Costa Rican environmental education, her subsequent book (2012) and articles (2008a; 2008b; and 2009) are

supportive of the idea that the locality for such education constitutes an assemblage of interactions and negotiations “embedded in social, economic, and political relationships” (Blum 2006: 207). Other ethnographic work on Costa Rica (Vivanco 2006) explores similar questions concerning the implications of environmental advocacy, community outreach, and the encounter between children and interest groups from elsewhere. An ethnographic perspective takes advantage of qualitative analysis and knowledge gained from an intimate understanding of the thoughts and actions of practitioners, families, and students. This chapter builds on such work by discussing how environmental education constructs a particular type of Costa Rican ecological steward that fits the nationalist narrative that popularly proclaims all Costa Ricans to be environmentalists.

While facets of environmental education are included in the state curriculum, the way lessons are taught in practice is largely due to teacher discretion and training. There has been a state-implemented interest in environmental education since the seventies (Blum 2006: 33), but the national environmental education office was formally established in 1993 (Ibid: 78), and state-led initiatives have been notoriously ineffective (75). Given this, there is a great effort on behalf of NGOs and others in the private sector to influence Costa Rican environmental education. Mirroring many environmental efforts in Costa Rica, environmental education is entangled with the international scientific community, disseminating the Costa Rican green image, seeking donors and support, and creating a platform that will support (eco)tourism.

Blum identifies two styles of environmental education in practice: a strict science-based approach that promotes protectionism, and a more integrated politico-economic approach that emphasizes social/natural interrelations (Ibid: 135), including ethnographic examples (154). Although, relative to other areas of Costa Rica, programs in the Osa encourage community participation, empowerment, and explanations of regional social/natural interrelations (Ibid: 82), the implementation is still difficult. The intentions, as many educators outline, are to include socio-political understandings of place and interrelations with the surroundings, but this is often poorly implemented and not helped by lack of interest from both local teachers and families.

From Puerto Jiménez to El Progreso, resources are poured into initiatives that fail to gain traction because of lack of interest, lack of communication, and lack of trust. Boxes of

unused lesson plans and activity booklets in the FC and OC offices attest to a similar disappointment from the perspective of environmentalists. Many NGO workers, foreign and local alike, say this is due to lack of interest and lack of training for teachers. Although there are some environmental education guidelines in the state curriculum, these are quite general and whether or not they are taught is normally left to teacher discretion. Many educators and activists denied that such guidelines even exist. In practice, what lessons are taught and how they are taught – especially in the Osa – is largely due to what the teacher feels comfortable with, what she believes will work with students, and the relevant training she has received. As much was related to me by the teacher in Dos Brazos, who, well-versed in environmental education and purposes for conservation in Costa Rica, welcomed La Leona Lodge and Roni, a young environmentalist from San José. Without any training in environmental education, some teachers have found it difficult to employ lessons and activities delivered by the NGOs. Furthermore, teachers are quite busy as it is, and many are simply not interested in adding lessons or taking an environmentalist role within their classroom.

The tensions imbibed within conservation and development politics are evident through the occasions of environmental education and the language of many students. While teaching English and leading group activities at the Puerto Jiménez library, I prompted students to draw a picture of anything they wanted. One student drew a militarized monkey seeking revenge on the human hunters. The student showed me the scene with the rainforest backdrop, the armed monkey firing at hunters, and explained this was justified revenge for years of hunting. Other children joked about making birds and iguanas into a soup, during one cleanup, and then quickly assured us it was a joke. When asked during one festival why people should conserve biodiversity, one student eagerly responded, “so the tourists have something to see.”

The chapter begins with a review of the literature concerning the anthropology of education and relevant social theory on pedagogy, knowledge, embodied experience, and the notion of awareness. The next section, introduces an individual Costa Rican educator with alternative styles of pedagogy informed by his political views and artistic lifestyle – exemplary of a successfully embodied pedagogical experience infused with activism. The section on environmental education in practice details the El Progreso festival for

environmental education as a typical event to pursue outreach and the dissemination of environmental awareness. The following section, highlights knowledge as a political field of tensions. I argue that pedagogy in practice is a negotiation of historically situated political actors, and the “success” or “failure” of strategies implemented are greatly informed by their embedded contexts. While environmental education is often a patronizing imposition of values, there are also liberating qualities in knowledge and learning that mirror developments in liberation pedagogy and the work of Paulo Freire. The ideology and practice of environmental education do inform a type of environmentality, but as educators like Freire clarify, education can act as resistance, not only oppression.

### **Framing Environmental Education**

Some basic education has a strong environmental inflection that is similar to environmental discourse in general and draws on classic discussions on what education means; but what is distinctive about the Osa, perhaps Costa Rica at large, is the increasing trend and insistence on environmental education as a teaching strategy and an essential type of knowledge that many (e.g., activists and policy-makers) view as critical towards the future of both national education and environmental activism. One of the best-known direct engagements concerning education, within the history of European intellectual thought, is Rousseau’s *Emile, or On Education* (1762). Much like his work in *The Social Contract* (1762), Rousseau presents a romantic idea of the human, born inherently good, only to be later corrupted by society. The distinction between society and individual, along with the importance of an education system that nurtures and empowers the individual, would later influence social theorists in the Americas, such as John Dewey (1916; 1938) and Paulo Freire (1970). Rousseau promotes the idea of education as an active learning experience where the child is an engaged participant and not merely a passive receiver of knowledge, and even amongst more recent contributors, the influence of Rousseau is evident.

A pragmatist, Dewey (1938) echoes Rousseau’s call for a more democratic approach to education that emphasizes the student’s personal experience in the world.

Dewey explains, “Education, in its broadest sense, is the means of this social continuity of life” (Dewey 1916: 2). Building on his belief that education is critical to social life, Dewey argues that it is both a necessity and in the best interests of all for the immature person (child) to become a mature person (adult), and that education, generally speaking, is the process through which this transformation takes place (Dewey 1916: 2-3). Identifying a distinction between traditional and progressive education (Dewey 1938: 1), Dewey explains the principles of progressive education as, the “cultivation of individuality,” “free activity,” “learning through experience,” “means of attaining ends which make direct vital appeal,” “making the most of the opportunities of present life,” and “acquaintance with a changing world” (Dewey 1938: 5-6). For Dewey, it is the link between experience and learning that makes progressive education superior to traditional.

Importantly, the individuality cultivated through experience in Dewey’s progressive education model parallels the nurturing of a sense of freedom within the individual. It is here, with the idea of freedom and liberation as central concerns for education, that Freire’s work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), offers some similarity. Freire identifies education, in its general and traditional sense, as an act of “depositing” knowledge, or what Freire calls “the ‘banking’ concept of education” (Freire 1970: 72). Freire explains, “In the banking concept of education, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those who they consider to know nothing” (Ibid). Freire is writing against this type of pedagogy because of the hierarchical relationship established that represses the individuality of the student. Drawing on the distinction between an individual and society, Freire argues, “Implicit in the banking concept is the assumption of a dichotomy between human beings and the world: a person is merely *in* the world, not *with* the world or with others; the individual is spectator, not re-creator” (Freire 1970: 75). Freire’s critique of education is meant to expose oppression and to offer a path to liberation – a more democratic form of pedagogy.

Freire’s view of liberation is based upon a romantic and humanistic conception of the human, an individual whose potential should be realized within an ideal situation of more egalitarian power relations. Freire explains, “Those truly committed to liberation must reject the banking concept in its entirety, adopting instead a concept of women and men as conscious beings, and consciousness as consciousness intent upon the world”



(Freire 1970: 79). In contrast to the banking concept, Freire proposes the “problem-posing” style of education, which leads to a liberated individual. Freire argues, “Liberating education consists in acts of cognition, not transferals of information,” and creates an active dialogue between students and teachers, breaking down the former authoritarian hierarchy of the banking concept, and fostering a sense of freedom for the students (1970: 79-80). Here, exercising consciousness and cognitive ability through interaction within the world leads to senses of liberation and individuality, lacking in the education system that Freire critiques. Freire was drawing contrast to an existing approach that did not empower all citizens but only members of the ruling class.

Other political philosophers, such as Bertrand Russell (1932), have struggled with the distinction between the individual as its own free entity and the individual citizen as a member of society. Russell identifies the aim of state education as fostering “national cohesion within the state” (1932: 14), and warns that teaching “patriotism of the nationalist type” acts as “a form of mass hysteria” (1932: 97).<sup>59</sup> Russell writes these words during the tumultuous early 20<sup>th</sup> century in Europe when nationalism took a particularly jingoistic, dangerous, and xenophobic form; while Latin American nationalism has historically consisted of more subversive and revolutionary leaders. He commits to the importance of education and using the intellect to critique forces like fascism and propaganda. Similar to the work of Dewey and Freire, Russell supports a progressive and liberated pedagogy, with the caveat that learning a sense of social cohesion promotes political stability in a moment when Europe was heading for catastrophe – later realized as World War II. Russell describes the effect of general education upon students: “The pupil is not considered for his [or her] own sake, but as a recruit: the educational machine is not concerned with his [or her] welfare, but with ulterior political purposes” (1932: 167). Here, Russell argues that the general education system operates towards its own political ends rather than for the welfare of its students. Additionally, he incorporates the concerns with citizenship and nationalism,

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<sup>59</sup> Russell describes citizens as persons who “co-operate” and are “conceived by governments [as] persons who admire the *status quo* and are prepared to exert themselves for its preservation” (1932: 4). The education of the citizen, Russell argues, is necessary until the world becomes peaceful enough for the individual to be more completely nourished. Russell asks the question throughout his work: “Can the fullest individual development be combined with the necessary minimum of social coherence” (1932: 166).

developing the understanding that the style of pedagogy creates particular types of members of the nation and always acts with some political aim.

The anthropology of learning inherits these debates over a liberated education reflecting active cognitive practice. Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger's individual works (Lave 1988; Chaiklin and Lave 1996; Wenger 1998) along with their joint project (Lave and Wenger 1991) are among the most prominent examples of the anthropology of learning. The process central to Lave and Wenger's book, legitimate peripheral participation, is explained as a "situated activity," where "learners inevitably participate in communities of practitioners and that the mastery of knowledge and skill requires newcomers to move toward full participation in the socio-cultural practices of a community" (1991: 29). A sense of community cohesion is reiterated as an outcome of education. Echoing Bourdieu (1977, 1990), they continue: "Legitimate peripheral participation is proposed as a descriptor of engagement in social practice that entails learning as an integral constituent" (1991: 35). Students actively engage in a particular practice, and that practice develops into a representation of what teachers or experts call knowledge. Additionally, a sense of self is integral to this process: "Development of identity is central to the careers of newcomers in communities of practice, and thus fundamental to the concept of legitimate peripheral participation" (1991: 115), we notice a particular type of person enacted within a group through learning.

Questioning what experience does on both a cognitive and social level is central to Lave and Wenger's work. They explain the usefulness of their phenomenological framework: "The notion of participation thus dissolves dichotomies between cerebral and embodied activity, between contemplation and involvement, between abstraction and experience: persons, actions, and the world are implicated in all thought, speech, knowing, and learning" (Lave and Wenger 1991: 52). Importantly, Lave and Wenger situate the phenomena of learning as a practice, rather than an objectified thing, that appears from a set of relations and interactions between the individual student and the structures at play. They explain, "*Knowing* is inherent in the growth and transformation of identities and it is located in relations among practitioners, their practice, the artifacts of that practice, and the social organization and political economy of communities of practice" (Lave and Wenger 1991:122). The result of both cognitive and experiential processes at work, knowledge of

ecological stewardship, for example, is most illuminated by ethnographic studies that reveal the socially embedded aspects of its everyday practice. Of the other ethnographies to engage with cognition in practice, Paul Willis' (2000) work explains how kinship relations are integral to the creation of identity as a historically located process vis-à-vis labor. Nicholas de Genova (2005) addresses the importance of ethnographic "dialogue," and traces Freire's pedagogy, which advises engaged interaction, not top-down education (23-25).

This discussion not only addresses the anthropology of learning and questions of embodiment, but also cognitive anthropology. Maurice Bloch (2012) reminds scholars that anthropological research together with cognitive sciences produces newer valuable questions that seek to explain both the role of the mind in everyday life and what each discipline offers the other (2012: 12). Such an interdisciplinary inquiry introduces the problem of the "embodied mind" (Varela et al. 1993), which is a helpful analytic for understanding how cognitive science contributes to (and is also influenced by) studying an individual's everyday interactions with the world, with great reflection upon phenomenologists like Merleau-Ponty. Varela et al. explain, "For Merleau-Ponty, as for us, *embodiment* has this double sense: it encompasses both the body as a lived, experiential structure and the body as the context or milieu of cognitive mechanisms" (1993: xvi). Like Bloch, Varela et al. want to build a connection between studies of the mind and brain to the study of human experience (what Bloch refers to as anthropology). Embodiment in this sense, alongside Bourdieu's notion of habitus (1977), is a helpful way to view the practice of Costa Rican environmentalism (Johnson and Clisby 2009), and to, more broadly, understand the interactions between inhabitants and environment. Varela et al.'s approach to cognition considers "cognition as embodied action" (1993: xx), and the authors propose the term "enactive" (Ibid) to describe the process by which the subject creates oneself through active engagement with the world. Such concerns with cognition and experience as mutually constituting processes inform this discussion of learning and education by refocusing our attention on how environmental education actually works.

Returning to Freire, the matter of a liberating pedagogy has had some influence upon education policies, taking the work beyond its place as radical critique within political philosophy literature. Moacir Gadotti (1996, 2004, 2008), among the most prominent of

Brazilian scholars to follow Freire, developed the concept “ecopedagogy” to propose a critical education initiative aiming at sustainable development and the protection of Earth’s resources. Gadotti, as a member of both the Instituto Paulo Freire (IPF) and the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, advocated for ecopedagogy which grew from Rio de Janeiro’s Earth Charter (1992), including Agenda 21 (1992), and the Brundtland Report (1987). Gadotti used the occasion of the Earth Summit to advance his ideas regarding a new approach to education that both responds to Freire’s criticism of hierarchy and adds the concerns for sustainable development and the health of various ecosystems. Perhaps no other author better encapsulates the interconnections between critical education theory and the practice of environmental education.

With its roots in Brazil, much of the literature on ecopedagogy is in Portuguese; however, Richard Kahn’s (2010) contribution is among the most valuable available in English. Kahn interprets ecopedagogy as education that upholds activist principles of biodiversity, ecosystem, and landscape preservation along with community-led sustainability initiatives. Understanding Costa Rica’s ecopedagogy will help explain the consequences of environmental policies in practice for students, practitioners, families, and others within the Osa Peninsula. The imperialist tendencies of education and institutionalized festival settings will be explored, in addition to the layers of learning in practice.

Environmental education in Costa Rica has found the most success through the practice of methods similar to Dewey’s progressive education and Freire’s problem-posing pedagogy. It is no coincidence that the only center for ecopedagogy outside of Brazil (which has three) is in Costa Rica,<sup>60</sup> demonstrating the republic’s pursuit of a greening national policy with education as a key component. Understanding Costa Rican environmental education through the lens of ecopedagogy, contributions from the educators mentioned above, alongside the intersection of cognitive science and anthropology, produces better questions for the interpretation of Costa Rica’s greening republic and what it means to negotiate membership within its environmental education initiatives. The line

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<sup>60</sup> This initiative is centered within the United Nations’ University for Peace, located outside San José. The proposed aims were decided during the UN Charter (1980) that established the university.

between activism as imposition and activism as subversive resistance is very much blurred by the practice of ecopedagogy.

### **Samuel's Style of Environmental Education**

Samuel is a musician and educator from San José who arrived in the Osa around 2004, employed by the state education system. His creative style incorporating music and dance into the learning experience advances the idea of ecopedagogy as an embodied experience. This is an example of education that has worked well for students; they enjoy it, engage, and have room for their own interpretations. With an admitted nod to Freire, Samuel pursues a liberated education model – a move towards “de-schooling” (Illich 2013). Of all the various styles and approaches to environmental education in the Osa, this educator's work stands out as particularly interesting for his engaging use of songs and costumes (Figures 6.1, 6.2). Samuel's contribution to education and activism in the Osa reveals another side to the dynamic field of environmental education, unaffiliated with an NGO. While there are a number of Osa residents (state-salaried teachers included) that teach environmental education and make themselves available as guides for fieldtrips, I focus on Samuel because of his revolutionary tactics, popularity, and consistent work.

Samuel spoke of his personal reasons for coming to the Osa, that he had a brother working there and was looking for a place to heal and regenerate after his separation from his partner. Like most Costa Ricans who move from San José to the Osa, and especially environmentalists, Samuel drew comparisons between the city and the country. He found his new neighbors reserved and encountered difficulty with integrating into social functions and developing friendships. As such difficulty socializing has been a very common experience for newcomers to the Osa, Samuel created a bridge through his musical performance. Writing songs about the Osa and the history of gold mining expressed – through art – a specific connection to place and helped solidify relationships.



Figure 6.2. Masked dancers exit a performance for President Solís.



Figure 6.3. Audience is captivated by dancers in Puerto Jiménez.

Samuel is known for leading children in song and dance with both his music and costumes consisting of elaborate masks that cover the dancer's entire head. He leads performances within schools and community events and plays music for children or adults nearly every day while school is in session. There are six different masks, often called "the mascaraded of biodiversity:" one former hunter named Revindicado [vindicated], one tapir called Danta Amaranta [Lovely Tapir], one tepezcuintle (lowland paca) called Chepezcuintle, Jorge Jaguar, Chanco de Monte Chester (a peccary/skunk pig), and a white-faced monkey. Each is a famed resident of the Osa's non-human biodiversity, apart from the "reformed" hunter. The inclusion of the hunter means to demonstrate that people,

especially longtime residents, are part of the biodiversity, and local forms of subsistence should be honored. As Samuel narrates, however, this hunter has learned that hunting tepezcuintle competes with the endangered jaguar's source of protein and drives the large cats towards eating other animals like domesticated cattle. The hunter has realized that hunting is not in his or neighboring farmers' best interests, nor in the best interests of preserving the biodiversity of the Osa. Three of Samuel's most popular songs include one on the tapir, one on the jaguar, and one on the history of gold mining within the Osa. He is constantly trying to bring the local socio-economic history into the celebration of the Osa's biodiversity. The songs are interactive, with opportunities for a sing-along and dance-along atmosphere. Personification of the tapir and jaguar is a recurring theme for each song, along with a romanticizing sense of nature. The songs serve as rallying cries for conservation, intensified and made more fun by dancing, singing along, and the interactive aesthetic at play. During one performance at a school gathering in Puerto Jiménez, Samuel reverently describes gold miners as the Osa's "first inhabitants, the grandparents of this land," before launching a reggae song on the history of gold mining. Then, the great-granddaughter of some of the miners leads in singing "Danta Amaranta" (the tapir song).

In 2013, Canal 13, Costa Rica's cultural programming station, traveled to the community of Cañaza, an area between Puerto Jiménez and La Palma, to film a story on Samuel's recycling band. This was a school band that used all recycled materials as instruments. Samuel admitted that it was more his intention to find instruments for students to play, rather than to make a statement about environmentalism at that time. The event marked, according to Samuel's report, the first school band consisting of entirely recycled materials in Costa Rica's history. The event invited attention precisely because of Costa Rica's maintenance of its greening narrative.

During one lengthy interview, Samuel's political views and desire for a Freirean styled education became clear. He views politicians like "puppets controlled by corporate power," critiques the neoliberal government, and feels education is the best (and perhaps only) means for social change. Importantly, Samuel supports interactive and engaged learning outside the classroom, creative alternatives like music, dance, and costumes, and opportunities for students' self-expression. For Samuel, children *are* change, and they act as young activists explaining to their parents why litter control, recycling, and reduced

hunting are important pursuits (an increasingly common occurrence). He advocates “contextualized” and “integral” education that involves a curriculum “particular to the Osa,” affording students a better understanding of where they live and what it means to be among 2.5% of the world’s species biodiversity.

Samuel identifies a distinction between the mainstream state-sponsored education and one of liberation, more integrated with communities. He spoke of a “strategy of domination,” with its roots in the rise of Figueres and Liberación (PLN) after the Civil War, that has acted upon students from primary school and onward. He defines this as a neoliberal government’s attempt at control over its citizens, and exclaims, “*Liberación [PLN] no es liberación [liberation]*”. Samuel was one such student in San José, and among his complaints of the state’s strategy of domination are other common Costa Rican stereotypes such as classifying the country as “Switzerland of the Americas” and reinforcing the jingoistic belief that (compared to other Latin American nations) “Costa Ricans are the best” – alluding to the widespread understanding of Costa Rican exceptionalism. Such ideas within mainstream education are examples of what he wants to subvert through a more contextualized, liberated, and active approach.

Most urban-born Costa Rican environmentalists in the Osa use the loaded modernist rhetoric of backwardness or “behind [*atrasado*]” to describe local residents – especially *campesinos* and *oreros* – and Samuel’s word choice is no exception. The approach to environmentalism in the Osa, therefore, as it inevitably acts upon people’s lives, must be “delicate,” as he realizes. Additionally, he states that an activist has to be careful when confronting greenwashing, over-development, and other forms of business that provide work for some but meet unsatisfactory standards according to many environmentalists. Ideally for Samuel, environmental education in the Osa would bring a “model of education that also conserves the livelihoods and customs of people who have lived in the Osa their whole lives.”

Throughout our conversation, we returned to the theme of integration between practical needs of regional communities and an environmentalist understanding of biodiversity that advocates protectionism and sustainability. Samuel invented an acronym for the Osa Peninsula that speaks to his views on the interactions between individuals and their environment: *Organismos Sociales Ambientales (OSA)* [socio-environmental



organisms]. He discusses the ecological wealth of the Osa: “over here, there’s so much richness, but that’s also where we get to the most important part: how do we make it so the same people that live in this place can take advantage of those same riches? Here comes the key word: education.” By “take advantage,” he means to preserve and continue to exploit, whether through tourism or personal enjoyment, as examples. Samuel proposes a “contextualized education” that focuses “on a curriculum that is particular to the Osa.” Convinced that the adults are not as susceptible to change but that children are more malleable, and can, in turn, influence their parents, Samuel argues that working with children is the best means for social transformation. In a sense, children are enlisted as advocates and guided towards a particular type of citizenship within the greening republic.

The particularity of the Osa is not only 2.5% of species biodiversity but social integration with the inhabitants; customs and traditions also have value for Samuel. Conservation has to be done along with respect for the traditions and politics of the people who live in the area, achieving “equilibrium with the inhabitants.” Too much prohibition is antagonizing. Samuel differentiates between types of environmentalism: “there are environmentalists and there are environmentalists...some put up a green flag with their name and alongside it, businesses and other interests.” For Samuel, conservation in the Osa has to include the person who has lived there her whole life. When considering his entry into environmental activism Samuel questioned, “how is it that my own people don’t know that we have this beauty... and that if we don’t act [the Osa] will look like Guanacaste.” The more heavily trafficked northwest area, Guanacaste, is often used for contrast to the Osa, as a warning by environmentalists who employ the fatalistic rhetoric to safeguard against increased development.

Samuel’s telling comment on distinct types of environmentalism alludes to greenwashing and less sincere mixtures of interests on one hand, and an environmentalist of the poor or liberating ethos on the other. Despite the interactive work and the integrated approaches, Samuel’s style is not a pure embodiment of Freire’s liberation pedagogy. There is still a concerted effort to impose social change, proposed by an outsider from San José, creating a type of environmentality, based upon a biological understanding of environmental values and a political understanding of the importance of conservationism. Samuel’s style remains, however, one of the best examples in the Osa of an interactive

pedagogy and subversive resistance to both mainstream education (through his methods) and what he has identified as the greenwashing neoliberal state (through his political ideology and understanding of “good” environmentalists).

### **Environmental Education in Practice: Embodiment, Pedagogy, and Outreach**

Pedagogical pursuits in practice are displayed vividly during events like festivals, meant to call the attention of nearby families, and always an occasion for NGOs, MINAE, and others to perform rituals of outreach. This section strives to look beyond what seems to be working with the children but not working with the adults, and detail how such a festival is carried through and what this illuminates about environmental education as both a political tool and an empowering method. I focus on the environmental education festival in the community of El Progreso, located in the Osa’s northern part on the road to Drake Bay from Rincon and home to about 300 residents. Although subsistence farming and hunting have been major activities, residents are becoming interested in taking advantage of the growing tourism industry in Drake Bay and the greater peninsula. As there are not enough jobs in Drake Bay to satisfy everyone’s need, many farmers and other residents are opening their properties for ecotourism and volunteering. The San José-based NGO, FC, along with the local cooperative, ACOTPRO,<sup>61</sup> manage most of the volunteering, conservation, tourism, and education in the village. The interconnected concerns of conservation, tourism (including voluntourism), education, and finding economic security within the transitioning atmosphere of the Osa is critical for understanding El Progreso.

A festival is a fruitful opportunity to witness various interests on display. Environmentalists from around the Osa come to set up information tables, give talks, and help with activities. Rural tourism projects attempt to advertise and gather support. Children take part in the games and activities prepared by the FC coordinators. Their families socialize and watch the display of events that have suddenly appeared in the village. This section concerns embodiment and what games and activities children learn

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<sup>61</sup> Asociación Conservacionista para la Protección de la Tortuga Marina del Progreso [Conservation Association for the Protection of Sea Turtles of El Progreso].

during such festivals, and I first offer a portrait on becoming acquainted with this community.

The two main coordinators working with FC on the environmental education staff for El Progreso and the surrounding communities are Alex and Tina, both Spaniards with backgrounds in biology and environmentalism. Tina told me that she had arrived with romantic ideas of saving the rainforest and a strict definition of conservation. These views quickly changed after nurturing a more nuanced understanding of the effects conservation has had on local populations. Especially after marrying and starting a family with a local man from the neighboring community of Los Angeles, she has come to develop another understanding of conservation – differing from that which she identified with European environmental activism. Tina describes their work as “working with people to protect nature,” rather than the top-down approach of setting regulations and making demands.

A discussion of Alex’s typical routine will give some idea of the aims, the audience, and the methods of introducing key concepts to the children in the surrounding communities. I spent the day before the festival shadowing Alex as he made his environmental education rounds. His aims for the day were to give a lesson at El Progreso School, meet with one of the animal clubs, and advertise for the festival, before helping with the event setup. The animal clubs are comprised of groups of children from surrounding communities: Los Pumas [pumas] de El Progreso, Las Aguilas [eagles] de Los Angeles, Los Halcones [falcons] de Los Planes, and Los Jaguares [jaguars] de Agujitas. That day we would meet with Los Halcones in Los Planes, play some games outside, and advertise the festival by going from house to house. Because school is closed in the afternoons and does not open regularly every weekday, Alex and Tina have created these clubs to offer extracurricular activities and ways for staying active outdoors.

FC works with fourteen schools, and Alex, Tina, or Mia, another community member, visit each one bimonthly. Ideally, each of the four animal clubs meets weekly. Ages range from about six to twelve years old, grades 1-6 in El Progreso School. This is currently (as of late 2014) the most thorough and engaged environmental education initiative in the Osa Peninsula. Before leaving for Los Planes, Alex taught a lesson on the food chain and marine life, including the fragile biodiversity of coral reefs. He had been working in El Progreso for three years and enjoyed his role there.

Throughout Alex's presentation on the maritime ecosystem, he was constantly eliciting participation from students. He used local examples like Isla del Caño to pique interest and familiarity with the subject, which is a common strategy in environmental education. Alex explained that last year's lessons were more about trash and recycling while this year has focused on teaching that "nature is beautiful and not just to be utilized." One student defends some of the larger animals on the food chain; "they'll only attack you if you bother them." The class was already familiar with many animal names including the four species of sea turtles found in Costa Rica. After the presentation, students completed colored drawings of sea creatures; their work could be seen scattered on the classroom's walls. Also, the school's emblem exhibited an image of a turtle with fields and cows behind. Even though recent efforts by ACOTPRO and FC have been relatively successful with turtle conservation, the students still noticed and remarked on the everyday fact that "people eat turtles." People were included in this food chain and ecosystem as well.

I sat on the back of Alex's motorbike and we left for the outlying community of Los Planes, navigating rivers as we went. Traveling between these communities is normally precarious and weather dependent, as some rivers are too large to cross during or after a big rain. We were half submerged as we crossed one river, dodged potholes without swerving too hastily on the dirt road, then arrived at the crossing to Los Planes where we had to take the suspended foot bridge rather than the car crossing below. We passed a sign that read, "the image of your town reflects who you are," meant to draw support for recycling and litter control. The message links a collective sense of identity to an aesthetic and health-conscious appeal – as proposed by environmental activists. The aim is to personalize the surroundings, making the environment as familiar as one's own identity.

Several children arrived as Alex and I waited at the small school near the football field. Alex led the group from door to door explaining to residents that there was to be an environmental education festival over the weekend with food and transportation provided. The goal was also to gather together more members of the animal club. Alex explained that many families did not know what FC was and were unsure about handing over their children to a group of less familiar people. This meant that Alex had to approach with caution and thoroughly explain what the festival was about and gain trust. Previously, it had been quite difficult to involve Los Planes due to transport and lack of interest, but 2014

had a relatively successful turnout. Having an established weekly meeting through the animal club perhaps assisted in creating some of the necessary trust between the community and the environmental educators. Once the students demonstrated that they were taking part in a fun and safe extracurricular activity, parents softened to the idea of participating in the festival.

After collecting a few more children, we took the Halcones group by the plaza for some running games and football. The animal clubs that week had also been responsible for drawings and cutouts of animals, posters, and banners in preparation for the festival. Many of these children have been in PNC and have relatives who are rangers (or guides) operating from the under-used station in Los Planes, which explain some of their knowledge and familiarity with regional flora and fauna. Alex stressed the importance of watching the weather because a rainstorm may thwart the possibility of crossing the river to return to El Progreso.

The weekend's environmental education festival was split into two days: one for the children and one for the adults, with a sleepover in between for all the students. First, students were split into groups that represented different parts of the food chain, from producers to super predators. The activity I supervised was about turtles, and students had to crawl on the ground pretending they were turtles. The setup consisted of about ten phrases, each placed into a different cup. Each student would throw a ball aiming to hit one of the cups, and then approach like a turtle to read the corresponding sentence. The sentences explained each turtle's fate. Only one lived to be an adult and lay eggs, demonstrating that roughly one in one thousand sea turtles lives to adulthood. All other fates were various forms of death, including human factors like pollution and fishing by-catch. As each student, or I, read aloud the turtle's respective fate, the students were learning what great risks exist for sea turtles. After reading the sentence, students had to crawl back to the rest of the group as a turtle once more.

Another game involved a large bucket filled with water and little objects that represented various sea animals: dolphins, turtles, and fish. The students could select between a net and a fishing line in order to gather the objects. It became clear that the line and hook were more selective than the net, as the net would always bring up a by-catch of dolphins and turtles. The lesson was meant to build empathy for the dolphins and turtles,

and demonstrate the importance of single line fishing, avoiding nets that cause a large by-catch.

One group was constructing a coral reef out of cutouts and pictures. Another was creating a dangling collage of sea creatures made to look like a large jellyfish. Each level on the food chain was represented as a part of the jellyfish, and students played a game with a point system for touching certain parts of the jellyfish without being “stung.” The purpose of these games was to familiarize students with marine life, the importance of coral reefs, and the harmony of the food chain, and to create a general attitude of amusement while teaching about the environment.

Many practices throughout the festival in El Progreso were common throughout most festivals that involved children and conservation on the Osa Peninsula. Loud dance music (bachata, merengue, salsa, pop), hula-hoops, sometimes a clown performance, face painting, and arts and crafts are all staples of an Osa Peninsula environmental festival. In El Progreso, the large football field afforded more opportunities for outdoor running and team-building games, and the organizers brought candy-filled piñatas made to look like sea creatures.

The festival’s next day was aimed more at adults but still involved some children. The children who slept over and watched a movie were joined by their families, and older teenagers and young adults joined in a football match. The main focus was a series of *charlas* meant to discuss environmental concerns in general and local concerns more specifically. The event was co-hosted by MINAE, COTORCO, FC, and OC, and they maintained their presence outside the *salon* with tables, photos, and general information. About forty people were in attendance and many more were found outside, looking through photos and conversing. The photographer snapping images of the crowd was likely gathering evidence of “community outreach.” Most locals were crowding in the entrance rather than joining the seated audience, consisting mostly of other speakers, volunteers, and environmentalists. By the end of MINAE’s presentation, only seven local adults were listening. In a statement echoed by many, the Corcovado director reassured the crowd that conservation would “save the benefits for everyone who lives in the communities as well.” During the intervals between presentations, music blasted and hula-hoops were enthusiastically given to the crowd. More on this day is provided in the following section,

but the contrast to the kids' day should be highlighted here. It was clear from the levels of participation and the tone of community engagement that direct involvement with students for the purposes of environmental education was more successful than offering presentations.

Lessons taught along with interactive activities meant to engage students have been common throughout environmental education events on the Osa, and, setting a similar tone, I provide details from another two events below. An annual turtle festival in Carate, which brought together conservationists from all corners of the Peninsula and nearby region, became a gathering dedicated to environmental education. One activist group used stuffed animals in the likeness of turtles to demonstrate their points. Some turtles had unnatural growths due to pollution, scars from boats, wounds from sharks, or fishing line wrapped around the neck. Students were elicited to state what was wrong with each turtle. They also had to judge how it happened and what to do about it. This presentation was made more visceral by the vivid depiction of wounds present on the stuffed animals. These appeal to student emotions, and provoke a more empathetic response.

There was a scavenger hunt with a quiz of five questions, and prizes that included t-shirts promoting environmentalism. Children were organized into groups responsible for creating various turtle sand sculptures. Splitting students into groups to answer questions together was an effective way to motivate curiosity, camaraderie, and competition. Face painting, as usual, was also popular here, and children were able to have fun with the color, shape, and type of animal to be painted on their faces. A clown was even hired from a more urban area of Costa Rica to entertain and hold the attention of the children.



Figure 6.4. Children at the Turtle Festival in Carate.

One school visit in Dos Brazos illuminates another good example of environmental education in practice. Representatives from La Leona Lodge, a camp bordering Corcovado National Park, led a series of activities and lessons in order to provide evidence for their sustainable development certification. This included the young and enthusiastic biologist, Roni. In addition to some lessons and drawing activities in the classroom and photography done by La Leona Lodge, the students were taken outside for lessons on trees, pollination, and bats. Students aged eight to ten years old gathered in a group in the football field. Three volunteers became “bats” and were blindfolded accordingly. The rest of the students were “mosquitos” and had to remain within a certain perimeter buzzing around the bats. The goal for the bats was to capture as many mosquitos as possible while blindfolded, an engaging and fun activity to break up the lesson on bats.

Next, the students gathered around various plastic bottles made to look like flowers that hung from the ceiling of the school’s porch. Using straws, students took turns sipping liquid (juice, soda, water) out of the “flower.” Here, students have become pollinators and have taken part in the process hummingbirds of the Osa are known for regarding ornithophilous flowers – emphasizing the co-evolutionary ecological factors of birds and flowers. Students were exposed to the idea of a relationship between different species,



where the proper tool (length and width of straw) needed to cohere with the proper container (opening and depth of fluid). Roni also explained how various colorations and shapes have an impact on the pollination possibilities.

Along with the La Leona Lodge representative, I scouted locations around the school and football field for planting new trees. We dug the holes and found the locations first so that the students only had to place the new tree and bury it. During this activity, we discussed with students the importance of trees and what the forest does for the ecosystem in which they live. Similar to much of the day's lessons, students were already very familiar with this information. Rural areas like Dos Brazos tend to demonstrate more familiar knowledge of the flora and fauna while larger communities like Puerto Jiménez tend to demonstrate less.

What brought these events to fruition in Dos Brazos was a number of things: the fact that La Leona Lodge needed evidence of community interaction for its portfolio and application to the tourist bureau's sustainability committee, the teacher's willingness to support environmental education, Roni's enthusiasm for his work, and the students' willingness to participate in the activities. The sustainability certification and application process became a platform for education here. Similar to the event in El Progreso, outreach and the dissemination of the organization's name are goals of these educational events. This complicates the act of educating by placing it into the political realm, that of activism and support of the interests of biodiversity conservation. Education as a tool, however, does not make it less educational but illuminates wider context for the motivations of the activists involved. Events such as those in Carate and El Progreso, given the loud music, hula-hoops, and entertainers, relate a sense of desperation to entertain the children and keep the atmosphere lively, while the content of environmental knowledge is meant to seep through the day's activities – ecology lessons punctuating an excuse to play outside.

The games described above clearly show that empathy, personification, and the appeal to interaction and fun are critical aspects of learning during the occasions of environmentalist gatherings. When students are given the experience of acting out the behavior of a bird, bat, or turtle, they take away more than an abstraction about some unseen creature and its ecological importance. While the festivals and lessons in Dos Brazos are more formalized and they fit within the larger agenda of an environmental

NGO, MINAE outreach, or an ecolodge gaining certification, Samuel's work is a more improvised and more of an ad hoc expression of place, but also shares environmentalist ethos.

### **Competing Perspectives on Valued Knowledge**

There is often a disconnect between the aims of the NGO and what is actually delivered to the recipients, and when based upon ways of knowing the world, these competing forms of knowledge create antagonisms. Intervention in student life, and therefore family life, creates tensions and illuminates fundamental disagreements over both the approach to environmental education and the definition for that type of activist knowledge. This section explores such tensions between competing notions of proper knowledge and correct approach. These instances speak to the failure of some NGOs to communicate well with residents and to listen to community needs. Within this breakdown in strategy, previously alluded to by lesson plans with student resource material produced externally by experts, I examine a questionnaire and tensions within the El Progreso festival described above.

El Progreso's residents are politically represented by ACOTPRO, while the NGO, FC, has had a more expansive range of interests. Beginning as an initiative of FC, ACOTPRO demonstrated its ability for community outreach by creating an association for turtle conservation within the community. Later, in 2012, the members of ACOTPRO sought autonomy and wished to control their own activities themselves, as they felt FC was too authoritarian. Some of the ACOTPRO members mentioned that they felt left out of the environmental education festivals. They said that they were not invited to give a *charla* nor did they feel completely included throughout the event. Later I would learn that ACOTPRO would plan its own conservation festival focused upon a turtle release.

One member of ACOTPRO, sitting at the display table inside, expressed his overarching concerns with FC. He told me that there had been some conflict between ACOTPRO and FC; FC had difficulty giving more autonomy to ACOTPRO prior to the split; FC had confused helping the community with ownership over the leadership and initiatives in question; there had been a lack of trust and communication; and the fight for

autonomy two years prior had been more complicated than he had hoped. This ACOTPRO member summarized the general town sentiment by stating that not everyone agrees with the way FC carries through its volunteer and education initiatives. He argued that this may be the reason more local residents are not involved in the festival, and that ACOTPRO would feel more included had they been invited to give a *charla* as the other groups had.

The use of space was suggestive at the El Progreso festival. Most locals stood at the back of the *salon comunal* and even just in the doorway peeking in, while the audience seated near the presentation area was composed of mostly foreign volunteers, activists, and other presenters. Rather than out front with the other NGO tables, ACOTPRO's table was inside, and at the back corner of the *salon*. Socializing was clearly defined by space as environmentalists stayed mainly inside near the presentations, younger children played inside and near the *salon*, older children and young adults played football, and the majority of the residents in attendance congregated outside near the food and drink. It was clear that the presence of conservation and environmental education in such forms was slowly being accepted as integrated social movements, but with a tentative attitude of mistrust, echoing previous instances of foreign exploitation.

I consider another example of education misfiring. One teacher in Puerto Jiménez, working in her classroom despite a teaching strike, submitted several ideas for how environmental education might fail. We were speaking about environmental education and the intervention made by foreign-run NGOs. She exclaimed that “a foreigner with an angry face” [*una extranjera con una cara brava*] would not be able to teach and realize a change regarding recycling and trash use, for example. Her comments were telling as she highlighted, within a brief conversation, mistrust and miscommunication between locals and foreigners, difficulties identifying problems people care most about, building ecological awareness, and engaging students with the right kind of attitude.

The focus on the “angry-faced foreigner” is interesting because it not only distinguishes between “foreign” and “domestic,” but it also creates a particular caricature of the foreign NGO worker that fails to create lasting impact. More than a caricature, however, the comment reveals the fact that an authoritarian demeanor and patronizing attitude will not effectively serve the goals of fostering ecological awareness. The comment underscores the importance of the style with which environmental education is

carried through, rather than only focusing on the substance. Clear from the conversation with this teacher, an environmental educator must establish a rapport, create trust, and build a learning environment as engaging as possible. Despite best intentions, NGO delivery is insufficiently attentive to the needs of clients, leaving many, like this teacher, amazed at the lack of chemistry between advocates of sustainability and their audiences.

Like boxes of unused lesson plans, the experience with one environmental education questionnaire indicates that teacher priorities and preparedness are not in line with what some NGOs assume are community needs, nor what are purported as solutions. I helped Maite, OC's environmental education coordinator in Puerto Jiménez, with a brief questionnaire (see Appendix A for detailed description of results and two examples) in order to understand how some teachers and students regarded environmental education. We had fewer options for respondents as a teachers' strike had just begun, but found some classrooms in the area still operating. Additionally, I attended one meeting where many teachers gathered during the strike, and several responded to the poll there.

Fifteen teachers and two students completed the questionnaire. The questionnaire was not written for students, but as a few were keen on participating in what they were present to witness, I gave them the questions. One of these students said that we must protect the forest because of climate change. When I asked how he learned about this, he responded that a foreign volunteer taught him environmental education in Puerto Jiménez's library, and that he had enjoyed being there. Written embellished responses normally mentioned workshops, training, time spent in the field (out of the classroom), and necessary equipment for teaching environmental education. The teachers' responses tended to reflect a desire to protect the more familiar surroundings. Global concerns like climate change were held in less esteem, when compared with the biodiversity and ecosystem of the Osa. Teachers demonstrated a strong desire for environmental education to be practical and outdoors, giving students the opportunity to engage with the environment under discussion. Another strong emphasis highlighted the desire for training and workshops. While many teachers agreed with the philosophy behind environmental education, they have felt underprepared. Most did not express that the state should be requesting lessons in the curriculum without providing proper training and necessary assistance, including funds for time spent in the field. Clear from interviews, many teachers felt that securing time,

training, and necessary funds were fundamental to creating better dialogue with environmental activists regarding what to teach and how it would be pursued.

This questionnaire, done with the prompting of OC, is the only quantitative data gathered, and I found the method helpful but problematic. Participants tended to talk to the sheet of paper rather than engage in conversation. Exchanges were much shorter than casual and open-ended interviews. Rather than discuss general and personal concerns surrounding the practice of environmental education, research participants took the completion of the five questions as the entire task, and when they were answered, the conversation normally ended. Only through more lengthy and casual exchanges did comments like that of the “angry-faced foreigner” appear. The results are also biased towards the options given, and therefore create a standardization that overrides the specific detail that may otherwise appear. The spaces provided for embellishment on the questionnaire attempted to address this, but the hurried nature of completing the poll deterred thorough engagement with teacher motivations.

The poll was helpful because it quickly produced a focused amount of information that is useful despite the above concerns. If understood in context, and noting the important biases and caveats mentioned, quantitative data can be complementary to what is largely qualitative. This method also assisted in strengthening the understanding of OC’s environmental education initiative, which translates to what Maite is able to achieve on a weekly basis. Critical to understanding how environmental education operates in the Osa, an opportunity to work closely with Maite, a Colombian who has made the Osa her home, is an illuminating experience that reveals the world of yet another dedicated foreign NGO worker striving to change attitudes in the Osa. When I asked how to influence such change and interact positively with community members, she often exclaimed, “you tell me!”

There are different ways to know nature, and science-based activism that serves the aims of state biodiversity preserves and various environmental NGOs reflects those particular interests. Farmers who were born and raised in the area, gold miners, and various other workers know nature in a different way, cultivating and exploiting surroundings in a manner that is often in conflict with proposed controls over land use.

## Conclusion

Environmental education is arguably most effective outdoors, incorporating games, engaging students, and eliciting participation, rather than depending on a classroom presentation. The aim is to nurture, from a young age, an ecological steward that understands the importance of environmentalism not only as ethically charged information, but also as a passionate social movement – appealing to emotions in motivating political choices based upon a shared notion of care. Environmental education is not about passive knowledge transfer from teacher to student or the strength of curriculum planning; rather, it is an active and embodied practice informed by particular relations, some of which, were discussed in this chapter. Understanding the levels of student and community engagement illuminates which strategies are more or less successful. Contrary to what some environmentalists, bureaucrats, and educators believe regarding the implementation of curriculum and lesson plans created elsewhere, pedagogical intervention into the lives of families only has a lasting chance at acceptance if the community's will and sense of necessity are properly understood. Families and their children are more actively engaged when the topics covered hold more direct relevance to their lives and in translatable terms to the various local experiences of the environment.

Environmental education exists within this tension between a Freirian liberation pedagogy and the mainstream state or NGO model that imposes the logic of conservationism. As a type of environmentalism in practice it transverses environmentality, imperialism, and the expression of capital embodied by the pedagogical ethos that supports nature as a commodity. It informs the use of knowledge as a tool for certain interest groups, and knowledge as resistance, or subversion to big interests – what Samuel intends by supporting sustainability and community wellbeing in the face of marginalization.

## Chapter 6

# Blurring the Line between Grassroots Activism and Green Imperialism

The practice of environmentalism in the Osa Peninsula is varied and changing in ways revealed by research participants who discuss “grassroots” activism, the “new school” of conservation, and other forms of activism meant to empower communities through its outreach. Many informants have demonstrated as much, as well as a passion for their work that has translated into better-established trust and communication between environmentalists and communities than previously acknowledged. Because of the institutionalized character of Costa Rican environmentalism, meetings and collective action align with many state-sponsored objectives; and similar environmental meetings and festivals in the Osa are particularly revealing for understanding the nuances of conservation in local practice. The semi-formal talks [*charlas*], for example, organized in Puerto Jiménez by a few Costa Rican environmentalists drawn to the Osa, were spaces that came to exemplify grassroots activism, demonstrate the tensions within community outreach, characterize a shift in our understanding of environmentalism, and expose how environmental values are negotiated in such sanctioned forums for discussion. By exposing details regarding the practice of biodiversity conservation, this chapter complicates the “binary” of green imperialism and grassroots activism, explaining them as differing forms of normative action but positioning the effort to move towards the grassroots as more egalitarian and anthropocentric.

Lynn Horton’s work (2007) should be highlighted as it directly pertains to the question of grassroots environmental activism in the Osa. She explores what grassroots activism is meant to accomplish, how it works within three case studies – one of which is the Osa Peninsula – and problems associated with the interaction of differing interests and assumptions. Just as concerns involving land use are also politically and socially

embedded, Horton explains, “all discourses of sustainability are inherently political in the sense that they are built on underlying assumptions and values (e.g., material, emotional, spiritual, aesthetic) that cannot be predetermined through scientific methods or technical analysis” (2007: xiii). She argues that sustainable development is a non-monolithic but varied entity with differing actors and interests involved, and “that grassroots perspectives and contextualized local histories are critical to help us better delimit both the possibilities and the limitations of grassroots agency in globalized processes of sustainability” (2007: xiv). Sustainability practiced in its more successful and egalitarian manner, Horton argues, empowers local communities and marginalized actors rather than maintain a top-down approach.

The metaphor “grassroots,” which has become part of colloquial speech and another example of a place-based metaphor in English, suggests the bottom-up quality of momentum within some social phenomena. The so-called “root of the problem” is perhaps the most essential and indispensable element of an issue. To state that a campaign is grassroots is to state that it contains an egalitarian populism that would normally seek to be as inclusive as possible, amplifying voices marginalized by powerful NGOs, multinational corporations, or the state, for example. Although framing initiatives as grassroots has the problematic tendency to essentialize the community as a bounded (Horton 2007) and simple entity of like-minded victims of global capital, I use the term to bring attention to unequal power relations involved in Osa environmentalism and to highlight resistance to that power hierarchy.

This chapter contributes to the anthropological literature on community-based activism that details the mix of outreach initiatives and bottom-up approaches. Horton is less interested in defining grassroots, community, and locality. Instead, she focuses on sustainability and those socio-environmental ambitions that address political hierarchies by empowering certain marginalized actors. Several anthropological volumes (Martinez-Alier and Guha 1997; Martinez-Alier 2002; Carrier 2004; Brosius, Tsing, and Zerner 2005) explore what community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) means and how it relates to scholarly discussions on globalization, the environment, and the clashing interests and perspectives involved within these encounters of environmentalism. This chapter proposes to problematize both the grassroots and the mainstream for their normative and



imperialistic qualities. CBNRM stresses the point that it is not imposed from above, but this does not mean that politics and hierarchies are not also present in some cases. Likewise, grassroots campaigns can often be imposed from above, but attempt in many cases to be as egalitarian as CBNRM initiatives promise to be. This tension and persistent questioning of what bottom-up campaigns entail is a core concern here.

Addressing this, the first section examines locality and the questions surrounding how scholars limit the definition of “local.” The next section provides some examples of sustainability in practice that include the importance of gender roles while discussing grassroots, in order to show that a sustainability movement can take a subversive form – in this case, against the patriarchy. The following section on *charlas* constitutes the main ethnographic case of the chapter and exposes one initiative meant to fulfill promises of grassroots campaigning, shot through with tensions of locality, elitism, and normativity, among the good intentions and many eagerly accepted results from community members. With some understanding of Osa environmentalism in place, the following sections continue to demonstrate the workings of activism on the Osa in its nuanced form, important strategies for environmentalists, and important aesthetic qualities of activism that are often overlooked. Next, I detail what the shift in conservation style means to some on the ground. Then, I explore the idea that personality and emotion play key roles throughout the functioning of environmentalism, and examine one type of environmental strategy and perspective that relies on the coherence of people and environment. The subsection on Roni revisits this environmentalist whose passion and enthusiasm are inseparable from his political vision and practice. How grassroots initiatives, and Osa environmentalism in general, operate on the ground advances understandings that environmentalism in practice is loaded with tensions, problems of normativity and power hierarchies at all scales, and highly influenced by the personalities of the activists.

### **Grassroots as a Metaphor: Localized Political Action**

As globalized spaces are generally discussed in terms of “local” and “foreign,” it is necessary to briefly discuss who the locals are and what local means. By referring to locals in the Osa, I am referring to Osa residents who have lived in the region for a great length of

time and those who were born and raised in the area. These boundaries are not rigid, as some locals move away for some time and return feeling foreign to the place, and some foreigners move in, stay with a partner and raise a family locally. Being a local, then, is more about the types of relationships established within the Osa and less about adhering to a strict categorical type.

It is important to view the local (both locale and locals) as a fluid entity, as several anthropologists discussed below have done. Hugh Raffles (1999; 2002) reminds us, through his interpretation of “local theory,” that the local is not an actual location nor should locals inherently be described as such. Locality, instead, describes a locale in the process of *becoming*, and one that is socially embedded within the political and historical forces at work. Raffles explains, “Locality is both embodied and narrated and is, as a consequence, often highly mobile: places travel with the people through whom they are constituted. Locality, then, should not be confused with location” (1999: 324). Concerned with how a “place that holds our attention comes into being” (1999: 323), Raffles explains that places become places through the practice of particular interactions – whether socio-economic or political or otherwise – and that practice, including the manner of its narration, realizes the place and its locality. Similarly, Feld and Basso (1996) are concerned with “the relation of sensation to emplacement; the experiential and expressive ways places are known, imagined, yearned for, held, remembered, voiced, lived, contested, and struggled over; and the multiple ways places are metonymically and metaphorically tied to identities” (11). Given that “people everywhere act on the integrity of their dwelling” (Ibid), the authors inquire as to how this process works, and therefore what particular place-person-way of being is enacted. Locality, then, is akin to “the idea of home, of ‘our territory’ as opposed to ‘their territory,’ of entire regions and local landscapes where groups of men and women have invested themselves (their thoughts, their values, their collective sensibilities) and to which they feel they belong” (Basso 1996: xiii). Basso’s ethnographic intervention reveals that “we *are*, in a sense, the place-worlds we imagine,” linking locality and identity; and exploring how identifications with both society and place are “deeply joined in practice” (1996: 7).

This expression of locality and the phenomenological focus on identity and place are helpful analytical tools for interpreting local activism in the Osa. Out of the friction

created by differing interests and perspectives regarding the environment and its use, comes differing takes on nature – perhaps different natures altogether. Commenting on the slippery definition of Amazonian nature, Raffles (2002) explains that the natures described in his work are “dynamic and heterogeneous, formed again and again from presences that are cultural, historical, biological, geographical, political, physical, aesthetic, and social. They are natures deep within everyday life: affect-saturated affinities, unreliable and wary intimacies” (7). As proposing political action based upon a certain ethical (and otherwise) understanding of space is always place-making, interrogating what sort of places are envisioned and created within the Osa also brings forward identity politics and various ways of knowing. This discussion of activism and its various kinds, including challenges therein, builds upon such understandings of locality, grassroots, place, and nature, by expressing how Osa environmentalism is a fractured, dynamic, and complex practice.

It is important now, staying on course with varied approaches and outcomes of environmentalism, to view sustainability initiatives and their related gendered projects. One quality of the fluidity to conservation practice in the Osa is the ability for the movement, through occasions like meetings, talks, and festivals, to afford opportunities to women and others that may not have arisen if not for the occasion of the environmental event or gathering. As discussed below, such outcomes do not necessarily relate to established missions of environmental policy but appear through its practice.

### **Sustainability, Gender, and Practice**

This section’s focus on gender does not mean that the rest of the thesis ignores it. Gender as a topic of discussion, perhaps like politics or kinship, is implied throughout an ethnographic examination of social relations. The purpose here is to highlight the particular feminist aspects of van den Hombergh’s analysis of Osa activism in the 1990s and Lynn Horton’s more recent work on similar themes, and to reflect upon gendered aspects of environmental movements in the Osa. The particular relationship between sustainability and feminism exposes the versatility of sustainable movements in the Osa and demonstrates that environmentalism is not monolithic nor easily predictable, but that only through close encounters with key actors can we understand its nuances.

Van den Hombergh's and Horton's studies provide useful and unique portraits of environmentalism seen through a feminist lens. Perceiving the movement in this way highlights the gendered aspects of structural violence and subversive qualities of sustainability movements. This section places such ethnographic work in conversation with more contemporary trends within environmental and social discourse found in the Osa. A number of research participants spoke of *machismo*, what they generally define as male privilege, and the importance of sustainability as opening a feminist space. Building upon van den Hombergh's ethnography, the subversion of gender norms and the ubiquity of male privilege should be highlighted here.

Van den Hombergh's term, "grounded green campaigning," using another place-based metaphor, is meant "to capture both the local struggle for livelihood sustainability and the explicit ecological values in the broader society that are defended by the protest leaders" (van den Hombergh 2004: 67). Such grounded green campaigns are bolstered by, and perhaps also help to create, collective identities and actions that build momentum upon networks that effect political change (van den Hombergh 2004: 45). Horton is able to contrast the Osa case with other cases in Central America and assert that "much of the leadership and drive behind Osa's 1990s environmental campaigns came from women, and those campaigns have indirectly promoted female empowerment" (2007: 63-64). Horton acknowledges what many activists also acknowledge: "environmental campaigns opened up space more broadly for women's participation in public spaces and collective action" (2007: 64). This type of activism, in a sense, was not only acting to resist foreign capital and enforce environmental sustainability, but also nurturing social change that forced an acceptance of varying public roles for women – activism affecting the activists themselves.

One research participant working at a well-known luxurious ecolodge explained that the popularity of environmentalism helped open a space to discuss "women's issues" and anything else on the minds of attendees during gatherings. She organized meetings to discuss sustainability, and they afforded a space for open discussion of any topic, which developed into a de facto support group for women enduring various forms of *machismo*. They discussed domestic violence, everyday difficulties for women, and male privilege. Given that the occasion of a sustainability movement transformed into a new place where subversive topics could be openly dealt with, the Osa's conservation movement, through

the actions of this informant, shifts to something new – breaking socio-political ground by offering conversations on gender equality.

Of the active environmentalists and foreign volunteers in the Osa, a majority are women. There is little doubt that this gendered fact of activism contributes to the increasing interest of young men to participate locally. Dating and partying become part of the phenomenon of young volunteer activists touring through the Osa. Some foreign women, and men, meet their partner and settle into the Osa to start a family. Normally, the foreigner then nuances her views of conservation to allow acceptance of some hunting, gold mining, and ignoring regulations on farmland.

It has remained difficult for female activists to avoid certain types of labeling. Some female activists are constantly maligned as “*loca*” [crazy] or “*lesbiana* [lesbian],” meant as derogatory. Differences in lifestyle of such activists, for example living alone or being over thirty years old without children, are markers for gossip, rumors, and insults. Horton includes male jealousy as something that also works against female activists being generally accepted as a social norm (2007: 64). Compared with their male colleagues, female career-oriented activists are seen as breaking a social norm and the gendered notion of household. For this reason, active and vocal women are often the target of such insults that a man would not necessarily endure in the same manner. That said, however, insults aimed at activists and NGO workers are certainly not only reserved for women; but the gendered assumption that a woman is breaking a norm for assuming an active public role is where the sexism and *machismo* is most apparent.

One women’s recycling group, AMARMA Osa [Mixed Association for Harmony with the Environment],<sup>62</sup> began to manage the waste visible throughout Puerto Jiménez and surrounding communities in 2014. The women became an active visible presence at festivals and throughout town as they gathered recycling and cleaned the grounds of litter. The group managed to relieve the town of two truckloads per month and gather the necessary profits to continue work. Nearby communities took notice and coordinated with AMARMA Osa to begin their own recycling programs as well. Similarly, another women’s group called Manos a la Obra [“Let’s Do It”] has been functioning as a

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<sup>62</sup> See: <http://worldconnect-us.org/projects/amarma-osa-transportation/>.

community service-led initiative that cleans Puerto Jiménez and organizes dengue protection events with some support from state funds.

At most large gatherings in the Osa, including environmental festivals and events meant to attract visitors and resident foreigners, groups of women sell arts and crafts made from recycled material. Such groups are targeted as worthy of support by various ecolodges, on the assumption that local women selling these arts and crafts are representative of the authenticity of community and that financial support in their direction symbolizes “giving back” or an example of “sustainability.” There is a troubling amount of essentializing that often accompanies the motives of those seeking to secure sustainability certification through these arrangements that promotes the image of the local woman as a timeless example of tradition or place. Most of these women are using easily accessible materials, like trash and recyclable goods, to generate some profit, exemplifying how environmental causes and economic gain cohabit particularly well, in this case, for women.

The fact that there is a majority of female foreign volunteers and an incoming of urban female conservationists does not mean environmental causes are essentially feminine or that women are inherently closer to nature (Ortner 1974), but serves to show that activism can be gendered for the purpose of particular insults; gendered in a way that allows vendors to use the “authentic” and “sustainable” tropes to sell goods to (primarily) tourists and visitors; sexualized as an opportunity for dating; and gendered in the more subversive way that allows for collective support and resistance to *machismo*. Rather than use this space to list the influential female activists in the Osa today, I build on similar work by van den Hombergh and Horton, including such activists in the larger discussion of environmental practice in general.

### *Charlas*

Biweekly *charlas* [talks/discussions] began towards the end of 2013, and created a space to celebrate and discuss the environment in Puerto Jiménez. Of all the examples of environmentalist gatherings, these talks were the most prominent and regular in the Osa during the period of fieldwork. They demonstrate ecological awareness, outreach, the

sociality of environmentalism, and the passions of the activists. The *charlas* were also a good marker for community reception of information delivered by biologists and environmental advocates. Carlos, the RFGD director, always begins the *charla* with a small welcome and a reiteration of their statement of purpose. Carlos ritually declares: “people have football clubs for those who love football... and this is a club for those who love nature,” or jokingly, “if it were karaoke, more people would show up.” He normally explains that there is no place for nature lovers to gather despite the abundance of opportunities for people with other interests, promoting the *charlas* as innovative and as meeting a communal desire. Rather than provide details from each *charla* attended, I include descriptions from several *charlas* here in order to illustrate how the process works, who is included, and how the talks are received. Common themes will become evident and color the personality of Osa activism at this grassroots level. Additionally, challenges to activism and complications to the assumptions (socio-political and scientific) that have historically accompanied environmentalism are also integral to this discussion.

I attended thirteen such *charlas* during fieldwork in 2013-2014, after the initiative had just begun. The idea began during a conversation between three men: the proprietor of Café Monka, a well-known local botanist I will call Edgar, and Carlos. The proprietor hailed from a family of coffee and tobacco farmers, moved to the Osa for new opportunities when agro-export prices fell, and has enjoyed hiking and spending time outdoors, saying that he “knows the value of nature.” The three men sought to create a space where invited guests and local experts could give talks to the public, and Café Monka, given the interest of the owner, was an ideal location on the main street of Puerto Jiménez. Some themes included: plant biodiversity, migratory birds, sea turtles, primates, the Golfo Dulce ecosystem, Carlos’s arboretum, sustainable agriculture [*agricultura familiar* or family farming], plant identification, compost, medicinal uses of plants, insects, biodiversity and ecosystems, needlefish, and environmental health [*salud ambiental*]. Attendance ranged from twelve to twenty-eight people and usually averaged about twenty persons. Although most *charlas* consisted of the familiar faces of environmental activists in the area and foreign volunteers, in many meetings non-regularly attending community members also peppered the audience, as well as the curious passersby.

Local guides were especially interested in the *charlas*, not only because the knowledge would help their business, but also out of a similar passion for nature that fed into their original reasoning for guiding. Local guides would share photos from their phones and cameras depicting various types of wildlife and plants. They engaged with several of the speakers, asked questions, often took notes, and chimed in with stories from touring the rainforest. Animal photographs were particularly successful for creating conversation, interest, and comradery, as the images were passed from person to person.

Edgar began one talk lamenting, “there is more information on Costa Rican plants in botany labs in Missouri (U.S.) than Costa Rica itself.”<sup>63</sup> He reinforced that Costa Rican biological diversity is “*your* diversity,” placing a sense of national ownership and pride onto Osa plant life. He attempted to convince the audience to see the rainforest for its potential forms of use, and to think of the flora as “a supermarket.” Edgar and Carlos usually use the example of an “exotic” Osa plant sold for thousands of dollars in Australia to illustrate this point; in their view people are living amongst financial opportunities without knowing it. Edgar’s environmentalism, which challenges the audience to consider the rainforest in its forms of use, creates a few contradictions.

On one hand, the argument is for the commodification and exploitation of everything, turning the environment immediately from use-based economy to a value-based fetishization of flora as a commodity. Paradoxically, perhaps, Edgar also argues for sustainable environmental stewardship and an expansion of scientific (specifically, botanical and ecological) knowledge for Costa Ricans. He is objectifying both financial value and scientific knowledge as ontological categories awaiting discovery by the populace, whose ignorance is implied. Rather than imposing an environmentalist way of thinking, though, Edgar is in fact proposing an empowerment scheme that begins with knowledge of flora and develops into economic advantage (whether through tourism or farming).

“The challenge of conservation,” Edgar stated, “is to let local communities understand what they have.” This, therefore, also spells out the success of conservation for Edgar. On the conservationist perspective of the environment, he continues, “*hay que cuidarlo, proteger, utilizar, y conocer* [you have to take care of it, protect it, use it to your

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<sup>63</sup> This is in reference to the international plant specimen registry.



advantage, and understand it].” In Edgar’s words, “to take advantage” of the environment is no different than sustaining, protecting, and learning from it, because the latter – meaning environmentalism in this form – allows for individuals to continually take advantage of Osa flora, for example.

The purpose of Edgar’s presentation was to instill and display passion for plants as much as convince the audience that the environment is not a mere controversial space of foreign or state interest; but, rather, a space for locals to “take advantage of” and enjoy. Carlos and Edgar constantly make comparisons to football, and would lament that “people care more about football than science or nature,” while advocating for more passion and resources to support Costa Ricans learning environmental science. They do not make such statements to claim that all *campesinos* are alienated from environmental stewardship and aesthetic appreciation, however, and give an example: “a *campesino* doesn’t cut down a flamboyant tree [Royal Poinciana], because it’s in his *finca* and he’s proud of it.”

During one of the two *charlas* on migratory birds, the migration across Costa Rica was described as a “gorgeous show.” Audience members passed around a bird book, looking at photographs and information and giving laudatory commentary. Some spoke of “experiencing the birds” as if they were not objects to be seen but social phenomena to be lived. Similarly, the activity of bird watching is called “birding” (as it is mostly everywhere) and those who participate are known as “birders,” thus personalizing the term. The other talk on birds was also timely as it fell prior to the bird festival set to take place in Puerto Jiménez’s *salon comunal*. Such a talk was, again, helpful to guides as they traded knowledge over what to show, how best to learn about the birds seen, and how to “make birds more interesting to people.” It seems that birds often suffer the same fate as plants and insects regarding interest levels when people really just become excited about the mammals (big cats and tapirs) inside PNC.

Such conversations about environmental strategy tend to continue after the *charla*, and on several occasions I joined a group of local environmentalists for a gathering at one guide’s house. This foreign immigrant, Rob, is Northern Irish, moved to the Osa in 1996, and is currently the only foreign-born Costa Rican national guiding in PNC (or, likely, anywhere on the Osa). His house has become a known meeting point for guides, environmentalists, and other foreign migrants; and, on this evening, it welcomed Edgar,

several known local environmentalists, and a miner-turned-guide who works almost exclusively with Rob. Everyone shared stories of environmental activism, discussed conservation, traded experiences of venturing into wilderness, and spoke of dangerous close encounters with snakes and various insects. As Rob discussed one of his early experiences hiking with Edgar, he described Edgar's face "lighting up like a bomb" when talking about plants – a testament to the type of passion Rob has found inspiring and has tried to emulate. Like many conversations about environmentalism in the Osa, this one quickly turned to a critique of MINAE as everyone expressed their disappointment.

Edgar's suggestion for MINAE is "to blow it up." He wants to start over with completely new staff, with the exception of Carlos, whom he would keep. Others echo the sentiment and approve of what Carlos does and his nuanced understanding of environmentalism, but remain emphatic in their discontent for MINAE management, especially in regard to PNC. Edgar argues that PNC is "not about tourism, not about the people that live here, not about conservation, or anything." He believes the park employees only move when their boss is around, and that the fact that there is no obvious progress after years of work suggests MINAE workers are just protecting their jobs and salaries and are not actually motivated to create worthwhile changes. Furthermore, the employees treat the park like their own property rather than public and are not doing enough scientific research, creating enough community employment, or practicing conservation in general. Others chime in to say, "give it a chance," but Edgar remains reluctant and disenchanted.

Rob is equally excited when discussing MINAE. He calls Sirena, the main base camp within the park, "worse every year," due to what he refers to as silly regulations that are privileged over more serious business. Rob becomes bitter thinking of how he has been shuffled out of the camp to smoke a cigarette. He suggests, "we get all the *campesinos* together and everybody else from here and have a revolution – taking back our park!"

The next stage of this prognosis after "taking back" the park is, for example, to "encourage more ecological knowledge." Both Rob and Edgar have identified a "lack of scientific interest in Costa Rica," and argue for a state-level push to revive science as a public interest. Edgar points to the lack of "museums, universities, programs, and funds" to highlight his point that Costa Rica does not invest enough in environmental science, and reiterates his regret that one must travel abroad to learn about Costa Rican neotropics. The

fact that Costa Rican neotropical research is quite strong compared with other Central American countries is not as relevant here because, as they and others explain, the will of locals and Costa Rican nationals lags behind foreign research efforts. The parallel complaint, therefore, is not just that the government should give more support to ecology but that Costa Rican citizens should, according to advocates in the Osa, take a greater interest in ecology. While it is easy to see this scenario as an imposition of interests from a botanist like Edgar, a biologist like Rob, or a forestry expert like Carlos, they always reiterate the importance of community self-empowerment and this particular ecological knowledge as a means for more equitable distribution of economic benefits – be they from tourism, entrepreneurship, or personal enjoyment.

Several tactics are used to enlist others to the cause of environmentalism. At various times the *charlas* are made as interactive as possible, splitting people into groups and making competitions out of naming types of plants. Medicinal plants are given out as examples and audience members taste one sample meant to cure toothache. The point is often made that many medical drugs come from tropical forests, and fieldtrips are proposed to offer participants a closer experience of the forest. Edgar entered a couple times with a large bag full of leaves meant for a hands-on demonstration. Handling the plants, looking at handouts, drawing our own versions, and discussing details within our groups made some *charlas* more similar to an environmental education experience that forces engaged learning. Edgar mentioned that one could ascertain information from smell, as he identified a fungus. A raffle game to win a bingo set was employed at least once, and a drawing contest administered on other occasions. Even the mural art in Café Monka is appropriately themed with a jaguar, rainforest backdrop, and the reflection of a little pond. This type of mural art is symptomatic of the Puerto Jiménez aesthetic that insists upon a certain rainforest image, as a tourism pamphlet would, and maintains an iconic mood amongst the building that reminds the onlooker of the jungle imaginary (Appendix C).

With twenty-four audience members, one of the best-attended and most engaging *charlas* was given by a young man from La Palma, currently a student at UCR. He is an example of someone who most Osa environmental advocates champion as a young local fighting for sustainable practice and environmental wellbeing. Given the fact that most outspoken environmental advocates in the Osa are from San José or the Central Valley,

environmentalists exploit the opportunity to highlight individuals like this young man who are actively pursuing sustainable advocacy. The subject, “Food Security and Agricultural Diversity in the Osa Peninsula,” brought a crowd of interested *campesinos* eager to understand more efficient ways to use compost, recycled materials, avoid monocropping, profit from sustainable practice, and eat healthier chemical-free products. He spoke of what can be grown, how and where, in addition to “sustainable agriculture.” Creating a farmers’ market was also a popular idea, expanding the possibilities for land use and securing economic sustainability for future generations of farmers, especially for smallholders in the La Palma area. As the Osa’s geography has shifted from mostly agricultural to one that caters more to tourism over the last few decades, many *campesinos* engaged in this event, actively expressed concerns, and asked questions in order to better understand what a more socio-economically sustainable agricultural future looks like.

Roni’s *charla* on insects proved to be another particularly engaging and popular talk with about twenty-eight attendees. He received a laudatory response with laughter and applause. Many stayed and continued to discuss insects after the talk. Carlos mentioned that Roni’s enthusiasm is “what keeps many environmentalists going,” meaning that that type of passionate display for his subject served as an inspiring and motivating factor, especially from a twenty-one-year-old biologist. Roni’s talks on insects always have engaged the audience with questions and various types of participation. Children were also involved and asked questions. Convincing the audience that insects, although often overlooked, are in fact interesting, he reinforced that the creatures represent “a world” all in themselves. Discussing the “*insecto de amor*,” Roni explained that “there’s a song and everything” involved in attracting a mate. He even acted out the insects’ sexual interaction and mimicked their movements, to much laughter, he labeled this insect: “a little aggressive.”

Lucy, a passionate supporter of Osa environmentalism and sustainability who also moved from San José to Puerto Jiménez, gave a *charla* on “environmental health [*salud ambiental*]” to twenty-seven people. Jacques, a vocal *campesino*, attended this one as well, and his young teenage son has become a regular participant at environmental events, spending a lot of time with Lucy and other environmental advocates in Puerto Jiménez. Lucy is a proponent of the socio-environmental stance that explains the environment and

ecosystem in terms of interactions with humans: humans are part of the environment and therefore environmental health is social health, and vice versa. Jacques asked, “what is environmental health, and from what perspective?” He challenged the audience to consider more than just the “conservationist sense of the word.” In response, Lucy argued that the types of environmental concerns she spoke of are always also human concerns. Presenting a Venn diagram containing the triad, “social, environmental, and economic,” she explained that sustainability is represented by the equilibrium where the three intersect. This *charla* was another especially engaging one as many audience members were participating, raising hands and asking questions, and commenting on the familiar and controversial themes that surround land use in the Osa.

There is a patronizing tendency within these *charlas*, familiar to environmentalism at large, that demonstrates an imposition of values and interests upon those who would not claim to be within the mainstream of environmental advocacy. Just as Jacques and others poignantly submit, any sincere interpretation of environmental activism and its assumptions should also include a transparent understanding of how power and privilege are operating, what hierarchies are being established and whose interests are exercised, and how the definitions are drawn between empowerment and imposition. Many environmental advocates have treated environmental knowledge as an object to be passed on to “ignorant” masses expected to take certain socio-political actions based upon this “new” knowledge. One environmentalist and entrepreneur asserted, “MINAE or someone should teach the farmer [*finquero*] how to [take advantage of the environment].” On the question of why locals do not exploit all the possibilities of natural resource use, Carlos concludes, “it’s that people are only familiar with a little bit.” The most telling accounts in Puerto Jiménez and the greater Osa region that pertain to this situation normally consist of farmers, fishermen, and those with interests in tourism, who feel that they are left out of certain decisions and are being taken advantage of or ignored by various practitioners that are expanding their own interests while claiming to empower others.

In light of this well-known critique of the “elitist environmentalist,” Carlos proposed a change in the rhetoric of the *charla* and began to describe it less as a talk and more as a “conversation/ round table discussion [*conversatorio*].” While a slight change in rhetoric may seem superficial, it marks the type of change in environmentalism that Carlos

has become known for – attempting to focus on grassroots activism and community empowerment rather than a top-down approach. Jacques’ enthusiasm at this last *charla* helped create a much more casual atmosphere, and one of the most interactive of conversations yet. Afterwards, many of us sat down for pizza and more talk, noticing the interesting and increasingly common situation in Puerto Jiménez where five languages (Spanish, English, German, Italian, and French) could be spoken at one table, highlighting the cosmopolitan nature of a small town many Costa Ricans view as “remote,” including the stereotypical assumptions carried by the label. Concerns over the future of conservation, tourism, and the empowerment of local communities were discussed. Informal gathering such as this usually did not include so-called community representatives, even though everyone at the table lived in Puerto Jiménez. Jacques’s teenage son usually attended such gatherings, though, and was quite interested in biology and befriending environmentalists, such as the Costa Rican conservationists who traveled to the Osa from urban areas. The imposition of environmental values from this standpoint contained traces of imperialism due to the fact that what constitutes empowerment is outlined by the urban-based environmentalists and proposed in a prescriptive manner.

These *charlas* simultaneously show that attempts at empowering grassroots campaigns reveal challenges regarding the imposition of values and misrepresentation, and that the talks are still subversive to the mainstream of environmental activism carried through by the state and NGOs alike. The talks were the most regular, openly interactive, and public forum for discussing environmental issues in the Osa during the period of fieldwork. Many disenchanted NGO workers celebrated the attempt as the right direction for creating awareness and offering information in a style that differs from the normative aspects of fortress conservation. *Charlas* were meant as democratic forums of learning and expression. They succeeded in becoming more like a grassroots campaign than other initiatives, and certainly when compared to the inception of RFGD and PNC, but still failed to incorporate perspectives of Osa residents in such a way that would gain the momentum of a grassroots campaign or, better, CBNRM. The exception, as I observed, was the talk by the young man from La Palma, a UCR student, whose *charla* would fit the criteria for grassroots activism not only because he was from the area but also because he spoke to the needs of farmers he knew personally.

While they performed differently than other types of conservation, *charlas* still retained their own sense of normativity. Edgar, Carlos, Lucy, and Roni are all from the urban Central Valley. Most self-described environmental advocates in the Osa are from the urban areas of Costa Rica and purposely moved to the Osa for the famed biodiversity of the rainforest. Other activists and biologists, like Maite and Rob, are from Colombia and Northern Ireland respectively. Just as the largest active NGOs in the Osa have offices in San José, there is certainly a trend of environmental governance as an urban-born elitist phenomenon imposed upon rural territories. This type of green imperialism, too, is not without its tensions and fissures; it is more ambiguous and never a monolithic, fully graspable thing. Despite traces of imperialism, especially apparent within the insistence of a commodified nature as the solution to the rural problems that environmentalists diagnose, it would be unfair to label all Osa conservation as imperialist because many efforts like those outlined above and elsewhere in the thesis demonstrate practice that is not consistent with the top-down model. In order to explain this, I turn to the “break” in conservation practice to which many activists refer.

### **Old/New School Environmentalism**

The majority of environmentalist informants remarked that there has been a shift in environmental politics that has placed both the ideology and method of conservation into distinct camps: the so-called “old school” and “new school.” There is a generational split here between the older and younger conservationists, which implies an evolution in the approach to environmentalism – an historic transformation that has responded to the changing political landscape and the reception or rejection of various environmental initiatives. This transformation and unfolding debate is documented in the volume, *Communities and Conservation: Histories and Politics of Community-Based Natural Resource Management*, edited by Peter Brosius, Anna Tsing, and Charles Zerner (2005).

The authors state:

Community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) is based on several premises: that local populations have greater interest in the sustainable use of resources than does the state or distant corporate managers, that local communities are more cognizant of the intricacies of local ecological processes and practices, and that communities are more able to effectively manage those resources through local or traditional forms of access (Brosius, Tsing, and Zerner 2005: 1).

Explaining some debate within anthropological studies that discuss CBNRM, Brosius, Tsing, and Zerner write that earlier works built upon the “critique of traditional fortress conservation,” and “were efforts to imagine and embody a new model of conservation incorporating ideals of democratic governance, social and economic equity, sustainable environmental management, and nature conservation” (2005: 28). The subsequent wave of research, representing a “strong backlash against community-based approaches to conservation” (Ibid), constitute what the authors describe as a “requiem for nature” (2005: 29) because of the focus on politics which these new critics felt too greatly backgrounded environmental concerns. Brosius, Tsing, and Zerner outline their concern with this backlash as reverting to fortress conservation yet again (Ibid). This debate is echoed in the manner in which this volume was produced, collaboration between scholars and practitioners from various backgrounds. Remarking on the more contentious aspects of the collaboration, the editors state, “Scholars said the activists were reproducing pernicious stereotypes, while activists replied that scholars were too busy self-indulgently advancing their own careers to notice urgent dilemmas” (2005: 3). This debate is reminiscent of more general debates regarding activism in academia (e.g., Scheper-Hughes 1995) alongside the question of how best anthropologists should (or could) examine activism of all types; developing into the epistemological terrain that inquires into what anthropologists do and whether knowledge is ever apolitical.

Many of the research participants in the Osa were well aware of such debates over the practice of conservation as empowerment rather than obstacle, and Carlos was no exception. He, even as a MINAE employee and head of the forest reserve, understood that “many conservationists were realizing that top-down, coercive conservation was not working very well” (Brosius, Tsing, and Zerner 2005: 17), and attempted to take action based upon that understanding. Carlos has identified the top-down and grassroots distinction as that of the old and new schools of conservation. He has observed that some of what distinguishes a practitioner of either school is generation: the older environmentalists tending towards the old school, while environmentalists in their early 40s and younger tend towards the new school. Normally, when this view of conservation is expressed, it is done so by a member of the new school or someone who feels they have



tapped into the new trends of environmentalism as community outreach. When members of the older generation in Costa Rica discuss what may have changed within the environmentalist movement, they lament what they see as a “lack of passion.” Older environmentalists like Alvaro Ugalde remembered how fervent the movement was in the 70s, and viewed the movement today as distracted, lackluster, and too easily overrun by special interests. In order to understand what constitutes the Osa’s new school environmentalism, I outline some of Carlos’s activities in addition to the *charlas* already discussed.

Carlos established an arboretum in the northern part of the Osa to represent each of the various species of tree found on the peninsula. This arboretum became a place where children were taken to learn botany and spend time planting the young trees. Making the arboretum a combination of environmental education and a challenge for MINAE to represent itself to the public, it attracted press from San José. On at least one occasion, either someone or a small group of individuals cut many of the young trees and sabotaged the planted area. This was a clear act of protest and anger directed at MINAE, likely a statement against environmental regulations in the area that some feel is state overreach. Carlos used social media, a place where he is very active, to raise awareness of the tree cutting, and maintains that it was probably someone angry at MINAE over an admonition for poaching or a similar fine. Here, as an example of tension with the surrounding community, Carlos was reminded of rangers finding severed heads of various animals left by hunters to antagonize MINAE. The arboretum as a symbol of MINAE’s activism and general governance (but more personally, one of Carlos’s passion for public outreach) opens itself to protest by its representation and reminder of state environmental controls. While many gladly accepted it, especially participating children, there was clear dissent from the values on display.

In Rancho Quemado, a village engulfed by the expansion of government-regulated lands and the RFGD, Carlos has introduced an initiative to train hunters to be guides. The idea rests on the fact that local hunters know the forest and animal behavior better than most people (or perhaps all) on the Osa. The initiative has been well received, and hunters have told me that they are happy with the opportunity to raise income and to exploit and help create the rise in tourism. In order to be successful hunters they must have an intimate

understanding of the forest, where animals go, and how they behave. One hunter explained how he could identify nearby animals based upon feces, smell, the presence of a particular food or water source, changes in the fauna that may signify animal traffic, and tracks.

Carlos's strategy was meant to argue that poaching could be curbed with economic alternatives provided and to demonstrate to MINAE and the world of environmentalism at large that the socio-economic interests within reserves such as RFGD should and could be taken into consideration.

Carlos was also candid about what the government had not done well, especially telling while discussing the inception of RFGD. He emphatically admitted that the manner in which RFGD was created in 1978 was illegal because it did not respect the entirety of the Forest Law and review the area's land use. If the government had done a complete review of the area now under RFGD control, it would have noticed farming communities like Rancho Quemado and Dos Brazos and the many people inhabiting the area. This is among the most central of *campesino* concerns, and Carlos, despite being the head of RFGD, has confirmed their suspicions that the government should have negotiated with farmers before establishing control over their land. Now, as residents within RFGD fight for land titles and rights, the animosity towards the government grows, and most believe the state should give all residents their titles rather than forcing them to bring forward evidence through the judicial system.

It was Carlos who suggested I speak with Jacques, the land rights advocate, and he feels more environmentalists should listen and engage with similar *campesino* sentiments. Carlos suggested that I not speak with the head of MINAE for the ACOSA region because, she, a member of the old school perhaps, is "fine inside her office" [*esta bien en la oficina*] and is out of touch with what is happening "on the ground." The trope of being "fine inside the office" is commonly used to malign bureaucracy and imply apathy, corruption, self-interest, and incompetence. In order to "know what's going on," Carlos suggests speaking to environmentalists who engage with the community and to other residents who are also vocal about community needs – exemplifying a grassroots-based campaign. For Carlos, understanding what is "really going on" rests upon "working with people," and supporting social advancement initiatives that rest on the popular idea that, as he states, "more education equals more employment."

Locals, according to accounts like Carlos', have lost trust in the government "*con todo razón* [with good reason]." Carlos explains, "*el peso de conservación esta en las comunidades* [the weight of conservation falls mostly on small communities]," and that MINAE is perceived as the imperialist police force. Among his criticisms for MINAE is the disproportional distribution of benefits and responsibilities. His bosses earn more in salary and appear to be doing less conservation work. The rangers trekking through the rainforest and placing themselves in danger, for example, have among the lowest salaries and among the highest of conservationist responsibilities. His "bosses are part of the old school," Carlos explains, and concerning that type of power hierarchy where the old school is in charge; it "makes things difficult to change."

In the broader Costa Rican context, Vandermeer and Perfecto (1995) persuasively argue for a more nuanced approach to conservation that does not simply, "purchase and protect islands of rainforest with little concern for what happens between those islands, either to the natural world or to the social world of the people who live there" (14). The move away from this fortress conservation is what Carlos and other *charla* leaders have been trying to do, but given clashing definitions of priorities and interests, their efforts are still far from successful. The alternative proposed by Vandermeer and Perfecto is "the Political Ecology Strategy," which "emphasizes the land and people *between* the islands of protected forest, and has greater credibility because of its willingness to see some of the interconnections in this complicated system" (1995: 15). This style has many iterations; including sustainable development, grassroots campaigning, ecotourism, and community outreach, none of which are immune to critique, mostly for the repurposing of conservation to serve capitalist agendas (Brokington and Duffy 2011; Brokington, Duffy, and Igoe 2008; Brosius, Tsing, and Zerner 2005; Büscher and Davidov 2014; Igoe 2004). Vandermeer and Perfecto explain why, especially in Costa Rica, one reason the shift towards the "political ecology strategy" is important: "one of the world's showcases of conservation is currently promoting a policy that actually encourages rainforest destruction" (1995: 4-5). The amount of free reign given to extractive industries (e.g., United Fruit) has dispossessed many of their land, and left little choice but further exploitation of the resources left under protection.

Fortress conservation in Costa Rica has been a reaction to deforestation and resource extraction; but, as many suggest, the sustainability of people's livelihoods as well as the sustainability of rain forest biodiversity would improve under the political ecology model, as it fails under the mainstream conservation model. This model examined by Vandermeer and Perfecto, and paralleled by many like Carlos in the Osa, allows for "a mosaic of land-use patterns: some protected natural forest, some extractive reserve, some sustainable timber harvest, some agroforestry, some sustainable agriculture, and, of course, human settlements" (1995: 15). Vandermeer and Perfecto clarify the problem while reiterating what is particular to Costa Rica:

Costa Rica has been held up as one of the world's best examples of rain forest conservation. Its internationally recognized conservation ethic, its position of relative affluence, its democratic traditions, the remarkable importance of ecotourism to its national economy, its willingness to adopt virtually any and all programs of conservation promoted by western experts, make it the most likely place for the success of the traditional model of rain forest conservation. The fact that the model has been an utter failure in Costa Rica, where it had the greatest chance of success, calls the model itself into serious question (1995: 16).

Moving away from this model, maintaining that "questions of land and food security are the most central component of any potentially effective political strategy" (Ibid), it is clear that the new school of environmentalists, political ecology strategy, or any of its various iterations, is an attempt to deal with social inequality, fair access to resources, and sustainable ecological stewardship. While the new model in practice rarely meets its lofty ambitions, there remains a distinct point of departure from earlier forms of conservation in its method as well as a much more egalitarian concern.

### **The New School in Practice: Ecology and Health, Sustainable Development, and Nature Loving**

With the shift towards grassroots conservation in the Osa and some fundamental distinctions between the new and old schools in place, the remainder of the chapter will highlight more methods vital to understanding differing takes on the region's environmental movement. Part of the imagined utopia purported by environmentalists that upholds Gaia theory (Lovelock 2000), the notion of the oneness of the ecosystem, is such that the health of the environment (suggesting the nonhuman matter) is reflected within the health of the individual. In this view, environmental health is human health.

Conservationists have used this argument to personalize and identify with the environment, reflecting the emotional connections between individual and environment as being inseparable from more scientifically explained rationale (Milton 2002). As a strategy for changing public opinion, discussing health consequences of ecological catastrophe has recently gained some traction. Lucy's work is especially well suited for this point, exemplifying one strategy of community outreach within new school environmentalism.

After studying environmental health, Lucy moved from San José to the Osa for a job at an ecolodge as the sustainability and community outreach coordinator in 2011. She spoke of loving nature and outdoor activities like hiking, swimming, and viewing animals. She mentioned that she felt a sense of harmony in the rainforest, and after living in the Osa for some time, found moving back to San José difficult. Lucy could not reacquaint herself with the crowds, traffic, and the stress, almost immediately phoning her Osa contacts and pleading for another job opportunity. Since then, she has been guiding, assisting ASCONA, and advocating for environmental health.

Lucy's premise regarding the notion of environmental health is that "a healthy environment equals social and individual health." She listens to fellow Osa residents and tries to empathize, stating, "community has to come before conservation," "I'd cut a tree too if I had lots of kids," and "making money for themselves is also a type of conservation." There is no real separation between social and environmental for Lucy. Conservation and sustainability are not only socially embedded, but also co-constituted by social wellbeing so that "social aid is also conservation."

Lucy expressed some difficulty in her community outreach, complaining that many people tend to think sustainability is only about recycling and nothing else. She, like many environmentalists from San José, carries the problematic tendency to circumscribe locals as "authentic," "simple," and lacking in the knowledge that Lucy and colleagues offer. Lucy seems to believe that the elitism of environmentalism or sustainability can be battled by listening to local needs. While many environmentalists believe that social transformation towards sustainability is a matter of attaining knowledge, the attitudes are quite different when considering the urban activist who wants to "fight and achieve" on one hand, and *campesinos* making a living or advocating against government controls on the other. It seems that the type of work carried out by activists has changed sooner than the language

used, as many still refer to their Osa neighbors as “simple,” reinforcing – whether intentional or not – the hierarchy that the new school activists seek to critique. In this sense, there is still growing room towards establishing a more egalitarian atmosphere between *campesinos* and conservationists, and talking about health has been a politically viable bridge to a place of common interests.

What is more difficult than the logic of Lucy’s argument, however, is convincing her audience to care the way she does. It is through the act of being convincing that grassroots initiatives that seek to engage people distinguish themselves from mainstream initiatives that pursue buy-and-protect methods. As bodily harm and the pursuit of personal health are easily translatable desires for her audience, Lucy, like others, uses health as a common language through which to discuss sustainable ecological practices and protection of biodiversity.

The aesthetics of conservation are an integral part of building a more intimate understanding of the movement’s politics. Sometimes maligned as self-serving strategists or bureaucrats, environmentalists exhibit sincere passions that should not be overlooked in a discussion outlining the character of conservation’s practice. Too often, social movements are reduced to analysis through the lens of vulgar materialism that fails to incorporate visceral affect as a premise for action. Through surveying what has mediated such affect, what follows, also in the tradition of Milton’s work, explores the way sensations become socialized and how passions are incorporated into activism. Many of the activists already discussed demonstrate this, and I offer a few more examples here to illustrate the point that personality plays an important, and often overlooked, role.

The personal attitudes of various activists were always influential but more apparent in casual social settings like the post-*charla* chats in restaurants, bars, and people’s houses, at parties, and during long car rides on particular excursions. It was within such settings that I became familiar with Miguel and Johnny, two young OC employees based in San José but working on the wetlands initiative in Sierpe, a small village tucked into the mangroves of the Osa’s northern portion. Their mission in Sierpe was to work with the *piangua* (mangrove cockle) fishermen [*piangueros*], make recommendations for sustainable fishing practice, and help build a politically and economically viable model for continued harvest. The car ride from the fishing meeting in Golfito to return Don Benicio,

the president of the *pianguero* association in Sierpe, then continue on to Puerto Jiménez just the three of us, was particularly telling. Their critiques spanned Costa Rican politics, the conservation movement, and some specifics on problems faced in the Osa, adding that their emphasis has been on “*social* sustainability and capacity building.”

Reflecting upon his studies in San José, Miguel spoke of the power relations evident in the Golfito meeting, and especially in relation to Don Benicio’s presence representing the small-scale fisherman. One sports fisherman known to be attention seeking and self-promoting caught Don Benicio’s attention when he argued that he was a “fisherman like everyone else.” Don Benicio, offended, expressed to us that being a successful sport fisherman in a country where that is a relatively large portion of the economy, does not qualify someone to claim socio-economic equivalence with a *pianguero* – an act that Don Benicio and others clearly viewed as a political maneuver. The same sport fisherman spoke over Don Benicio, trying to exclude him from a leadership position on the fishing committee. Miguel and Johnny viewed such tactics as forcing a power hierarchy, which placed *piangueros* like Don Benicio nearer the bottom. Noticing this and other maneuvers that politically marginalize *piangueros*, Miguel and Johnny sought to focus on *piangueros* in Sierpe and empower their ability to sell while simultaneously practicing ecological sustainability. Remaining sensitive to power relations and NGO-community interaction was always important to the young environmentalists.

Don Benicio spoke for himself and his neighbors when he asserted that Miguel and Johnny had done more for the fishermen than former NGOs in the area, by listening to concerns, creating economic models and pamphlets to help explain the *piangua* market, helping to negotiate better returns for the small-scale fishermen, and mediating the *piangua* association. Their critique of Costa Rican politics and bureaucracy bolstered these environmentalists’ focuses on community. Even suggesting that the fishing meeting in Golfito was only held due to the new president’s sister, a marine biologist with an interest in sustainable fishing, Johnny and Miguel reminded me that politicians “follow their own interests and rarely act on behalf of the community.” Johnny expressed that environmentalists are “using old tactics for a new world,” and should adjust to socio-economic needs rather than force old models of fortress conservation. Johnny continued to point out that if the already-established conservation areas are not even managed correctly,

then there is not a good argument for adding more protected territory, but rather for better managing the areas already established. They discussed that it is not enough for the government to make environmental laws, but they need to ensure how they will be carried through and managed. They believe it is past due to update the “*reglamento*” [rules of management] for many such laws, and that the addition of a sincere engagement with public social management should be paramount.

One thing that helped create the distinction between Miguel’s and Johnny’s work and that of previous NGO engagement, was the effort exercised when navigating the river and looking for various residences well into the night, to the surprise of many like Don Benicio. Acts like these convinced some Sierpe residents that Johnny and Miguel were not like the usual NGO employees who made promises of integrating efforts but had not connected on a personal level with people’s needs. Demonstrating interest in communication and addressing socio-economic issues was very appealing to *piangueros*. For Johnny, “environmental problems *are* developmental problems.” To address development, Johnny emphasized empowerment and defined it as listening, negotiating solutions with people, helping with organization, and stepping back so that “they do it on their own.” He linked empowerment to self-esteem, and discussed the paternalistic approach of many NGOs that ignore capacity building – something Miguel and Johnny strived for with their late nights in Sierpe.

Contrary to what some older environmentalists have said, the passion in Costa Rican environmentalism is not gone, but instead of a more unified movement, Costa Rican conservation is splintered into more ambiguous camps that are constituted by various aims. Conservationists like Johnny and Miguel, for example, are enthusiastic in their criticism of environmentalists using “old strategies for new problems” and ignoring socio-economic factors within communities directly affected by conservation initiatives. Miguel says he is interested in “how socio-political changes become real for people on the ground,” and Johnny adds, “the Osa could be a model for how development should work” with “sustainable alternatives that are profitable.”

The type of conservation proposed by Miguel and Johnny is a mix of conservationism as it informs the creation of capital and the protection of subsistence livelihoods. It is infused also with nature loving and awe inspired by the environment.



Johnny's compulsion for handling dangerous snakes, as he enthusiastically narrates several instances, attests to a sense of awe regarding the non-human that is shared by many environmentalists and guides. Lucy's approach is different as it was a more tourism-based promotion of sustainability and pedagogical advocacy of socio-environmental health, rather than campaigning for sustainable practice and economic growth in Sierpe. Lucy's rejection of life in San José reflects a profound aesthetic connection with the environment, in addition to a particular lifestyle preference.

### *Roni*

Roni's style of activism and enthusiastic personality also reflect the impassioned approach of many environmentalists and is worth noting again here. Roni focuses less on socio-economic concerns as compared with Miguel or Johnny and instead takes a more eco-centric approach to framing environmental concerns. This may be more in philosophy than practice, however, as I watched him interact and engage audiences of various ages and backgrounds on many occasions. His environmental education work in Dos Brazos and the successful *charlas* have already been noted. Growing up in San José, he enjoyed escaping to be outdoors, away from the city. His interests in biology and ecology began when he joined the Boy Scouts as young as seven years old, saying he "loved nature a lot." By age sixteen, he had his first credited biological publication, and at age twenty-one he had ten publications. Roni also discovered a new species of wasp and butterfly, naming one after a pioneering female environmentalist. Inspired by earlier generations of environmentalists involved in the first iteration of ASCONA, biologists, and ecologists, Roni moved to the Osa to research, work in ecotourism and environmental education, and to volunteer.

One aspect of studying insects, and particularly butterflies, that Roni appreciates is how one or a handful of samples can demonstrate where in Costa Rica they are from, the altitude, the type of forest, the health of the nearby ecosystem, and the types of flora present. Studying insects, then, is also a study in the ecosystem of which they are a fundamental part. Roni explains, "insects are like books" and has often expressed the types of ecological knowledge that may be read from the tiny creatures. His eco-centric views reinforce the Gaia perspective and focus on the interrelations between living things. His

perspective comes with a hardline take of human activity, calling humans a “plague,” that “we modify nature,” and that “nature has a rhythm... we’ve lost that rhythm.” This is a fairly common sentiment among some nature lovers and environmentalists: a glorification of nature, upholding the non-human world as sacred, while maintaining the possibilities of oneness. Statements like these risk reproducing the social/natural divide that some, like Roni, would like to reorder, mainly due to particular ethical and political stances familiar to the environmentalist movement.

Roni expresses many views on his experience with the environment in romantic and sentimental terms, sometimes reminiscent of a Rousseauian utopia. He remembers his Boy Scout uniform and told me that now it is “inside” of him. Roni states, “I can be a child again... that’s why I like nature.” Motioning across Golfo Dulce at the distant green hills, Roni proposes, “if you come to nature you can see beautiful views like this one we have... you can’t be angry or sad.” Many Osa residents, and especially the foreign immigrants and environmentalists, discuss the mental and emotional healing powers of time spent outdoors, creating particular descriptions of the environment more readily expressed by those with preconceived notions of this type of nature loving.

## **Conclusion**

In addition to town hall and association meetings, there were a number of significant festivals and events with environmental themes during the fourteen-month period of fieldwork (October 2013 – December 2014). In El Progreso, there was a two-day environmental education festival organized mostly by FC, and a turtle festival organized by ACOTPRO. In Rancho Quemado, there was a large rural and sustainable tourism festival organized by several groups including the university-led PiOsa from San José. There were two tree plantings in the northern part of the peninsula, and one tree festival organized by Carlos from MINAE. Carate hosted the annual turtle festival organized by several of the major NGOs, including OC. Dos Brazos hosted the president’s visit, and residents and organizers mentioned a future sustainable tourism event, held post-fieldwork.

There were beach and mangrove cleanups organized by several NGOs and community members for Puerto Jiménez, Carate, and nearby coastline. Puerto Jiménez, as

the Peninsula's main town, led in the festival count with the Earth Day environmental festival dubbed the Peña Cultural (organized by ASCONA), the bird festival (organized by many local NGOs and guides), the sustainable agriculture festival (led by university students and assisted by local NGOs and interest groups from San José), MINAE's anniversary parade for PNC, and the president's visit on World Environment Day. This averages to one significant gathering of dozens of people per month in the Osa, relatively frequent and decently attended, considering the current lack of any major environmental campaign on the scale of opposing development plans. Environmental events and festivals are key examples of community outreach, and occasions for promoting familiar themes of environmental activism in celebratory environments aimed at having fun, with loud music, dance performances, clowns and other entertainers, and free food.

This chapter has surveyed various types of grassroots conservation, building a contrast with older mainstream conservation that has carried such labels as green imperialism. Janis Alcorn (2005) outlines a contrast between "Big Conservation" and "Little Conservation" in order to explore what community-based natural resource management may entail. She defines Big Conservation as "a management issue unrelated to the agenda of rights and responsibilities that centers the environmental justice movement" (2005: 39). Little Conservation, on the other hand, is "embedded in local dress and metaphors, in the 'right way' to do agriculture, and in ethical relationships with ancestors," as well as, "part of local cultural heritage" (Ibid). Alcorn's distinction places Little Conservation in contrast to more exploitative capitalist extraction, and emphasizes the socially embedded aspects of conservation that make it seem even less like a movement but more like an aspect of normal life (compare, Nash 1992).

Van den Hombergh's grounded green campaigning, Alcorn's Little Conservation, Vandermeer and Perfecto's political ecology, and the commonly used "grassroots" each describe sustainable natural resource management that accounts for more egalitarian politics, socio-economic reformism, and empowering the rural periphery with terms residents set for themselves. Grassroots initiatives in the Osa are well defined by research participants like Carlos, Johnny, Miguel, Lucy, and others. Carlos's distinction between new and old school conservation mirrors many qualities within the works discussed above, but the methods of such activists must be resisted as a panacea solution because grassroots

contains normative tendencies as well, and successful outcomes are always context dependent. As we have seen, the urban-born environmentalist tendencies do not always blend well with desires of Osa residents, nor do they feature the needs that many residents had expressed. The blurred line between grassroots and mainstream environmental activism demonstrates the variance of environmental practice on the ground and the difficulty in defining the conservation movement outside of particular socio-political contexts. Within the context of Osa environmentalism as this fluid, ambiguous, and dynamic field of tensions, forms of practice that exhibit multiple types of environmentalism nuance our understandings of the environmentalist movement.

## Chapter 7

# Science, “Voluntourism,” and the “Cosmopolitan Nature Experience”

Over the past two decades, a basically agrarian subsistence-based economy has, in many cases, given way to tourism in the Osa Peninsula; and with the rise in foreign presence, the variety of touristic experience has also increased. Volunteer-oriented tourism (or voluntourism) and international scientific research projects have become common. In addition, spirituality-based tourism has increased, pursued by those searching for personal harmony, exploring the forested setting. Such aspects of the global and cosmopolitan character of the Osa Peninsula are explored in this chapter. Significantly, the Osa has become widely recognized as a site on which foreign and Costa Rican activists have sought to effect socio-political change. Interactions between incoming visitors and longtime residents create both limitations and possibilities. Within this friction between foreigners’ activism, its negotiation within communities and the skeptical resistance from many residents, is a type of power dynamic based within the scientific community that has always been – despite the claims of foreign environmentalists to be defining something new – central to state-sanctioned Costa Rican environmental activism since its inception during the 1970s.

As we have seen in some of the secondary literature already noted throughout (Goodman and Redclift 1991; Brockington, Duffy, and Igoe 2008; Brockington and Duffy 2011; Büscher and Davidov 2014), which discusses concerns regarding globalization and complexities within the capitalism-conservation nexus, and much of the data presented as well, many environmental activists in the Osa have reproduced power hierarchies they sought to mitigate. Additionally, such environmentalists left socio-economic concerns of the area to other institutions or branches of government and have not built in understandings of the local political history of landscape within their efforts, which would

have fostered better trust and communication between parties. As the Osa's nature experience is consumed by tourists, the processes of commodification become relevant to the types of environmentalism discussed here. The themes of nature loving met with capitalism and scientific research as a global experience are developed further.

Previously, attempts at community-based conservation and the overlap between pedagogy and environmentalism have been discussed. With the major shift towards a service based economy, the influence of foreign migrants and visitors, I build upon those themes by expanding the discussion on differing forms of knowledge to include cosmopolitan elements and the commodification of natures that have been examined throughout. This chapter explores the tension within a cosmopolitan Osa, circumscribed as a frontier, and the interactions between scientific research, tourists, and volunteers. I begin with a descriptive ethnographic narrative that portrays the changing hustle of Puerto Jiménez. The following subsection discusses general tourism in the Osa, and then scientific research as the basis for the voluntourism taking place. The subsection on sea turtles is particularly relevant to the Osa context, given its prevalence as an example of intervention: the fact that turtle conservation is quite attractive to volunteers, researchers, and environmentalists. Next, I proceed to the main body of ethnographic data and the survey of volunteering in the Osa. Here I look at one large international group (Frontier); one small group begun by a German immigrant (Green Life Volunteers); a Costa Rican non-profit association with practical ties to an ecotourism outfit (ASCONA and Osa Wild respectively); and the work done at Piro beach mainly by Costa Rican-managed, and internationally supported, Osa Conservation (OC). The examples provided in this chapter are all instances of growing cosmopolitanism founded on the rising profile of "environmental concern;" and the list above demonstrates tourism, environmentalism, and research on differing (inter)national scales. The section on spirituality-seekers and nature lovers provides an alternative type of tourist and shows that the Osa also affords this opportunity, and the rainforest is viewed as more than a resource in theory despite the commodification in practice. Finally, I survey the frictions regarding the mixture of science, rights to access resources, elitism inherent in tourism, and clashes that result from cosmopolitan space.

## Global/Local and the Making of a Cosmopolitan Space

Today, Puerto Jiménez is an idiosyncratic mix of sensations. In some popular restaurants, 80s hit music videos and VH1 Classics play incessantly as background. In the *sodas* (small locally-operated cafes), *telenovelas* play throughout the day and patrons eat differing forms of *casado*<sup>64</sup> (rice, beans, salad, plantains, and a meat or fish). Wandering feral dogs sniff the restaurant tables lining the main street and the Golfo Dulce waterfront. An older man on a bicycle sells coconuts, circling through town most of the day calling, “*pipa, la pipa!*”<sup>65</sup> *Pipa fría! Fría la pipa!*” Large trucks haul beechwood through town. Dust cakes the building facades during dry season, and the smell of burning trash is ever-present. Loudspeakers attached to a small car boom and echo paid advertisements through the streets. White-faced monkeys can almost always be seen near a little stream by the airstrip during the afternoons, creating a scene of stopped traffic, excited photographers, and passersby trying to feed the monkeys bananas. The deep grunts of howler monkeys are heard much sooner than they are usually seen. Scarlet macaws majestically fly overhead.



Figure 8.1. An elder gold miner, a longtime resident but early migrant, within Puerto Jiménez.

<sup>64</sup> Literally, “married man” in Spanish, the term is used to mean a complete homemade meal.

<sup>65</sup> Literally, the word means “pipe”, perhaps a connotation to drinking the coconut water through a straw, but it is used as Costa Rican slang for coconut.

Tourists are continuously coming and going, by car, by small aircraft, and even by cruise ship, as the fjord-like Golfo Dulce is deep enough for large boats. Five or six different languages can be heard in the streets of town or its restaurants and cafes at any one time. The airport fence presents a menagerie of advertisements for ecotours, ecolodges, and other eco-themed attractions. Vendors and tour guides rush to incoming flights and boats. *Taxistas* crowd the sidewalks waiting for clients. By 5:00am the bakeries are usually crowded with guides and clients, preparing supplies for the trekking ahead. The main street is tattooed with colorful and inviting nature-themed advertisements for tours, restaurants, souvenirs, and environmental causes that present an onslaught of marketed nature experiences – almost creating a caricature of the biodiversity for which the Osa is famous (see Appendix C). Some residents hustle to take tourists to particular hostels from their entry-points for some reward. The familiar faces of at least three former gold miners can usually be seen in town, and the men have become an inextricable part of the town's character (Figure 8.1). The town's character can also be found through the vibrant mix of volunteers, tourists, urban-transplant environmentalists, researchers, “expats,” local residents, guides, and former gold miners dancing and drinking into the early morning beside Golfo Dulce.

One local man's tour is especially exciting for tourists and other visitors who wish to see crocodiles up close (Figure 8.2). His property abuts a swampy mangrove area in Puerto Jiménez and is signaled with a wooden sign claiming the property as his own. He felt it important to make this public claim as he has not been able to obtain the legal title to the property, but had worked there for a foreign owner long enough for *de facto* rights to the land. He has named each of the crocodiles living nearby, feeds them, and calls them, “*Venga! Vamos!* [Come on, let's go!]” Visitors watch as he uses a stick to guide the crocodile's movements and feeds them raw chicken.





Figure 8.2. One man posing with the crocodile he feeds, holding a stick against its head.

This portrait has provided an impression of Puerto Jiménez, the hub of the Osa Peninsula and its hustle, in order to better illustrate the cosmopolitan mixture occurring as the growing tourism industry changes the socio-economic landscape. Below is a brief overview of tourism in the Osa, which gives context to the voluntourism, research, and other activities discussed in the following sections.

### *Osa Tourism and Volunteering*

Tourism in the Osa is often compared with mass tourism in Guanacaste and other more traveled parts of the country, such as the much larger Nicoya Peninsula (Almeyda, et al. 2010) and popular coastal park, Manuel Antonio (Almeyda et al. 2012). The Osa is normally classified as distinctive because of its relatively remote and rural character when compared to the Central Valley, and such comparisons are usually meant to critique the mass tourism of popular destinations while praising the “pristine,” “natural,” and

“authentic” Osa (Horton 2009). The lack of mass tourism, however, creates an opportunity for ecotourism to monopolize the area’s tourism business (Ibid).

Critics of tourism in the Osa (or ecotourism as most area reports label it) are concerned that, despite the contrast with mass tourism as neoliberal expansion, ecotourism can also maintain a capitalist agenda and reproduce many of the problems of justice, access to resources, and balanced distribution of power (Fletcher 2012; Horton 2009). Horton (2009) observes, “Costa Rica’s latest transnational activity, ecotourism perpetuates historical patterns of inequality, social exclusion, and environmental degradation associated with past patterns of dependent, agroexport-led growth in Central America” (94). While contrasting accounts (Almeyda, Broadbent, and Durham 2010; Hunt et al. 2014) find socio-economic and environmental strengths within ecotourism, accounts by Fletcher and Horton argue that it has been easier for foreign investors to reap the benefits of ecotourism (Horton 2009: 97), and building on the presentation of Horton’s work in the previous chapter, within the Osa, the shift in control towards foreigners perpetuates those divides along the lines of nationality (Horton 2009: 98). In agreement with Horton, Fletcher asserts that the large majority (almost all) of Osa residents see some financial benefit from (eco)tourism (2012: 303). In a similar spirit to ecotourism, paid volunteering has responded to the allure of the Osa, and may also exhibit symptoms of greenwashing, national elitism, and the maintenance of economic inequality.

International volunteering overlaps with ecotourism; and they seem to appear together in the Osa because of the fame of this biodiversity hotspot, the availability of protected reserves, and the long-standing interest in science and environmentalism. Volunteering shares some of the issues that critics of ecotourism have exposed. Carrier and West (2004) argue that ecotourism needs to be placed as follows:

within its broader political-economic context – neoliberalism and the institutions that reflect it, which foster its spread in the countries in question. Ecotourism may be seen as an exercise in power that can shape the natural world and the people who live in it in ways that contradict some of the values that it is supposed to express (483).

West (2008) asserts that “scientific tourists may be seeking an educational adventure that they can turn into symbolic capital on their return home,” and, similarly, volunteers are looking for the adventure and the biodiversity marketed to them by the fame of the Osa Peninsula. West argues that, “scientific tourism and scientific research can be considered

social interactions through which rural people and their interlocutors come to understand place, self, and other, and together they constitute a powerful site for the analysis of discourse, power, and cross-cultural self-fashioning” (597). The entanglement of incoming researchers and the transforming service-based industry along with longtime Osa residents not only demonstrates the politics of power, but also the value systems underlining environmentalism, research, and tourism.

International volunteering is a rich field from which to understand the friction of global/local interaction (Tsing 2005), the power dynamics at play, and the transition to a service-based economy. Human geographer Jamie Lorimer (2010) reviews three themes regarding international fee-paying volunteering:

- (1) “international conservation volunteering as a mode of cosmopolitan global environmental citizenship, guided by the universal framework of natural science across a flat earth of difference making opportunities,”
- (2) “the material reality of conservation volunteering as an illustration of the neoliberal and neo-colonial tendencies within mainstream environmentalism,”
- and (3) “a more-than-human account of international conservation volunteering” (311).

International volunteering, with its similarities to ecotourism based upon interest in environmental activism, is often a type of activity that holds many of the same adventure-seeking elements as tourism. Voluntourism, then, exposes international and regional elitism, scientific knowledge as a service industry, and exemplifies one consequence of the shifting conditions of possibility within the cosmopolitan, eco-obsessed, tourism-rich setting. Scientific research, like environmentalism in this context, is employed as an instrument of capital accumulation. While the Osa is not known as an example of “mainstream” Costa Rican tourism, the region has its own version of mainstreaming that relies on the profile of biodiversity conservation.

### **Science and Political Knowledge**

During one visit to Cerro Osa, a hilltop research station for Osa Conservation (OC), I spoke with a well known foreign biologist and conservationist with longtime interests in the Osa. To the buzzing and loud backdrop of cicadas, as we – including the head of OC – rushed to a view of the sunset over the Pacific and distant PNC, the scientist says, “you hear that? Those are genes fighting for survival.” This biologist believes, as many do, in the primacy of biology, that the scientific method is the best means for obtaining “real” or

“true” knowledge, that “we are all born naturalists” in his words, and thus reaffirming an ontological significance for naturalism, or an eco-centric cosmology that presupposes a natural order of things. This particular biologist has held great influence over OC, and views on a biological basis for human understanding have underpinned much of what environmentalists in this tradition have believed. Some critics have labeled this environmentalism “old school” and link it to the ethos of fortress conservation. Science as the true means for obtaining objective truth, however, has been criticized (Kuhn 2012; Feyerabend 2010; Popper 2002), linked to European cultural hegemony (Gramsci 2000), and deconstructed as the product of particular political actors within a network of knowledge production (Latour and Woolgar 1979; Latour 1987, 2004). Viewing knowledge production as a political process assisted by regimes of value allows us to better understand the entanglements of interests in the Osa.

Max Weber’s (1919) famous essay, “Science as a Vocation,” exposes one interesting fact about the production of scientific knowledge: financial funding matters. Many times, what scientific projects are pursued is determined by trends in funding, and where money can be spent allows for the conditions of scientific work within that particular project. Weber calls into question the innocence and objectivity of the scientific method, and thus reveals socio-political (as well as financial) forces at play involving the practice of science. One research participant revealed a similar point: he, a North American sport fisherman and sustainable fishing advocate, “almost got in a fist fight with a marine biologist” for saying that “scientists already know what they will find before looking [or carrying out a study].” The accusation was meant to suggest that the scientist had a political agenda that not only biased the research but also infused the methodology itself with environmental activism that, in his view, negated the sincerity of the work. Voluntourism and international scientific research in the Osa sit within these tensions, and understanding the power dynamics within knowledge production and research as a service industry better illuminate how these phenomena operate and what influences exist. Environmental activism, within which scientific research and voluntourism play clearly integral roles in the Osa, is nuanced by the operation of services towards the ends of ecotourism and voluntourism, at the expense of greenwashing and issues raised above, in

addition to the reordering of power and knowledge. Turtle research and conservation is offered as one example of the complexity that old school environmentalists tend to ignore.

### *Sea Turtles*

Sea turtle research and activism consume a relatively large number of volunteers in the Osa (and Costa Rica at large), and the literature on this intervention suggests similarities between ecotourism, voluntourism, and scientific research. West (2008) describes “scientific tourists” as “looking for both the physical ‘beyond,’ that authentic other – both other nature and other culture,” (610) born from their imaginations. Just as the circulating media and fame of Costa Rica leaves many “seeing green” (Vivanco 2002), a critical take on the viewpoints and practices of voluntourism will expose environmentalism to be more politically and socio-economically embedded than the scientific purists claim.

Within the literature on turtle conservation Lisa Campbell (2002; 2007) explains how regimes of value inform the privilege of access to turtles in Costa Rica, Ricardo Macip (2012) exposes elitism within turtle conservation practice, and Dimitrios Theodossopoulos (2003) explains how turtle conservation fundamentally clashes with regional agrarian understandings of land and resources. Theodossopoulos explains the reasoning that underlies the tensions and misunderstandings between conservationists and local residents: there is a history of elite control over land (2003: 31) and an “emotional and symbolic significance” of land ownership, which reflect pride in harvest growth and the struggle of production (Ibid: 46-47). When Theodossopoulos’s interlocutors, Vassilikiot farmers, express their practical knowledge of place in contrast to what they think ecologists know (Ibid: 109), they emphasize an intimacy with animals and landscape that is gained through agrarian practice and struggle. Within this ethnographic intervention, farmers have deep personal ties to their land and are proud of their work. When land rights are threatened by incoming interests and controls, conflict ensues, and political consequences of the distinct forms of knowledge and value regarding turtles become apparent.

On the Oaxacan coast of Mexico, Macip has taken a Gramscian approach to view cultural hegemony parallel turtle conservation efforts, in the process of reinscribing roles, to create guardians out of poachers. Following “the relation between coercion and consent

in a hegemonic process of class rule” (Macip 2012: 241), as well as a critical look at “mixing anxiety and hope and producing renewed common sense and local knowledge” (257), Macip engages the idea of socially incorporated conservation. Macip builds a critique of environmentalism and conservation but with the emphasis that it should not reiterate old arguments that critique the production of inequality in the general global economic system; rather, it should focus on the conservation movement as one social movement that is increasingly implicated within those problems that the conditions of neoliberal economic systems help to make possible (Ibid).

Campbell’s work (2002; 2007) parallels some of these concerns and focuses on Costa Rica. Campbell (2002) exposes the views of conservation experts and tracks the tension between science as the communal language for understanding conservation and the political effectiveness of the shift in environmental practice towards a more socially inclusive process. Building on such work, she later (2007) reviews the tension within politically negotiating common property, access to resources (turtle eggs, for example), and conservation practice. Campbell writes, “although most sea turtle conservation policy is legitimized in the language of ecology, beliefs about rights to sea turtles as a resource underlie ecological arguments” (313). This is a fundamental tension of conservation in the Osa.

Some turtle conservation initiatives like COTORCO<sup>66</sup> and ACOTPRO are very inclusive and embedded in local life, while other NGOs, like Osa Conservation and Frontier, have been more exclusively focused upon volunteer work and direct engagement with turtle research rather than public socio-economic engagement, exemplified by their Piro initiatives. COTORCO, managed by a female British immigrant who lives with her Costa Rican husband and child, gives direct payment to former poachers for conservation services, and aims for some sustainable use of the resource rather than strict fortress style conservation. ACOTPRO is an association managed completely (as of recent changes) by residents of El Progreso, and assisted by the Corcovado Foundation, that works in turtle protection on the beaches of Drake Bay – involving participants who take turns even sleeping overnight on the beach with the turtles. The politics of Piro will be outlined below; but first, I broadly discuss volunteering and some key interlocutors.

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<sup>66</sup> Comité Tortugas Corcovado [Corcovado Turtle Committee].

## Volunteers and Voluntourists

Building upon this discussion of tourism, research, and cosmopolitanism in the Osa, this section examines volunteering within multiple case studies. Frontier is one of those “early pioneers”<sup>67</sup> that helped constitute “organised overseas conservation volunteer programmes for fee-paying members of the public,” which began during the mid-eighties (Lorimer 2010: 312). Founded in 1989 under the name Society for Environmental Exploration, this internationally recognized institution affords young people the opportunity to travel, participate in a “gap year” experience, discover what practicing conservation means outside their home country, and gain scientific research experience. Lorimer explains that this type of global environmental citizenship should be “understood to entail the rational and anthropocentric observation of a collection of social and environmental duties,” resulting in a situation where “the global humanitarian or nomad scientist is presented as a positive, modern archetype of the cosmopolitan citizen who inhabits this new world, performing a universal attachment to globality and a reterritorialised sense of belonging that respects cultural difference” (2010: 312-313). What is suggested by this type of international scientific research and style of global environmental citizenship is a moral, ethical, and political trajectory reflected within the missions of programs such as Frontier.

From small-scale efforts like Green Life Volunteers to large-scale international organizations like the UK-based Frontier program, this section presents volunteering read through the lens of tourism. Costa Rican managed NGOs like ASCONA are also globalized as they receive the influence of overseas people, cash, and ideas. Particularly, OC’s turtle initiative in Piro exemplifies the tense entanglements of conservation and community interaction, conservation as business, research as participation in the tourism industry, and the expectations of various volunteers and researchers that go unmet.

Frontier’s Costa Rica program is focused within the Osa Peninsula and includes a turtle conservation initiative that shares some research space with OC’s Piro station. The

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<sup>67</sup> Others include the Earthwatch Institute and Coral Cay Conservation.

program extols the biodiversity of the Osa<sup>68</sup> and the forested environment is presented in an appealing way, clearly meant to allure the young volunteer to an exciting and unique environment within which to complete biological research. Of the twenty-four publications listed online (mostly as research reports), one is designated as peer reviewed and the numbering suggests there are over 160 in total,<sup>69</sup> exemplifying some of the program's results. Frontier's Piro program has many components including assistance with turtle perseverance and research, otters, monkeys, and other interests unique to the area. Data collection for monkeys, for example, consists of observing and counting the monkeys that pass one particular spot. When I asked researchers how they know they are not counting the same monkey twice, they simply reply that it is not such a relevant point, and that gathering an estimate is sufficient.

The young biologists wonder about the methods of social science as well. The group's manager and a lead researcher told me of a Frontier study that involved several volunteers biking to various farms throughout the Osa and conducting a survey on jaguar and puma dangers. The questionnaire-based method involved asking research participants to identify threats from big cats that endanger their livestock. The study found no significant threat. When I asked about the public interest in not telling the truth to researchers who are unknown to the participating farmers and never foster a relationship with them, I was simply told that the possibility of lying is "just the problem with social science." The concerns of Frontier, as expressed to me, maintained an eco-centric perspective on the Osa's socio-environmental habitat, and emphasized a biological viewpoint void of much of the socio-political concerns of conservation in the area. This is not to say Frontier does not have a social agenda in the Osa, as they have many volunteers in Puerto Jiménez helping in the private school in addition to many farm visits, but some volunteers still expressed disappointment and highlighted the need to "reach out to the community" and work more with people there – especially in Piro.

This discussion of the Frontier participants in the Osa should include a look at their impressions, observations, and everyday experiences. The volunteers are mostly eighteen to twenty-one years old, and women constitute the majority. The facilities are quite

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<sup>68</sup> See <https://www.frontier.ac.uk/projects/102/Costa-Rica-Big-Cats,-Primates-%26-Turtle-Conservation>.

<sup>69</sup> See: <https://www.frontier.ac.uk/Publications/DisplayPublications.aspx?project=102>.



minimal and Frontier volunteers at Piro sleep in hammocks. The group usually forms tight social bonds, organizes football games for themselves and others nearby, and treks weekly to a roadside bar at a neighboring *finca*. Playing, having fun, and pursuing sexual and/or platonic relationships are all influences upon the everyday experience of being part of the Frontier group and completing the “gap year” adventure in the rainforest that many of the participants had fantasized. The relatively expensive research and volunteer program brings those who want to “be close to nature” or “take a break.” They are looking for something “wild,” and usually with elated smiles claim to have found it, enthusiastically describing local residents as “so friendly and happy” and “so close to nature.”

In an organizational contrast to the international organization that is Frontier, Green Life Volunteers is a small-scale effort managed and founded by one young German woman, Erika, who has taken up residence in Puerto Jiménez. Erika had been accepted for a job as a lead investigator at Frontier in Piro, but when she arrived at the camp she was disappointed by the conditions. She mentioned that the camp was too basic and was not enthusiastic about sleeping in a hammock for a year. Erika was very critical of Frontier saying that “the majority of the money goes to rich people’s pockets [in the UK],” the job is essentially a “babysitter for teenage volunteers... keeping them occupied,” and that the organization has ignored surrounding communities, thus “realizing that they are not integrated.” Although she never actually began her work at Piro, Erika formed these opinions from a pre-work visit. What she imagined to be scientific research, seemed, in her view, to be managing “bored volunteers” who are young kids who have also come to party and have fun. Such examples reflect the commodification of science, a sellable experience that simplifies both the research process and the place where research is done.

During some of her first experiences in Costa Rica, Erika worked for a larger volunteer organization in a more populated region. However, she grew weary of the greenwashing and exaggerated promises of which she had taken part. Central to her role was marketing and online media work meant to lure volunteers from abroad, tasks she understood as fostering voluntourism rather than comprising a sincere activist effort. For Erika, greenwashing signaled bored volunteers, as she explained that the volunteer organization where she worked would invent activities to keep the volunteers busy rather than activities most needed by the surrounding socio-environmental context. Her

motivation to start Green Life Volunteers arose from this experience, as well as stemming from the desire to do a better job, participate in needed activism, and refrain from greenwashing.

Erika began Green Life Volunteers with the desire to “help out and make a difference...especially regarding conservation and development projects.”<sup>70</sup> She began a dog rescue shelter in Puerto Jiménez and most of her time had been devoted to that, as I observed, in addition to organizing volunteers for other projects in various partner locations. There is a consistent effort within Erika’s website to convince the reader or prospective volunteer that the projects are sincere, create impact that communities want, and stand distinct from the greenwashed superfluity of volunteer opportunities in Costa Rica. While it is difficult to verify these claims, the point here is to provide an example of an “expat” volunteer organization, how it fits in to the milieu of volunteer opportunities in the Osa, and stands distinct from both larger scale operations like Frontier and Costa Rican associations like ASCONA. Despite Erika’s rhetoric regarding voluntourism done the right way, the name “green life” suggests participation in a particular narrative that is meant to attract people and sustain a business. The intended audience for the volunteer organization is still the North American/European gap year student paying for certain enrichment experiences that include seeing another part of the world.

ASCONA, along with its ecotourism-oriented counterpart Osa Wild, accepts international (and regional) volunteers, while maintaining a steady and devoted presence within the politics of conservation in the Osa. This organization, a reincarnation of a famous Costa Rican environmentalist group now focused primarily on the Osa, is the Costa Rican owned and operated NGO that provides some national contrast with the other examples explored throughout this discussion. ASCONA assists in the development of rural tourism, cultural events, ecological awareness, conservation, and operating Puerto Jiménez’s library where foreign volunteers occasionally give English classes. The founder and manager, Natalia, is the daughter of one of the pioneering female conservation activists and member of the first iteration of ASCONA; she splits her time between ASCONA and Osa Wild. More often than not, the needs of making a living and thus pursuing a career in ecotourism through operating Osa Wild are privileged over the activism and community

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<sup>70</sup> See <http://www.glvolunteers.com/about/>.

service agenda of ASCONA. A structure that embodies both tourism and activism is common to the split personality of many environmental efforts in the Osa where individuals struggle to find viable ways of making a living and spreading ecological awareness simultaneously. This tension between the elusive “authenticity” of socio-environmental activism and the economic demands of livelihood is common to practitioners of both ecotourism and voluntourism, as they orchestrate and maintain a certain appeal and marketability for tourists and volunteers.

Natalia perceives ecotourism that privileges locally owned farms and other properties as the most beneficial way to stimulate both economic security and area conservation. She argues, as many do, that conservation must be a business if it is to survive. Rural ecotourism, for Natalia, is conservation’s best chance because it helps foster economic stability for nearby residents by demonstrating some sense of equilibrium between development and conservation. Some problematic implications, here, include the categorization of local residents as stewards of nature, as inherent to the conservation “problem,” and continued reliance on neoliberal forms of career orientation to achieve the aims of conservation. While on one hand, Natalia is aware of the potential of rural tourism as resistance to mainstream tourism with its more corporate top-down characteristics; there remains an effort to impose a change on local patterns of environmental stewardship rather than an incorporation of those behaviors into environmentalism. She is situated within the majority of Costa Rican environmental activists who are from San José or the Central Valley and moved to the Osa for precisely the purposes of biodiversity conservation, environmental activism, and the appeals of a lifestyle within the lowland coastal rainforest. Local without *being* local, such environmentalists are seen by many other residents as just as foreign as a Londoner or New Yorker. In their characterizations of the Osa and inhabitants, such activists employ labels like “simple,” “authentic,” and “innocent,” which reify the urban environmentalist fantasy of the Costa Rican yeoman farmer and the essential environmental steward – labels externally defined.

Regarding the ASCONA and Osa Wild volunteers, Natalia approves of “young people questioning” themselves and aspects of the world they encounter (both at home and abroad), and welcomes the help in both sustaining economic comfort and one manner of participation in the environmentalist movement. Her volunteers typically have elated

smiles, travel and pursue outdoor activities whenever possible, extol the landscape with statements like, “this is the most beautiful nature I’ve ever seen,” and enthusiastically pursue their tasks. Many of these volunteers are looking to gain a particular experience for themselves, and not necessarily to build a career path based upon that experience.

### *More from Piro*

Piro beach, where OC and Frontier share some property, is an intriguing mix of scientific research, fortress conservation, tourism, voluntourism, traditional hunting practices, farming, and biodiversity. Most of the turtle volunteers, interns, and employees at OC’s Piro research station are an eclectic mix of enthusiastic North Americans and Europeans. Many are gaining research experience, which they hope will inform their educational careers in college or graduate school. Many are drawn to Costa Rica’s fame as eco-friendly and the Osa’s fame as a biodiversity hotspot. It is common for volunteers (and many other environmentalists) to have animal themed tattoos, and several volunteers had turtle tattoos – imbuing their enthusiasm and commitment within their bodies. The tattoos also claim membership in a particular community of activists that support free aesthetic expression, affection for the animal they claim to save and adore, and desire to display this motivation and sensibility for public consumption. One American volunteer displayed a Hawaiian chant tattoo that translates: “if you take care of the ocean, it takes care of you.” These images become inseparable from the aesthetic of turtle volunteering, conversation pieces, and embodied evidence of standing for the cause of conservation.

Discussing the practice and aesthetics of the turtle volunteers serves to illustrate Costa Rican conservation as global, contentious, and a fluid practice of claims to knowledge and place. A typical day for the turtle volunteer consists of two main patrols: one lengthy one and one shorter one – the latter normally takes four hours, while the former can take all night. The length of tour usually depends on how many turtle tracks are seen, and thus how much work is to be done. The volunteers measure the size of the tracks and the distance the turtle traveled for their records, study the nests to see if they are real or false, mark the nests for egg collection in the morning, and draw two lines in the sand to indicate that information has been recorded for that nest and set of tracks. On a separate

walk, the eggs are collected from nests deemed at risk and taken to the hatchery, which is protected by a net to keep away the birds. Without the hatchery it is believed only about one per nest would survive, and that may be optimistic given the infamous one-per-1000 survival rate. The temperature of each nest is checked three times per day, indicating the sex of the turtles, and any risk factors. Once the eggs hatch the turtles, surviving at 80-90%, are placed into plastic tubs for three days before they can be released into the water. Volunteers try to guide the turtles down the beach towards the surf, careful not to step on any of them; they sometimes scratch the belly and shell to give the turtle a sense of motivation.<sup>71</sup> This is especially challenging at night under the low intensity red lights used to keep from molesting the turtles.

Volunteers here do not pay the high prices of Frontier volunteers but pay for the program and room and board, nevertheless. Interns pay less and research assistants do not pay. Only the staff is actually paid, and that consists mostly of Costa Ricans. Volunteers and others expressed skepticism and confusion with regards to the allocation of funds. They would often ponder the amount of money received by OC per month and where it is actually spent, noticing cabin restorations that aimed to receive guests paying higher prices per night contrasted with radios that did not seem to work properly. One volunteer was told that the radios simply do not work well from the beach, even though (as has happened) it is the likely place to see turtle egg poachers – an alarming situation for at least one 18-year-old German woman in particular.

This young German, Emily, was particularly critical of the program. She felt that the emphasis on efforts to create comfortable accommodations aimed at an international clientele misplaced resources that could be used for more essential items that pertain to security, efficiency, and research. After her radio failed on the beach, she saw a poacher approaching, and wrote “*te veo* [I see you]” in the sand, believing it served as a warning. As many poachers are armed and travel with dogs, she was concerned. The concern for functioning radios was also exacerbated by the fact that there is an abundant population of *terciopelos* in the area, and Piro inhabitants commonly see the venomous snakes while walking. A young woman from the United States who was disappointed at the lack of data

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<sup>71</sup> This is a tactic mimicking the vibration and scratching sensation that turtles feel during a hatch, and it is believed (as well as seemingly working in practice) to instinctively motivate the turtles.

collection and record keeping echoed such concerns. Recorded data was apparently not kept in an organized fashion so that new data could be comparatively useful. At one point, as this story was told to me, all their recorded data disappeared, had never been backed up, and – apart from a few volunteers – no one seemed particularly concerned about it.

During another instance when volunteers took issue with the management of resources, the turtles were meant to be released, but volunteers were told to wait for incoming groups from nearby luxury hotels who would visit the project. Volunteers were concerned that the heat and exposure would be too harmful for the turtles, so they argued for releasing them or protecting the turtles in some other way. The weather proved too intense, and the hatch was lost while staff and volunteers were waiting to release in view of the tourists. Emily remembers the emotional situation of seeing all the turtles dried out, overheated, and stuck in the mesh surrounding the hatchery. She also remembers the dead turtles put to the side under some leaves while some were salvaged for the release demonstration. As tourists in the area are seen as potential donors to OC, witnessing the release is used to portray the spectacle of conservation and the fruits of the environmentalist effort; this time, perhaps ironically, at the cost of the turtles themselves meant to be saved from predators.

In addition to inviting guests from nearby eco-resorts, OC orchestrates visits from research interns and staff aimed at educating hotel guests about the programs OC pursues and the Osa Wildlife Refuge, which includes the properties of OC and nearby eco-resorts. These presentations, complete with Power Point-styled slide shows, fit the mainstream environmentalist narrative of the Osa and are clearly designed for outreach, awareness dissemination, and obtaining donations from the particular audience of Osa resort guests. One such presentation gave a brief outline of OC's work, the continuing effort to build a biological corridor from PNC to Piedras Blancas National Park (near Golfito), the travel possibilities for cats and tapirs, the cat cameras used to observe movements, the food chain, and ecosystem. OC's cat researcher discussed the importance of predators (like the big cats) to the ecosystem and compared the Osa to Yellowstone National Park in the US, with reference to the reintroduction of wolves there and supposed success stories relevant to the audience.

During the presentation and conversation afterwards there were some insights on the dissemination of conservationist work and tensions regarding the policing of space. All the members of the small audience were from the United States. The style of the presentation was interactive, as the cat researcher displayed some of the images from the camera traps, and elicited audience participation while discussing the animals of the Osa. The difficulties of policing the refuge were simplified as a “constant fight” between the conservationist “hero” and the “bad” poacher. One audience member exclaimed that controls “do not seem strict enough,” in response to the discussion of poaching and threats to the area’s biodiversity. Issues of controlling the refuge were framed through environmentalist rhetoric and as problems faced by researchers, rangers, and other nature lovers. Discussion developed around what to do about poaching, the difficulty in actually being able to prove someone has been hunting, gather sufficient evidence, and press charges. The audience members generally thought more should be done to control hunting in the area, and – similar to views held by environmental activists, volunteers, and researchers. But, we see that their responses do not challenge fortress conservation as a strategy to make conservation operable within a particular socio-economic setting.

Tourists visiting Piro for one day and those sitting for a talk are not the only forms of tourism that interact with Piro, however, and some short-term volunteers are able to stay and contribute in a manner resembling voluntourism due to the easygoing nature of daily demands. Four Canadian women were visiting Piro and volunteering for two to three weeks, and while they were expected to help, it was clear that they were there for vacation and no one pressed for them to majorly contribute to Piro’s research efforts. Their motivations for coming were similar to that of mainstream tourists, “spending time in a beautiful place, seeing lots of animals, and having fun.” Some guests are using the time to figure out what to do next, are in between jobs or other experiences, and added to the transient character of the Osa – especially in regards to the presence of volunteers. One said that she had been to the area before and “could not wait to come back.” All of them echoed the sentiment, and popular stereotype of the “wild and exotic Osa,” that they had wanted to venture into a “remote” and “rustic” place, thought the resorts “were not rustic or authentic enough,” and wanted to see “exciting wildlife.”

I shadowed Jeremi, a local young man whose family had sold some of their land to OC, on a night patrol and turtle release. A kind, curious, and likable guy, Jeremi led us down the path from the research station to the beach, a route the volunteers and researchers know intimately. We spoke about the environment, the conservation movement, and working at Piro, which is near to where he grew up. It became clear that Jeremi cares a great deal about his time at Piro, spending time with young people from other countries, and being within the familiar surroundings of the rainforest.

Jeremi exclaimed that he “would die” living in a city and needs to be out in the country and the Osa forests. Even Puerto Jiménez with its 2,000 inhabitants is too urban for Jeremi at times. He always misses the rain forest when he is not there. He could not, in the attempt to elaborate at that moment, say what his favorite thing about being in the forest was, but that he views it as a complex and “connected system,” and “loves it all.” The beach where we walked is marked by sectors, and Jeremi knew them by heart without having to point the light and look. He is a local nature lover, and shares similar environmental sentiments with the voluntourists and researchers. One distinction is his memory of imperialistic conservationism and lack of sensitivity from both NGOs and the state directed at the traditions of nearby *campesinos*, something discussed often within his family.

Environmentalism, here, is embedded in networks of capital accumulation. When groups sell volunteering experiences and seek donations, they commodify conservationism and create a spectacle that often transforms into an experience that visitors can take away as symbolic capital. The overlap of conservation and business problematizes the sincerity of nature loving, as in the form of greenwashing, and also complicates the potential of environmentalism in general. Many conservation efforts would not sustain themselves without capital; and, *campesinos* are normally convinced that cash from incoming voluntourists and ecotourists make conservation a viable way of life.

### **Spirituality, Beauty Seekers, and Nature Lovers**

There is a subtler form of environmentalism embodied by groups of people who find a spiritual fulfillment during time spent outdoors, and especially within the biodiverse



intensity of a rainforest. There are many routes to this nexus of spirituality and environmentalism, but I will focus on one example here to better illustrate what some foreign-born immigrants and visitors are experiencing in the Osa. The spirituality-seeking experience is also a form of the commodification of nature, as it creates the occasion for tourists to not only purchase the meditation and Qigong training, but also the particular environment where the program is completed.

John P. Milton, environmentalist and spiritual guide, founded the Way of Nature and the Sacred Passage program, which centers on “assisting in the recognition of Source Awareness as the liberating, foundational nature of ourselves,” “opening and deepening the experience of communion with all of life and Gaia,” and “helping to reveal our unique core purpose for coming into this life and how to fulfill that purpose” (Way of Nature Spiritual Fellowship, 2014-2017).<sup>72</sup> John, in his late sixties, has been guiding people “into the wilderness” since the 1950s, and carries his passion for environmentalism, fostered during the early years of the United States-based social movement during the 1960s, into these new programs. With foundational teachings in “shamanic traditions, Taoist internal alchemy, T’ai chi, Qigong, non-dual Advaita Vedanta, Hindu and Buddhist Tantra, Dzogchen, and Vajrayana Buddhism” (Ibid), Milton’s instruction focuses on the body, movement, meditation, the idea of finding one-ness between the subject and environment, Gaia theory (Lovelock 2000), and a self-help oriented therapy, complete with before and after photos, meant to change the client’s perspective of the Earth and of themselves. Needless to say, the courses are not cheap, and they cater to a particular urban-based, affluent, and “stressed” (or weary of industrialized urban life) clientele.

The Sacred Passage is described in the website: “the foundational program for Way of Nature... This program offers you a unique opportunity to explore your intrinsic spiritual connection to all of Nature and, ultimately, to the Source of all Being” (Way of Nature Spiritual Fellowship, 2014-2017). Clients can choose between the Sacred Passage, Nature Quest – for those who “would prefer a shorter program than the standard ten to twelve day Sacred Passage” (Ibid), and more lengthy excursions that also include solo stays (twenty-eight or forty-four days) within the particular environment of choice. The Nature Quest in Costa Rica’s Osa Peninsula is hosted at the eco-resort called Luna Lodge near PNC, and it

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<sup>72</sup> See: <http://www.sacredpassage.com/index.php/about-us/intro/about-won>.

was there, upon two visits, that I spoke with John and his clients about the Nature Quest experience and what it means to take part in such an activity within the Osa rainforest.

Following Gaia theory, John's teachings view the Earth as a living totality that requires certain nourishment, balance, inter-subjective communication, and the dissolving of natural/social binaries. Lovelock (2000) defines Gaia as "a complex entity involving the Earth's biosphere, atmosphere, oceans, and soil" (10). Lovelock proposes Gaia theory as "an alternative to that pessimistic view which sees nature as a primitive force to be subdued and conquered...[and] an alternative to that equally depressing picture of our planet as a demented spaceship, forever traveling, driverless and purposeless, around an inner circle of the sun" (2000: 11). Lovelock argues for a more complete aesthetic understanding of the environment. Ecological stewardship is not just a rational order of material relations, but it is also constituted by emotion (Milton 2002), or the aesthetic sensibility that John and his group seek to develop. Given the lengthy list of meditative techniques and philosophies proposed to achieve this sense of personal balance with the environment and some profound catharsis for the practitioner, the agnostic mix promotes both environmentalism and tourism.

John's philosophy regarding the environment drifts between humanism and an ecological anti-humanism. He thinks of the environment as a life-supporting system that "we all depend on." Thinking of the environment as a system of which humans are one part allows John (or like-minded ecologists) to challenge humanism on the basis that the environment is not simply an external resource to be exploited, but an integral part of human life. Simultaneously, these teachings are meant to embolden the human subject, provide a profound sense of enjoyment while participating in the Sacred Passage, and act as catharsis for an essentialized sense of self.

The experience of being in the rainforest is commoditized, similar to ecotourism, but for spiritual guidance and a sense of personal fulfillment. It is not so much that the marketability and monetization of the experience detracts from its spiritual worth, but it may detract some elements of spontaneity and surprise that may have arisen external to a packaged spirituality experience.

After the initial contact with John and some of the group at Luna Lodge, I was invited back the following week to witness their debriefing and thoughts on the

transformative and educational experience Sacred Passage promises to be. The clients were mostly women, international (including those from the U.K., Brazil, and North America), and keenly interested in John's practices – especially personal healing and catharsis.

The example of John's Sacred Passage experience offered at Luna Lodge shows the variety of touristic experiences the Osa affords, in addition to the variety of visitors and motivations that bring them to the area. The fame of the Osa's biodiversity and the excitement of the Costa Rican rainforest are appealing to foreigners especially and commonly noted within conversations regarding motivations for traveling to the Osa, particular reasons for enjoying the area, and questions that probe the Osa's characterization.

### **Tensions and Friction**

The tip of the Osa Peninsula, where the Pacific Ocean meets Golfo Dulce, is a famous surfing area known as Matapalo and is home to a mostly self-described “expat” community that includes North Americans and Germans. Often maligned as a “*gringo-only*” area, many draw contrasts between Matapalo and more acceptably Costa Rican towns like Puerto Jiménez. One informant, a North American migrant who lives near La Palma, describes the residents as “*Matapolitans*,” in reference to both the popular magazine *Cosmopolitan* and the new ideal of an urban, post-national, and professional citizen of the world; and meant to suggest a sense of elitism imbued within Matapalo residents. Home to multi-million dollar properties, gardens, luxury eco-resorts (e.g., Lapa Rios, Bosque de Cabo, and El Remanso), yoga retreats, and second homes, Matapalo, including the nearby area, has succeeded in differentiating itself in some ways from the rest of the Osa.

This growing surfing community and tourism hub has led to clashes of interest that nearly all speak to the performance of Costa Rican nationalism. The practice of private property in the area has upset the Costa Rican status quo, which maintains that all rivers and coastlines are public land. The most famous case of this was the construction of the Four Seasons exclusive resort in Guanacaste, which privatized the beachfront to much protest and dismay by nearby residents. In Matapalo, private property signs are said to disrupt flows of labor, subsistence, and travel. Some complain about private reserves like that of the Lapa Rios ecolodge for incorporating rivers and beautiful waterfalls into their

own property, leading some locals to hike through the river (with or without their own tourist groups) in protest. Others argue that foreigners unfairly took land that had historically belonged to them but could not provide the paperwork necessary (likely due to time and money restrictions) to prove this. Perhaps the most explicit example of resistance to exclusive property rights is the construction of the gate at the entrance to the beach access road.

The Matapalo residents that live along the beach were worried about robberies (which have been common in the area) and sought a more exclusive and secure neighborhood, so they constructed a gate at the front entrance to the beach access road. One research participant explained that his family, after having seen the gate, approached with a tractor and tore it down. The residents reconstructed it, and it was torn down again. This pattern repeated itself a number of times before residents yielded to the fact that nearby farmers and other local residents would not tolerate blocked access to a beach that is, by Costa Rican law, public. Tearing down the Matapalo gate, in an assertive political act, reaffirmed nationalism embodied in public routines of land access, and reestablished the ethics of boundary building as more egalitarian.

Matapalo's reputation is mixed between hippie lifestyles, surfers, and million-dollar mansions – none of which are mutually exclusive. Many foreign expatriates hone in on the area based upon the belief that the remoteness of the rainforest enclave offers some repose from the fast-paced or “soul crushing life” they have identified as urban modernity. Their version of the Osa is the antithesis to that urban world from which they believe they are escaping to a tropical paradise. The so-called authenticity of pristine nature as an object consumed by vacationers is also critiqued by other foreign migrants who refer to people in Matapalo as “*matapalitan*s” and argue that a vacation home is not the best example of authentic experience of the area. Residents there and elsewhere on the peninsula still brag about psychedelic parties on the beach, and, in the same breath, fighting for environmental causes upon the famed Greenpeace ship *Rainbow Warrior*.

The foreign immigrants, commonly referred to by the whitewashed term “expat,” try to “out-hippie” one another: bragging about who is more prepared for robbery, who is more minimalist, who is more connected to nature, who loves the Osa the most, who hates industrialized life the most, who has done the most drugs, the most surfing, and successful

green campaigning. The expat competition orders their sociality in a self-referential fashion that distances their community from longtime residents, despite claims to the opposite. They have made a home within the region, where many of them have actively reaffirmed borders of modernity they sought to escape.

## Conclusion

The cosmopolitan locality, transforming within an ethical regime of sustainability and conservationism, includes economic incentives linked to global trends. Looking beyond globalization as a dividing force for “global” and “local,” Ben Campbell (2008: 10) discusses environmental cosmopolitans in light of three themes regarding “the value of cosmopolitan perspectives on translocal phenomena in environmental anthropology:”

(1) the extent to which the concept of the ‘environment’ has translated across cultural contexts to speak to local conditions, as well as local structures of power and meaning, (2) translocal agents of globalization... circulating in global spheres of consumption, (3) and attempts to accommodate cultural diversity within the politics of environmental protection.

For Campbell, looking beyond globalization emphasizes the mixture within the globalized setting rather than the agency (or lack thereof) of one “side” because it is impossible to see one side in a network of embedded relations. What I attempt here is to show that voluntourism is a new and growing service industry, informed by conservation practices and ethics, the fame disseminated by localities like the Osa, the variance of tourism, and the image of the ecotourism and biodiversity hotspot. Voluntourism and international scientific research both nuance the way environmentalism can be practiced, and its expression in the Osa suggests a market-interested Costa Rican conservation practice.

The variety of examples above demonstrates overlap between capitalism and conservation, and now, I narrow the discussion to only some examples of *campesino*-led ecotourism projects in the Osa. Launching from the growing cosmopolitan context in the Osa, the following chapter adds a more specific series of perspectives, and offers insight into quotidian experience of the emerging capitalism-conservation nexus.

## Chapter 8

### Ecotourism and Its Nuances

Most accounts of ecotourism within the Osa (Almeyda, Broadbent, and Durham 2010; Fletcher 2012, 2014; Horton 2007, 2009; Hunt and Durham 2012; Hunt et al. 2014) have either focused on the success or failure of various outfits, or on the degree to which Marx's perspective of commodity fetishism is a helpful analytic for understanding ecotourism. This chapter proposes the cases of La Tarde and Rancho Quemado (see Figure 9.1) in order to show the variance of ecotourism and the type of commodification occurring, to explain its role as an emerging form of environmentalism, and to explore its everyday practice. The new Caminos de Osa initiative encompasses over forty projects Peninsula-wide and exemplifies a trending marketing scheme to export certain Osa experiences. There are some recurring themes that illuminate the tension between biodiversity and landscape protection as a financial concern and such protections as examples of a new form of environmentalism. Namely, the new ecotourism practitioners' voiced concern over how to place value within their respective environments, collective action that marks a new social movement, concern over the marketability of "sustainable development," and a widespread exclamation regarding change in mentality that is argued to reflect the adoption of environmental values, all adhere to the practice of agrarian ecotourism. The way that Osa "leaders" in ecotourism have treated such concerns clarifies what Costa Rican eco-citizenship means within new forms of agrarian socio-political organization. An intimate look at how *campesinos* are participating in ecotourism details what environmentalism in practice means for some Osa operators, and contributes to existing literature that has overlooked places like La Tarde and Rancho Quemado.

Continuing from the previous chapter, I provide a geographic overview along with a map of the Osa (Figure 9.1). Taking the cases presented and considering comparisons to large-scale tourism and big projects near Carate and Matapalo, we gain a better

understanding of greenwashing, the range and scale of Osa tourism, and the geography that demonstrates widespread *de facto* segregation based upon wealth and nationality. The surfing community of Matapalo is almost exclusively populated by North American and European migrants and vacation homes located about forty minutes from Puerto Jiménez on the road to Carate. The farther along the road to Carate one travels, the larger the farms become and the more marketable the land along the Pacific Coast, compared with properties found north of Puerto Jiménez. This marks a distinction between wealthier Costa Rican families, larger properties, and various foreign-owned properties along the Pacific Coast that are known less for consistent agricultural production and dependency. While other researchers have focused on more famous and expensive ecolodges like Lapa Rios in Matapalo (Almeyda, Broadbent, and Durham 2010), the focus here is on small-scale projects, operated by longtime residents and those born in the Osa. This focus offers insight into the meaning of the commodification of nature for families living there, and how these new projects reflect a change in environmental practice.

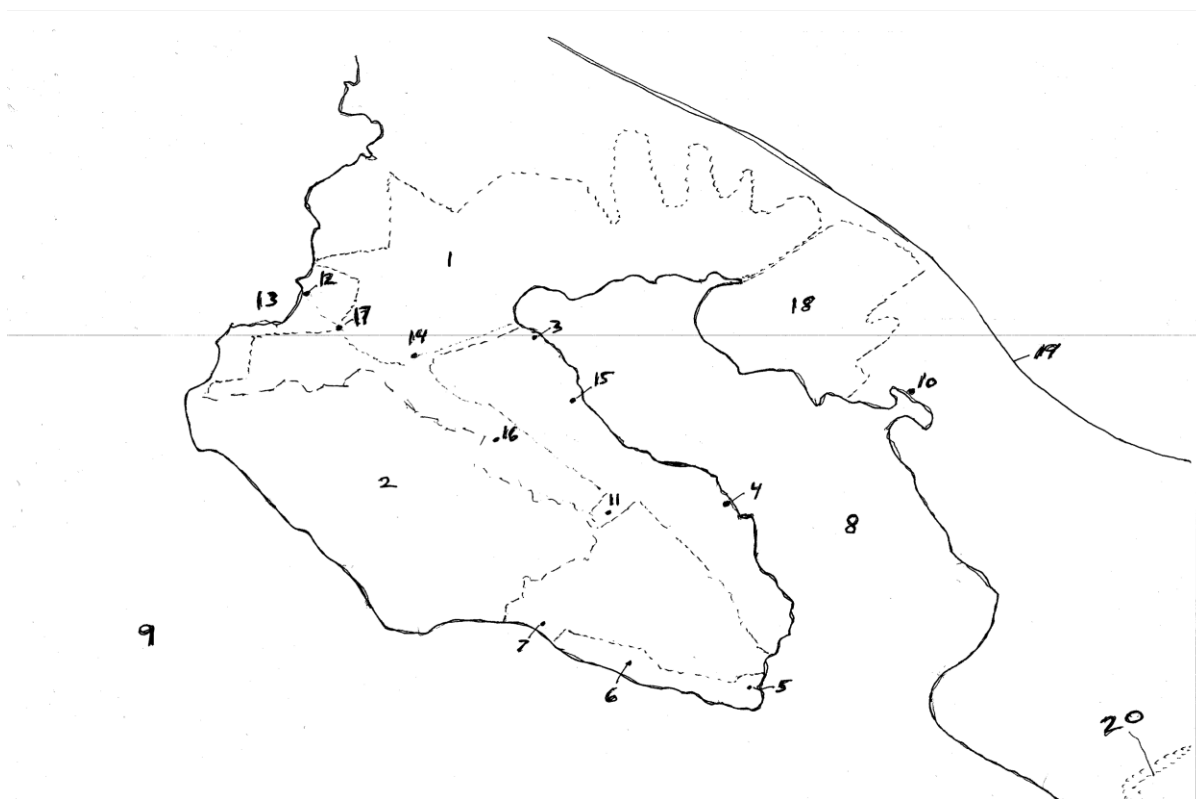


Figure 9.1. Key: 1: Golfo Dulce Forest Reserve. 2: Corcovado National Park. 3: Rincon. 4: Puerto Jiménez. 5: Matapalo. 6: Piro Beach. 7: Carate. 8: Golfo Dulce. 9: Pacific Ocean. 10: Golfito. 11: Dos Brazos. 12: Agujitas. 13: Drake Bay. 14: Rancho Quemado. 15: La Palma. 16: La Tarde. 17: El Progreso. 18: Piedras Blancas National Park. 19: Pan-American Highway. 20: Costa Rican border with Panama.

The first section of the chapter reviews some relevant literature on ecotourism and “sustainable” practices. The following section provides a recent example of rural tourism in the Osa as planned by the San José-based NGO, Reinventing Business for All. This introduces how the Osa is imagined as a tourist map and exported as an adventure-travel experience. The next section, La Tarde and Rancho Quemado, constitutes the main body of the chapter and is split thematically in order to show differing understandings throughout the shift in agrarian practice. I highlight the much discussed “change in mentality,” shift from hunting to guiding, perspectives on nature, relations with the state and NGOs, and the complex balance of economic imperatives and conservation. This last subsection deserves particular attention due to the longstanding debate between environmental ethics as a platform for introducing rural controls and the everyday experience of subsistence farmers supporting their families. Many in the Osa look to various forms of sustainability movements as potential solutions to both biodiversity conservation and economic security, while this means different things in practice, for example, a corporate investment into a resort will be quite different than a farm in Rancho Quemado accepting visitors.

### **Locating Ecotourism in the Osa Peninsula**

The Osa has been the subject of many studies, and there are some common themes to these, but also some very substantial differences in emphasis. I organize these studies in terms of their overriding themes, in order to set the scene for the results of research with new ecotourism outfits. Ecotourism exemplifies one direction of conservation and the overlap with capitalism. This chapter builds on recent literature on the Osa (Almeyda, Broadbent, and Durham 2010; Fletcher 2012, 2014; Hunt et al. 2014; Hunt et al. 2015), Costa Rica at large (Honey 2002, 2008; Almeyda et al. 2010; Almeyda et al. 2012; Hunt and Durham 2012; Miller 2012; Isla 2015), and problems concerning ecotourism in general (Budowski 1976; Goodman and Redclift 1991; Brockington, Duffy, and Igoe 2008; Brockington and Duffy 2011; Büscher and Davidov 2014). This chapter’s contribution adds an intimate and qualitative take on Costa Rican owned and operated ecotourism prospects. Almeyda, Broadbent, and Durham (2010) investigate the integrity of Lapa Rios



– the foreign-owned luxury ecotourism pioneer and popular honeymoon destination – as a successful ecolodge. While these authors are concerned with the integrity of the ecolodge meeting its objectives of community outreach, ecological stewardship, and advocating sustainable practice, my intervention is less about “good/bad” ecotourism and more about the attitudes of longtime local residents who are currently practicing, or preparing for, rural ecotourism.

Martha Honey’s (2002, 2008) definition of ecotourism is among the most widely accepted; based on the understanding that it can be done correctly or incorrectly, she contends that there are seven characteristics found within what “real” ecotourism should do: (1) ecotourism “involves travel to natural destinations,” (2) “minimizes impact,” (3) “builds environmental awareness,” (4) “provides direct financial benefits for conservation,” (5) “provides financial benefits and employment for local people,” (6) “respects local culture,” and (7) “supports human rights and democratic movements” (2008: 29-31). Honey generally remains critical of ecotourism, but optimistic for its potential and its future for achieving such objectives. Horton (2007, 2009) and Fletcher (2012, 2014), however, have pursued a critical analysis of the political economy of ecotourism in the Osa Peninsula, with a concerns for inequality and justice. The following cases build on questions of inequality, coherence of capitalism and conservation, and the experience of ecotourism being thrust by various initiatives that both attract grassroots involvement and facilitate its participation for the cases of the Osa (Fletcher 2012, 2014; Horton 2007, 2009; Hunt and Durham 2012) and Costa Rica at large (Carriere 1991; Isla 2015).

Some authors critique the capitalism-conservation nexus by essentializing the economic trend, missing some opportunity to highlight desire for economic alternatives on the ground. Ana Isla (2015), for example, frames her argument in a neo-Marxist and ecofeminist critique that discusses what she refers to as the “greening” of Costa Rica,” where the term “greening” refers to “the creation of a new form of capital accumulation.” Among her claims that environmental policy and practice in Costa Rica parallel neoliberal interests, she argues, “the Earth Summits, the economists of the World Bank, and biologists of large ENGOS, using debt-for-nature swaps, have created a service economy, centralized the accumulation process, and forced a shift in products, biomaterials, and cheap or unwaged labor towards international markets” (Ibid: 172). Although Isla engages with the

discussion over capitalism and the politics of conservation, she does not engage with some key interlocutors (Goodman and Redclift 1991; Brockington, Duffy, and Igoe 2008; Brockington and Duffy 2011; Büscher and Davidov 2014), which would have nuanced the argument. By asserting, “the rural population and their environment are exploited by those with power, those who also define whose knowledge can be seen as authoritative,” (Isla 2015: 173) she identifies important power dynamics but not the power within the communities themselves and the possibility for agency. While I share Isla’s concerns with power and inequality regarding environmental politics, the general and essentialist treatment of capitalism seems too broad, and a focus on greening as a varied phenomenon would reveal that, in practice, small-scale rural tourism appears differently from top-down greening.

In the Osa, Horton argues that while “proponents have presented ecotourism as a market-based activity that will provide income and empowerment to local communities while promoting environmental conservation” (2009: 93), ecotourism also reproduces hierarchies and power dynamics it was thought to mitigate. Because the Osa’s “relative isolation has limited the presence of transnational corporate capital” (Ibid), mainstream tourism has not acted upon this part of the Southern Zone the way it has in Guanacaste, Jacó, or Manuel Antonio National Park, for example (see Almeyda et al. 2010; Almeyda et al. 2012). If socio-economic trends in the Osa continue to respond to growing interest in tourism, then ecotourism, specifically, should have a competitive edge. Labeling ecotourism the “central economic activity” of Puerto Jiménez, Horton claims that this type of tourism has grown significantly in recent years throughout the area, and also that, rather than a “disruption,” it offers “new income-generating opportunities within the limitations of foreign ownership” (2009: 97-98). Similar elsewhere in Costa Rica, and continuing since neoliberal reforms beginning in the eighties (Edelman 1999) and increased interest in tourism since the nineties, “an important degree of economic control has shifted towards North Americans and Europeans” (Horton 2009: 98) within the Osa. This, in addition to “state regulatory power over land in the Golfo Dulce Forest Reserve [RFGD]” (Horton 2009: 99) perpetuates a power hierarchy that marginalizes many *campesinos*. Within this uneven landscape, some *campesinos*, as we will see, can and do create their own ecotourism initiatives. With a balance of skepticism and optimism, Horton writes that

“ecotourism has fulfilled neither these worst fears nor the most optimistic of hopes;” and, “Osa residents have drawn on local traditions of resistance and embedded social networks to reshape an external environmental discourse into a localized one that is a sometimes *tension-ridden mix of environmentalism, local livelihoods, and nationalism*” (2009: 104, emphasis added). This “tension-ridden mix” is one point of departure for current ethnographic case studies pertaining to ecotourism in the Osa.

Fletcher’s (2012, 2014) two essays on the Osa, *Using the Master’s Tools? Neoliberal Conservation and the Evasion of Inequality* and *Between the Cattle and the Deep Blue Sea: the Janus Face of the Ecotourism-Extraction Nexus in Costa Rica*, build on Horton’s analysis above and pursue a critical neo-Marxist look at the confluence of capitalism and conservation. Fletcher describes the Osa as a place where “the state supports market-based ecotourism, industrial extraction, and fortress conservation simultaneously” (2014: 82). Fletcher contends that integrated conservation and development projects (ICDPs), environmental NGOs, and various initiatives assimilated for similar ends have not only failed, but served to exacerbate many of the problems of inequality promised to be addressed (2012: 295). The Janus-faced characterization of the “ecotourism-extraction nexus” is “not merely the product of an idiosyncratic Costa Rican governance structure but is in fact directly inscribed in the very nature of a neoliberal approach to environmental management” (Fletcher 2012: 82). Fletcher continues, “this Janus-faced strategy is in fact *necessitated* by neoliberalism’s characteristic negation of state-centered mechanisms of resource redistribution and regulation” (2012: 83). The Osa region has seen extraction (like that of OPF, Ston Forestal, and United Fruit) and fortress conservation (like that of PNC and RFGD); and ecotourism that pulls from both traditions of conservation and capitalism is just gaining momentum, especially at the grassroots level. When rural tourism initiatives are incorporated into the private sector, how might they assume a more egalitarian structure? I attempt, here, to take Fletcher’s suggestion for further research regarding “[perception and practice] at the local level by both organizational implementers and project recipients” (2012: 313), and explain how the voices and actions of various *campesinos* complicate the apparent dichotomy of conservation and development. In fact, this is not necessarily a dichotomy but concerns

how economic opportunity and biodiversity conservation operate together – especially through small-scale ecotourism.

### **Camino de Osa**

The following case marks one example of how conservation initiatives shift from fortress conservation to a more inclusive style of community outreach, sometimes labeled sustainable development. This shift in emphasis is vocalized by funding bodies, the implementation and facilitation of initiatives, which include their practitioners on the ground and by the state through its conservation branch SINAC. Negotiating SINAC's involvement was uniquely challenging for some project leaders as many communities had lost faith in the government. This meant that attaching SINAC's name to the initiative had to accompany the rebuilding of communication and trust between *campesinos* and the state. This case zooms out and widens the perspective noted in previous sections because Camino de Osa refers to collective action and the Peninsula in its entirety, establishes important current context for Rancho Quemado (and other communities), highlights one direction of rural tourism that has been well-regarded and widely accepted, and provides further explanation as to what it means to be an example of rural/ecotourism in the Osa.

A Costa Rican business consultancy group called Reinventing Business for All (RBA) has particular interests in tourism and sustainable development. It should be noted that the group uses an English acronym because most of its clients have been North Americans. RBA had had success with the well-known Punta Islita project that established the group as a pioneer for sustainable development and tourism in Costa Rica, and the group has recently begun to construct a rural tourism network for the Osa Peninsula. Funding for RBA's implementation of the plan came mostly from CRUSA<sup>73</sup> (La Fundación Costa Rica Estados Unidos para la Cooperación) and INOGO<sup>74</sup> (Iniciativa Osa y Golfito). With these funds, RBA was able to implement the initiative called Camino de Osa (Osa

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<sup>73</sup> CRUSA is an independent and private non-profit funding body initiated in 1996, the same year that marked the withdrawal of USAID, which CRUSA treats as a model (see: [www.crusa.cr](http://www.crusa.cr)).

<sup>74</sup> Stanford University's Woods Institute for the Environment is responsible for the management of INOGO (see: <http://inogo.stanford.edu/project-overview?language=en>), aiming for sustainable development and environmental stewardship with a focus on community outreach.

Trail), and an effort that became one part of a four-step proposal under the overall title Caminos de Liderazgo [Paths of Leadership].

Caminos de Liderazgo's four-part project proposal is split in the following ways: (1) creating a training workshop for the small-scale ecotourism projects that includes personal development, (2) creating a "destination" in the Osa that will attract tourists similar to marketing experiences like Peru's Inca Trail, (3) refocusing on artwork, icon building, and marketing for each project, and (4) monitoring and evaluation. Parts three and four are currently in progress, and parts one and two were completed from the summer of 2014 through the summer of 2016. The major implementation of Caminos de Osa mostly pertains to parts one and two, where their competitive proposal beat the Rainforest Alliance for CRUSA funds. According to RBA's project manager, Rainforest Alliance only proposed the trainings; RBA developed the idea of creating an Osa trail experience where visitors could travel between varieties of linked rural sites.

One of the things *campesinos* interested in tourism have desired most is training, and RBA responded to this by offering one workshop every fifteen days for one year. The manager explained that RBA's goal was to spend one year as project leader, then create a local association called the Caminos de Osa Association, and help to facilitate but step back from a complete leadership position during the second year. After the second year, RBA would help facilitate the art projects (part three) and the certification process for project membership in Caminos de Osa. Throughout the two-year involvement with RBA, Caminos de Osa grew from the initial twenty-three projects to forty-three by 2016.

The official launch of Caminos de Osa, after more than two years of testing and preparation, is set for 2017, and the former project manager expressed her optimism and excitement. Costa Rican press, social media,<sup>75</sup> and international tourism operators all took notice, and national TV stations have since covered stories in Rancho Quemado, El Progreso, and elsewhere. Caminos de Osa won first prize in 2016 for adventure tourism

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<sup>75</sup> See: [http://www.consciouscompanymagazine.com/blogs/press/95316033-caminos-de-osa-3-lessons-from-costa-rica-for-improving-ecotourism?utm\\_content=bufferde780&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_source=facebook.com&utm\\_campaign=buffer](http://www.consciouscompanymagazine.com/blogs/press/95316033-caminos-de-osa-3-lessons-from-costa-rica-for-improving-ecotourism?utm_content=bufferde780&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook.com&utm_campaign=buffer); and more, <http://www.europapress.es/turismo/fitur/noticia-costa-rica-premio-mejor-producto-turismo-activo-internacional-20160118125939.html>, <http://www.crhoy.com/archivo/proyecto-en-osa-recibe-premio-por-turismo-de-aventura/economia/>, <http://www.revistasumma.com/costa-rica-recibe-premio-al-mejor-producto-de-turismo-activo-internacional-en-fitur-2016/>.

with their “gold trail” at the International Tourism Fair (FITUR) in Spain. The project also became one of 2016’s “top 100 sustainable tourism destinations.”<sup>76</sup> The idea for the visitors, as RBA’s project manager and others have explained it, is the creation of multiple routes for hiking and travel through the Osa Peninsula that connect the forty-three participating projects. The travelers are presented with “passports” and each project is meant to have a unique stamp to decorate the tourist Caminos de Osa passport. The stamps are part of the icon-building and artistic development currently underway, used as marketing tools and unique ways to represent each project. The proposed themed routes are split into the “gold trail,” “water trail,” “jungle trail,” and “*Osa Elemental*,” which traverses six communities (Puerto Jiménez, Dos Brazos, Playa Blanca, Rancho Quemado, El Progreso, and Agujitas/Drake Bay). Each route is meant to offer the visitor a different slice of the social landscape; an opportunity for the exploration of various terrain, flora, and fauna; an experience that mirrors the marketing narrative of rural community tourism. Additionally, each route is meant to provide socio-economic opportunities for the hosting families.

The Osa is being reimagined as a product to sell to tourists. Tropes of adventure, remoteness, the exotic, and the wild are appropriated as marketing tools, just as the biodiversity of the rainforest is infused with values for the new marketplace. What will the perspectives of *campesinos* and local entrepreneurs tell us regarding their participation in ecotourism, and what does that mean for redefining the environmental movement at large?

### **La Tarde and Rancho Quemado**

The two case studies examined, Rancho Quemado and La Tarde, inform another type of conservation in practice – a combination of the everyday engagement with the environment and the conservation-capitalism nexus. The project in La Tarde is operated by Santiago, and the multiple projects in Rancho Quemado portray collective efforts less established than Santiago’s. Detailed description and local sentiment surrounding these cases offer insight into the meaning of this process for *campesinos* and the embedded nature of transformation towards a service economy.

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<sup>76</sup> See their website: <http://www.caminosdeosa.com>.

We can view Santiago's experience as prototypical of a *campesino* with a big skillset who takes advantage of specific increases in tourism and successfully exports the Costa Rican (or Osa) nature experience within a natural resources-focused national polity. What follows is an exposé of his project in La Tarde and an analysis of its relevance to ecotourism in the Osa – how this case demonstrates a shift in both consciousness and practice regarding biodiversity and landscape.

La Tarde refers to the area of forest and farmland situated between La Palma and PNC, but is commonly used to describe the ecotourism projects that operate in the area. La Tarde, meaning “the afternoon,” has striking views to the west, capturing the sunset over PNC. Upon one visit, a La Palma resident drove his children to an overlook to appreciate the view and watch for wildlife. The road there is difficult to maneuver and not passable during heavy rains, and it is this place that Santiago calls home, an operation that many Osa residents and visitors refer to as the most successful *campesino*-led ecotourism outfit in the Peninsula.

As of 2014, Santiago's La Tarde ecotourism project was six years old. Before beginning the project, Santiago had tried many things on the property, including farming, hunting, cattle ranching, selling rice and beans, and maintaining an outpost for gold mining. He arrived in the area with his family at age nine, and apart from a brief time working in San José, he has been in La Tarde ever since. After gold prospects started to diminish and the ocelots, pumas, and jaguars decimated his domesticated animal population, he decided to look for other opportunities that would be based upon conservation of the resources he had been exploiting.

While the first two years of what he calls a family-led project (“*es un proyecto familiar*”) were devoted to guided tours and camping, Santiago has been constantly expanding and looking for ways to improve the La Tarde experience for guests. Even ideas like rebuilding the cafeteria closer to where the monkeys like to be are under consideration. The popularity of La Tarde has grown and has created both opportunities and obstacles for Santiago. “Nobody believed it when we had the first group here,” Santiago explained, making reference to the area's unprecedented nature for the *campesino*-led project. He noted the difference between a well-traveled destination like Drake Bay, with its own tiny airstrip and the forested ranchland of La Tarde with its “*camino tan feo* [really tough/ugly

entry road].” Santiago adds, “nobody thought it was possible to bring tourists here,” and he proved the skeptics wrong.

One guest was so taken with the property that he left Santiago a \$1,000 check after paying the bill. Donations such as this have been reinvested into the project, and in this case, helped construct a bunk bed cabin and toilet facility for school groups that fits about twenty students. Since, he has finished two more exclusive rooms that would demand a higher price from ecotourists. Although financial growth and word-of-mouth popularity have provided La Tarde with opportunities, obstacles remain in the form of some social isolation. Santiago explains that many of his neighbors are jealous, and that there are ego politics at play, which mark him as less of a “true” *campesino* now that he runs an ecotourism operation. He “doesn’t really have good relations” with many of them; he is often maligned as “crazy.” Other neighbors, however, admire what Santiago has been able to achieve and see him as creating a model to follow, exemplary of the type of agrarian change in Costa Rica, where experiencing nature becomes the primary export, in place of formerly profitable agro-exports or subsistence-based activities. In regard to socio-economic impact, Santiago made clear that he would like to help “people within the nearby community more than anyone else.” Some ways of doing this have been to buy eggs and pork from nearby farms, and to run horseback tours through other *fincas* or allow neighbors on his. The jealous attitude, although palpable, does not really stop friendship, in Santiago’s terms.

The label pertaining to the type of tourism (sustainable/responsible/eco/rural) placed upon the La Tarde project does not have much relevance for Santiago, although it is critical for marketing. When questioned about rural/sustainable tourism and ecotourism, he responded by stating they were “complicated questions;” the suggestion being that the label has a more external concern for marketing, and the practice itself – rather than what to call it – is more Santiago’s concern. Santiago’s definition of the project resembles that of rural tourism: “rural tourism is a case like ours, as a family, as a community...” Looking ahead, Santiago thinks tourism will greatly increase in the Osa, and he hopes to take full advantage of it. Due to his success, most tour operators in the area think of Santiago’s project as ecotourism, distinguishing rural tourism as a smaller-scale intervention into the tourism market.



Unlike La Tarde, the example of a locally succeeding ecotourism project, Rancho Quemado is a village of about 200-300 residents that has committed to collective action that aims at creating a rural tourism cooperative drawing on the tourism magnets of nearby Drake Bay and PNC. Rancho Quemado's collective effort and early-stage tourism profile distinguishes this case from La Tarde's singular family-led tourism project, in addition to the fact that Santiago's project has been underway for many more years than any project from Rancho Quemado. Residents are hoping to capitalize on the traffic to Drake Bay, as any driver must pass through Rancho first, and to build a tourism experience that blends aspects of the "authentic" cultural agrarian experience and various tours through the forest, including the town hiking trail known as Sendero Osa. The University of Costa Rica (UCR) has worked for over ten years in the area and developed an initiative called PiOsa<sup>77</sup> to assist collective action and create opportunity towards rural tourism. PiOsa's work represents an effective launching pad for the Caminos de Osa initiative, which would have been more difficult had UCR not spent so much time in the area providing advice and research.

Several people in Rancho Quemado were identified by various other research participants as especially important to speak with regarding new collective socio-economic momentum in the village. Over a series of days and return visits, a handful of impressions from semi-structured and recorded interviews to casual conversations were gathered, in addition to participant observation within family properties, operations, town hall meetings, and hikes. Among others, I met with Rodrigo, the education committee head, a rural tourism operator, and member of Caminos de Osa; his wife Claudia, the development association treasurer; Matt, the Peace Corps (PC) volunteer staying with them; Victoria, the woman who, according to Matt, "runs Rancho, and has for a long time" and acts as the secretary of the development association; Jackson, the former development head, preacher, and project operator on the Caminos de Osa map; Don Matias, recognized as the village's founder and development association accountant [*fiscal*]; and Alejandro, the current (2014) president of the development association. PC, active in the village for decades, proved a valuable point of contact as I met Matt's host family, counterpart Victoria, and others he

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<sup>77</sup> Programa Institucional de Osa-Golfo Dulce. During my fieldwork period this group was mainly focused on developing rural tourism in Rancho Quemado.

suggested. These interviews illuminate what it means to begin a rural tourism project, how residents view this socio-economic shift, how conservation is practiced at the grassroots level, the marked difference between rural tourism and ecotourism, and insight into the everyday life of Rancho Quemado.

Don Matias, Rancho Quemado's founder during the late 1960s, explained how, after his family was cheated out of some property inland, he had to search for a new place to make a living. Through word-of-mouth and some chance, he ventured into the Osa Peninsula and found within the "pure mountains," what he considers to be "a most beautiful place [*que tierra mas lindo*]." The land had already been visited and named, however, and the name – as it literally suggests – is said to stem from the story of an accidentally burned ranch house (Zykë 1987: 118). Don Matias described the land of Rancho Quemado as "nothing" and "pure mountains [and jungle]." As a *campesino*, he was "fixing" the unruly rainforest and settling in the 2,000 *hectarias* he and his family would call home. Despite the obvious and – for that time in Costa Rica – normal claim to the land, Don Matias still feels he must clarify, "I'm the founder here, I'm the first, and I don't have a land title." Before, as others explain, Rancho Quemado consisted of only one family – Don Matias's – but it has grown significantly within the timeframe of twenty years. Many of the early migrants who were not settling the land to farm were gold miners.

Don Matías holds the common and stereotypical view that gold miners of the area "turned their gold over for alcohol [*el oro por alcohol!*]." Forcing this point, he likens gold mining and the lifestyle he attributes to that activity with the "ruins of humanity," while discussing the former "kill-or-be-killed mentality." His negative impression of gold miners persisted; Don Matias referred to Zykë's (1987) book on Osa gold mining as "extremely vulgar," which is certainly fair.<sup>78</sup> Don Matias spoke at length about the history of the area from the sixties through the nineties, recalling aggressive policing and private extraction interests like OPF. Today, the forested environment and making a living within it, represent, for Don Matias, "ancient knowledge that modernity takes away." Descriptions of Rancho Quemado have moved from the adventurous kill-or-be-killed atmospheric trope to one of hidden rewards in conflict with what is imagined to be "modern." Other research

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<sup>78</sup> Zykë's (1987) adventure travel book is an autobiographical account of gold mining in the Osa, consisting of misogynist, homophobic, sexist, and racist rants, among other problems of representation. Don Matias made sure that I wasn't French (like Zykë) before offering these views of the French prospector's book.

participants build on this characterization of Rancho Quemado as resisting socio-economic trends, while simultaneously (and perhaps contrastingly) capitalizing on the growing interest in rural community tourism.

Being an embedded PC volunteer, Matt gathered general impressions of the socio-economic makeup of Rancho Quemado. He discussed negotiating time based on people's schedules, and how that allowed a window into routines of daily life. Matt noticed that people were generally the busiest during the mornings and until the mid-late afternoon, starting at 6:00 a.m. to take advantage of the sunlight and weather. He was "shocked" by the tough work in the palm fields for about two dollars per hour. Matt explained that the majority of men (75%) would find work on African oil palm or beechwood plantations, or, perhaps additionally, Drake Bay construction and part-time hospitality jobs. Most people aged twenty-five years and older may have completed an education up to the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Matt noticed that there is not "a lot of disposable income, but no one's starving." He continued, "first things that people usually get are a cell phone and a satellite TV," addressing the priority within the way disposable income is spent. Amongst his comments on education, Matt included that "everyone is smarter than me," explaining that he lacked the practical knowledge of farming and making a living in Rancho Quemado, leaving him impressed with those he described as "happy and content" and "organized," while also frustrated and ignorant of many details regarding subsistence farming within the area. Women, about 95% by Matt's count, work at home, take care of family, and then address their projects, while some participate in the active women's group. The town's development association receives money from PNUD (the United Nations Development Program), appropriates it for various projects and town committees, such as health, women's affairs, sports, education, youth, security, and some type of political organization for each church – the Protestant and Catholic. Victoria, as president of the women's group, explains that the organization works to find women options for employment, albeit sometimes part-time or temporary, such as painting, housework, garbage collection, artisanal work, and cleaning. The last major project that the development association oversaw was the construction of lights for the plaza and football field. According to Matt, "that was a long time in the making," and it was assisted by funds from FC, ICE (Instituto Costarricense de Electricidad), and the municipality. With the first large plaza in the Osa to

receive lights, Rancho attracts teams from all over the Peninsula, marks a sense of pride for the town, and is “what Rancho is *really* about,” according to some fans.

There are numerous ecotourism outfits in the Osa that could be discussed here, but I focus on the two above because La Tarde exemplifies a campesino-turned-entrepreneur and Rancho Quemado demonstrates a village’s communal action towards sustainable tourism. Towards the goal of building an understanding of new environmental practices within the changing tourism market, the following subsections, organized thematically, provide accounts of different perceptions of the shift in experience of agrarian space.

### *Change in Mentality*

There is a ubiquitous claim in the Osa that sometime during the early 2000s there was a great change in mentality, in reference to the collective consciousness of the Peninsula. Santiago discussed the shift from poaching to conservation over the last decade, for example, as a “complete change in mentality.” Some of this transformation occurred while he was working at an ecolodge in Drake Bay for two years. Any venomous snake would have been killed during those preceding years – a point Santiago likes to make while gesturing the whacking motion of a machete – but now Santiago gently moves them, and in some cases, takes care of them. For example, he has moved some eyelash pit vipers that appeared near the dining hall into a container for guests to see. Because La Tarde is an exceptionally rich area for reptiles and amphibians, Santiago recalls at least four documentary segments filmed on the property exhibiting the vipers and frogs, among other animals of intrigue. Snakes and gold seem to be most alluring to TV crews, as attested by the Costa Rican TV special on La Tarde, “Fiebre de Oro [gold fever]” and another one on the “most venomous snakes of Costa Rica.” Attraction and coverage events like these were not thinkable or at least not part of the everyday experience of living in La Tarde before.

Working at the hotel in Drake Bay was difficult because Santiago was so accustomed to being outdoors and working his own land. He calls the process of becoming familiar and creating relationships with tourists in Drake Bay “*buenísimo* [great]” for understanding how they view the animals of the Osa: “that was incredible, and started everything... Everything changed for me, in two years working at that hotel.” Santiago

continues, “after work ended there, I thought about finding another hotel, but I then realized that I wanted to start a project of my own rather than work for someone else.” In order to initiate the work, he applied for FONAFIFO (*Fondo de Financiamiento Forestal de Costa Rica* [Forest Financial Fund of Costa Rica]) to receive payment for conserving land. He also received financial and professional assistance from an environmentalist NGO, Fundación Neotrópica, and the Danta Corcovado Lodge, a nearby ecotourism outfit.

Santiago reiterated a number of times the influence of change – both in land use practices and consciousness. Santiago’s 95-hectare property abuts the national park, and during one conversation he explained where the best trails were to sneak in, how he would learn ranger schedules and enter at night undetected in order to hunt for food while mining for gold. Santiago jokingly explained that during his first experiences in tourism in Drake Bay, he imagined eating the animals that tourists would gawk over. Hunting and mining are now among the activities he has given up, and they have come to symbolize the “complete change in mentality” that he has articulated. Santiago explained that when he witnessed people in awe over the birds, frogs, snakes, monkeys, sloths, and other animals, he arrived at the idea that the biodiversity he had become so familiar with could be marketed and reappropriated as another type of exploit. This began as offering tours and camping ground, and, guiding groups through the rainforest for the first two years of operation.

One of the best examples of this transformation is the shift from hunting to guiding, exemplified below. New environmental subjectivities (Agrawal 2005) are maintained through more than the influence of the state, including the domain of tourism and the allure of economic opportunity amidst depletion in the productive sector. Environmentality must expand, then, to incorporate exploitation and reappropriation in addition to governance, if the service-based economy is to perpetuate eco-centered identities similar to the adoption of state controls through Agrawal’s argument.

### *Change from Hunting to Guiding*

Hiking is a central activity for experiencing the rainforest as a tourist and exemplifies one of the new activities for Santiago in La Tarde. A typical La Tarde hike

today includes the following: walking from the main area with panoramic views through the rainforest towards the river; viewing and participating in a gold panning demonstration; visiting waterfalls; swimming in the river; swinging from vines; partaking in a demonstration of the “Velcro” plant that sticks to one’s clothes, and of the “tattoo” plant that leaves an exact replica of its design also on one’s clothes; viewing some Native American pottery and utensils of unknown origin extracted from the mud; learning about leaf-cutter ants, sloths, frogs, and snakes; viewing mating boa constrictors underneath a neighbor’s floorboards; hiking through (and even inside) large Banyan trees; tasting certain plants (such as the “caramel plant”), or roots with healthy characteristics; and observing other flora and fauna with explanations throughout the day. Not only were these activities, in their exported form for tourist consumption, new to La Tarde, but the attitude and mentality in regard to the environment changed for Santiago as well. He is intent on doing “anything that we can each year to bring more tourists,” and he envisions eventually having 10 private *cabinas* with bathrooms in order to meet demand.

Santiago and Rob, the biologist, guide, and Irish immigrant, have maintained a friendship and working relationship over many years, exemplifying the relations that spring from Santiago’s lifestyle transformation. Rob spent one Christmas at La Tarde with his family visiting from Northern Ireland. Santiago calls Rob “incredible,” and explains that he was the first guide to visit La Tarde, and that “Rob has helped us more than anyone else.” It is guides and friends like Rob that keep projects like La Tarde lucrative. Rob mentions, in reference to the empowerment of local communities, that “if the only thing you did was promote rural tourism, then that’s the best thing you could do.” Rob has found it essential to support socio-economic growth at a local level and has grown weary of NGOs and more formal routes toward such a mission. To that end, he has devoted his resources to helping Santiago more than anyone else and conducts the majority of his tours (that are not in PNC) at La Tarde.

Guiding has become important peninsula-wide, and many former hunters make the best guides due to their practical knowledge of the terrain. In Rancho Quemado, like La Tarde, the primary source of protein has been obtained through hunting despite recent legislation against it. Conservation is the basis upon which the occasion of tourism can be exploited in the manner that a village like Rancho seeks to develop that socio-economic

change. “Everyone knows it’s important to conserve,” Victoria states. She explains why it is so difficult to get formal permissions and practice conservation the way MINAE wants it to be done; the point being that lack of legal ownership and bureaucratic operations involved prohibit people from following protocol. Even so, “conservation is the future... it’s what we have here,” she maintains. Conservation practice is at odds with hunting, leaving Matt with the impression that “animals don’t come anymore,” only the older generation still hunts, “you can hear the dogs barking every now and then,” and the younger generation is less interested. Victoria’s husband, however, a young father, tells a different story – one of a practicing hunter who was willing to stop, as long as he did not have to forfeit the ability to spend time in the forest.

Victoria, offering some of her personal experience, explains that she loves to walk in the forest and begins to discuss the program in which her husband Teo takes part. What apparently began as an idea offered by the RFGD head (Carlos) to transform hunters into trackers and guides has been accepted by some, including Teo. She begins with some context on hunting: “people don’t need to hunt anymore but do it because they like it, it’s tradition, it’s the experience, being in the mountains with their dogs.” Many who interpret poacher activity miss the aesthetic aspects of it, the experience of being in the forests tracking animals and the value that that experience can have for someone regardless of being able to afford meat from elsewhere.

Victoria told me that because Teo knew that she was a conservationist from a more urban part of Costa Rica, worked in tourism, and carried an affinity for animals, he purposely did not tell her that he was a hunter because he knew it conflicted with her interests. Teo felt more comfortable hiding it from an outsider like his wife. Eventually this changed, and he now shares some of Victoria’s conservationist ethics. “He’s happy taking people into the mountains, teaching about the smells, tracks... it’s an experience,” she explains, and Teo has seemingly kept many of his aesthetic values of experience in the rainforest and transferred them to guiding rather than hunting. Victoria asserts that this type of tour would be very different than one in PNC because “the trackers know the smells of animals that the guides don’t,” demonstrating to visitors the “knowledge and experience” that the trackers have. To the extent that guiding and similar tourism forms share a base in conservation, trackers-turned-guides are reflections of the capitalism-conservation

coherence. Today, Victoria argues, “forested land is more valuable than farmland,” quite contrary to previous decades when “vacant lands” were “improved” by agricultural practice. In large part, this value comes from guiding and the experience of touring the forest.

I hiked with Teo one night along with a group of UCR students who were assisting the PiOsa initiative. We mainly bushwhacked as there was no clear path, but Teo knew exactly where he was going. Especially at night, and without the assistance of a view, it was critical to know the terrain, where the hills and rivers are situated. Certain unique trees and rocks were helpful markers. Teo often stopped to smell for an animal, to examine feces, to look for broken plants or any evidence of movement. He looked for tracks in the mud and tried to ascertain what direction the animal would have walked. Teo, affable and excited to show us the hills and rivers behind Rancho, was smiling and eager to lead us through the bush.

Others in Rancho, like the town’s preacher, Jackson, discuss hunting and the idea that recent change means, “projects are done *with* nature;” alluding to the tension in the belief that campesino lifestyle is antagonistic with nature. Jackson agrees that for this type of work, noting the rural surroundings of the area, conservation is important. Like Santiago, and others, he argues that “animals are worth more alive than dead,” and that this is “something we have learned.” This, again, reflects a recent and rapid transformation of consciousness, and he envisions this to be “a very good direction,” and one fostered alongside the pedagogy of conservationism. This change marks a critique of hunting, or poaching, as environmental policies have come to label it. When Jackson asserts, “hunting is culture,” he illuminates the fact that hunting is a socially embedded activity, and policy would not change that activity without also creating cultural impacts. Indeed, one of my conservationist interlocutors was walking in Rancho Quemado years earlier, shot by someone, and showed me his scars while explaining the incident and obvious difficulty communicating what the state and NGOs mean by conservation. Understanding previous incidents like this makes the rhetorical and practical shifts in everyday life more remarkable. He adds that MINAE did not help them at all before, but beginning around two years ago, there has been better communication. Simultaneously, projects began and people stopped hunting as much. Jackson often emphasized how much he enjoyed just



walking into the forest, how beautiful Rancho is, and how this exercise helped him to “clear his head.” But what is this *place* that inspires so much controversy?

### *Natures*

What some environmentalists treat as a contrast, the economic interests of *campesinos* against concerns with biodiversity, I will submit as more of a complication. While it is easy to peg conservation with financial interest in tourism, especially considering Santiago’s candid statement, “we conserve for the tourists,” such a simplification – reducing everything to materialist epistemology – is not corroborated by the practice of conservationism. Because conservation can be profitable for *campesinos*, whether through payments for environmental services or ecotourism, this does not mean that *campesinos* do not share a sense of environmentalist ethos similar to urbanites from San José who arrive in the Osa with a sense of awe; nor would those financial benefits disprove any spiritual or aesthetic appreciation for the environment known as home. Both concerns coexist: the need for survival within the economic system of less viable agro-exports and not pouring concrete over the rainforest, radically changing the place towards which people like Santiago and Rancho residents purposefully migrated.

Some evidence of this coexistence exists in the rhetoric used to discuss lifestyle differences between the country and the city. The element of lifestyle preference and the meaning therein is important here for Santiago. He discusses the differences between the Osa and the urbanized Central Valley: “we were happy arriving here... because we lived in a city where you’d never see animals or listen to nature – monkeys and birds – all of it.” He explains that there were “large groups of parrots in the mornings and afternoons, and [that] we’ve never seen [them] before.” Santiago affirms that he much prefers living in the Osa to his brief time in San José and to the more centrally located region he remembers as a small child. He feels “a hundred times better” in La Tarde and describes “meeting people from all over the world and seeing their excitement” as a major contribution to that enjoyment. Santiago explains that he loves to listen to the sounds of the birds at dawn: “*Me encanta escuchar a la amanecer aqui.*” He adds, “I wouldn’t change it to live in town – don’t like that.” Santiago confidently remarks that La Tarde, like many rural spaces, is

“*mas tranquilo* [more peaceful],” than the city – specifically San José and the Central Valley. Before ecotourism, life – especially raising a family – was more difficult for Santiago. Assuring me that “life before was a little difficult but happy as well,” he attributes some of that difficulty to the challenges facing farmers in the Osa and elsewhere during the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, lack of economic opportunity once gold access became complicated by PNC, and lack of employment when United Fruit pulled out of Golfito. Agriculture and gold mining were major opportunities for Osa migrants throughout the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, and the extraction and exploitation of natural resources were normal. Santiago states as much and does so without mentioning whether those activities are a detraction from the country lifestyle described: “we didn’t always have the idea to practice conservation. Before, any *campesino* would hunt, gold mine, and cultivate the land...”

Other villages and their inhabitants share similarities to Santiago’s experience in La Tarde. While in Rancho Quemado, I stayed with Matt’s host family, composed of Rodrigo, Claudia, and their daughters. Set to the nighttime soundscape of insects and frogs, Rodrigo and I spoke on his porch. He begins by explaining some of the impacts of the associations that have been helping various projects in Rancho Quemado and the surrounding area: FN, FC, INOGO, PNUD, COPITURIC,<sup>79</sup> and Caminos de Osa. Despite the attention that the area has received, Rodrigo claims that the Osa is “one of the most abandoned *cantones* in Costa Rica.” By referring to the Osa Cantón, he is referring to the northern part of the geographic peninsula where Rancho Quemado is situated, which is politically distinguished from the southern portion where Puerto Jiménez is located. Rodrigo explains that it is difficult for *campesinos*, in the more rural and remote areas especially, to organize, seek public funds, and submit the proper documentation. He contrasts the lack of development perceived in Cantón Osa with neighboring Cantón Golfito, arguing that his district has been overlooked and “left behind” unlike the busier towns of La Palma and Puerto Jiménez where Rodrigo imagines more socio-economic opportunity. Within the Caminos de Osa initiative, Rodrigo sees “the opportunity for sustainable development” to “improve communities.” When thinking of the questions, “what do we want?” and “how will the community grow [*crecer*]?” Rodrigo answers: “a tourism that is responsible – sustainable tourism. That is what is wanted: economic development but without losing our family

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<sup>79</sup> Recognized as the Osa’s first rural/ecotourism cooperative and an example of sustainable development.

values – our Costa Rican values.” Clearly equating family values, national Costa Rican values, and sustainable economic development, Rodrigo is building an action plan that mirrors a sense of belonging.

As our conversation led to discussing the character of Rancho Quemado and how we might interpret the desires of the community, Rodrigo offered some insight. He takes a moralistic approach, distinguishes a value system linked to geography and socio-economic practice, and then characterizes Rancho in relation to other Costa Rican localities. His view on what Costa Rican family values are includes the limitation of drugs and delinquency. Rancho Quemado, as Rodrigo notes, is a “very calm and healthy community.” He continues and attempts to speak on behalf of his neighbors, outlining some desires amidst socio-economic shift towards tourism; a portrait of what is shared with an incoming visitor; imagined threats to that portrait; and hints towards a vision of successful ecotourism for the area:

We wouldn't want to lose the ability for families to share with the visitors. We want to offer a service where the visitors feel part of the family – share and learn our culture, how we live, what we eat, *como estimos* [how/what we value/appreciate], what sport we like best, what we do – let's say – for music, guitar... if there are typical dances, history of the community... So, these kinds of things, we want to maintain and improve. We don't want to lose them. Because the result when it's full... of a lot of – let's say – people that aren't from the community, and they change the mix, and we lose all of that.

As much has been implied, but Rodrigo continues to articulate his distrust of tourism in general: “massive tourism brings a lot of *economico* [economic opportunities] but also a lot of destruction to the environment.” He claims that local ecotourism should have “the best equilibrium possible with nature.” Statements such as these always come from the contextual knowledge of other places – mostly outside of the Peninsula – that are flooded with tourists, shops, and large resorts. Rodrigo's environment, “the nature that we enjoy,” is precisely what he believes the community shares with outside visitors.

Rodrigo offers his perception of the surrounding environment, and further explains what may constitute “equilibrium with nature.” He says, “nature... is what gives us life,” and continues, “the nature we have here is unique.” Here, he is inserting qualities of life-giving and uniqueness within the surroundings, and then relocates the nature question from a philosophical domain interrogating its essence to a more political one concerned with the policies that mark environmental use. For Rodrigo, nature is not a setting, but a *process*.

On the difficulty of practicing conservation that many in the community have faced, Rodrigo offers the commonly expressed sentiment: “If you’re hungry then you can’t take care of the forest or be a conservationist if your family is malnourished [*con hambre nadie puede cuidar el bosque o hacer conservacion si su familia esta perdiendo su alimentacion*].” It is easier to give up poaching when there are other means to buy meat for oneself and family. In order to sustain the natural resources and biodiversity of the immediate area, Rodrigo insists that there must be better economic alternatives. Tourism may fit this description, but he wants a different kind of tourism, not massive tourism, explaining that it is not right for this area, or Rancho’s values.

#### *Relations to the State, NGOs, and Other Interests*

In addition to individual relationships with guides, many *campesinos* with ecotourism projects work with institutions and the state. Santiago expressed a balanced view of NGOs. He noted that FN took too long – one and a half years – to pay for one tour, and this soured his relationship with the group after the initial help he had received. FC was less relevant for him, but he noted that they work well with the ecotourism cooperative, COPITURIC. Santiago does not trust NGOs very much in general because he thinks they seem to care most about their own image, not really improving lives locally. On the other hand, Santiago believes the idea of conservation NGOs, generally speaking, is good and that there is potential to help. Ultimately, the common consensus of the area is that NGOs could (and should) improve their relationships with local residents. While some of the Osa’s ecotourism projects have found working with foreign and domestic organizations helpful, Santiago has proven to work independently and to benefit from strong personal relationships with guides like Rob.

Most small-scale ecotourism projects in the Osa have had a tense relationship with MINAE’s regulations, and La Tarde is no exception. This is mostly due to the existence of RFGD, which engulfs much of the farmland and forest of the inner peninsula, including La Tarde, Rancho Quemado, and Dos Brazos, and denies land titles to the residents. The residents are *de facto* owners but cannot legally perform many land alterations under RFGD oversight. “There’s a fight over titles in the Osa. They [the government and environmental

branches of MINAE/SINAC] don't want to give them because they call the land patrimony of the state," Santiago explains. MINAE is a bigger problem for the other *campesinos* with less resources. Life is more difficult for *campesinos* today because there is less gold, big cats eat livestock, and more regulations on land, which, as many in the Osa explain, forces people to work in tourism. The common exclamation that Santiago echoes, "we need land titles to be ok... it's very important," is central to the local tension with the state, argument and controversy over land use, and to the attitude of antipathy for external control.

MINAE is seen as the "imposing force," a sentiment echoed by nearly every research participant (including rangers and state employees). Rodrigo comments that RFGD created a "great divide between institutions and communities," referring to the state's management body occupying lived-in territory and not immediately recognizing prior legal ownership. As Rodrigo explains, FONAFIFO was the only institution that seemed to incentivize people by providing payment for conservation services practiced on one's land. Rodrigo also states that there is a problem of corruption, and even when funds are allocated, they often do not arrive at the intended destination. Clearly, this is a loss for many individuals and families. Almost all resident landowners in Rancho Quemado and the surrounding area mentioned the strained relationship with the state (especially with regards to land titles), but many normally also mentioned recent improvements in communication, trust, and cooperation. Establishing a binary between state regulations and fair distribution of resources within the community Rodrigo mentions, "You have to see an equilibrium/balance [*equilibrio*]." He sees himself and the community as "mediators of development," securing both environmental and socio-economic sustainability.

When discussing the argument over land titles, Rodrigo advises that "the government should deregulate and fortify/support areas of cultivation." Although relationships with NGOs are changing, Rodrigo expresses some reasons for previous distrust of such incoming institutions. He explains that many have had the experience with various groups that enter the area and collect funds to do something, only to then disappear, leaving the population skeptical of any institutional interaction. While the contrary side to this complaint is that NGOs that stay for a long time are seen by many residents to exist in a state of inertia, protecting their own interests. Rodrigo's comment suggests communal distrust of previous groups that did not stay long enough to create and maintain

relationships, communicate their work to the public, and exhibit what a resident like Rodrigo would perceive to be a genuine effort in assisting the public's wellbeing.

Claudia, Rodrigo's wife and treasurer for the development association, spoke about Rancho Quemado, her personal history, and current socio-economic shifts towards tourism and conservation, with her daughters playing in the background. Claudia talked about growing up in Rancho Quemado, navigating her way through the rainforest, and the great distances she and her siblings would have to travel: "*Me gusta caminar...aprendí a caminar* [I like to walk... I learned how to walk]." She said that she likes birds and lists various types including parrots and macaws. There was a clear sense of agreement with the lifestyle that a place like Rancho affords, throughout the conversation. Claudia explained that some agrarian change she witnessed occurred after people heard about the government's role in land use and some wanted to take advantage of various benefits like the FONAFIFO payments. She also mentioned that others felt forced away as a result of the change in policy, as though payments for environmental services would be yet another iteration of government inserting itself into farmers' lives, which is, in fact, what many others say. Once rumor and reputation spread, regarding benefits promised by the state not delivered as intended or previously believed, many stopped believing in benefits altogether and felt ignored by the government. This vein of thought led to the infamous example of trash management in Rancho Quemado. Even though citizens of Rancho are meant to pay tax that theoretically pays for trash pick up, the truck is full after reaching Drake Bay and never stops in Rancho on its return trip; leaving residents with the options of refusing to pay for service they do not receive (with the possibility of legal repercussions) or unfairly paying and not benefiting. Either way, the town has no viable alternative but to burn its trash.

The next change Claudia discussed following the FONAFIFO funds and tension with the state was the arrival of rural tourism. Claudia described the rural tourism initiatives as creating "something to grow the family and help the community," by creating a reason for people to visit or stop for a while *en route* to Drake Bay. UCR, and especially the members of PiOsa, helped create an ecotourism path through Rancho Quemado called Sendero Osa. Claudia described about five years of work with PiOsa, building projects and training, presenting the initiatives to other institutions that may wish to be involved, and

said that twelve projects were able to participate at that time. PiOsa has given workshops in the *salon comunal* meant to help interested parties with their ecotouristic work, in addition to other consultations. PNUD also helped the twelve projects create Sendero Osa and promote “the community,” meaning share with visitors a marketed version of everyday life in Rancho and hope to financially benefit from growing ecotourism. UCR, along with help from PNUD and the development association, also assisted to create a brochure including the identifications of various trees mapped along a hike for visitors. The biggest challenges are promoting the Sendero Osa and securing permission for each project to operate.

Institutional assistance is significant here, and the manner of assistance can often seem like imposition, but PiOsa’s work was well regarded by community members. MINAE and the management of RFGD have been met with resistance in the past, but views have begun to evolve. In a sense, the new regime of sustainable tourism is environmentalism – making subjects vis-à-vis environmental stewardship defined by the state. This type of environmentalism is complicated by the fact that opening farms for visitors and operating tours have become accepted aspirations for many residents, reflecting community-based initiatives that are more egalitarian and distinct from mainstream trends.

### *Economic Imperatives and Conservation*

Now, I turn to the tensions between conservation and economic imperatives, as many research participants have mentioned the importance of negotiating between government controls, the wave of sustainability practice, the tourism industry, and ethics for conserving the land. As we have seen, residents in the Osa do not perceive conservation and economic concerns as mutually exclusive, nor do they view sustainability rhetoric as necessarily foreign in practice.

Along with a new type of practice for the conservation ethic, there is a consistent concern with the future. The concept of the future, imagining what is best for the children and grandchildren, is embedded within the conservation discourse. In discussion of the unwieldy label “sustainability,” Santiago offers one characteristic for the definition: “using the same resources that we have here.” Sustainability always carries a concern with the

future; what is noteworthy here is the parallel with socio-economic sustainability and not just an exclusive concern for biodiversity or landscape. Santiago exclaims, “Conservation is one hundred percent important for us – if we conserve then the tourists will see more.” Conservation is treated as an obvious parallel to ecotourism, assuring that “there are many animals for tourists to see and be content with.”

It is important not to reduce this change to mere materialist terminology, as Santiago has felt a strong sense of pride, value, and enjoyment while beginning the ecotourism project, and this new treatment of the surrounding biodiversity means more to Santiago than only financial support. He has maintained relationships with guides like Rob, volunteers, researchers, and other workers enthusiastic about the project and about the beauty of the area. The change in mentality Santiago describes points to this, as well. He could have emphasized a change in *opportunity*, but instead emphasizes the mentality aspect, which recalls a viscerally felt perception of the environment. He claims to have experienced the land and biodiversity differently after the exposure to so many visitors and witnessing their expressions of awe.

When Santiago states, “the idea of conservation is eight years old,” it marks a shift in thought, but also makes a more specific political and economic claim. Especially using the term “conservation,” makes this claim also one of acceptance of and participation within a social movement. Residents of the Osa have almost always known conservation as politicized. This is not to state that there is inherent bias or self-interest within every conservation initiative, but there are always (perhaps within every social movement) dynamics of power at play that contain and transform the conditions of possibility for said conservation movement. Santiago’s statement means that he has been participating, alongside others who may identify themselves as conservationists, in the protection of biodiversity, maintenance of relationships with local guides and visitors (mostly from North America and Europe), and profiting financially by providing services where production is no longer viable.

Likewise, residents of Rancho Quemado envision financial opportunity in their collective efforts. Almost thirty projects (during 2014) were included within Caminos de Liderazgo (inclusive of Caminos de Osa), and there is a sense of comradery, in Rodrigo’s words: “We’re supporting ourselves.” Rodrigo states, “they’ve permitted changes –really



good changes – for the community and we keep working on those... without losing the vision that I explained that we want.” Like many in the Osa, he explains that things have changed completely in the last ten years or so, mentioning the prior lack of electricity, lack of a viable road for ambulances, lack of cell tower, and other markings of historically rural space. As he explained the new works towards rural tourism, Rodrigo imagines, “what motivates someone is ‘we want to see the fruits that we’re working on today,’” and reiterates that the village, collectively, reflects a feeling of tenacity in relation towards the goals of operational tourism.

Many of Rodrigo’s points throughout our conversation seem to spring from the feeling that Rancho Quemado lacks something, and that void is being filled by rural tourism in this case. The rural tourism initiatives are politically strengthened by the assumption that there is a problem for which these initiatives are the cure. Said differently, Rodrigo sees people in the Osa as in need of “solutions.”

In five to ten years Claudia envisions people from all over the world coming to Rancho and she imagines that the projects will be even better supported. After a Costa Rican TV station completed a segment on rural village life in Rancho Quemado, there was a palpable sense of pride and excitement. Claudia explains, “the experience for us was really nice because that was the first time a TV program had arrived to record anything. We were really proud; they looked at several projects and asked about what we’re doing.” She asserts, “we’re working now to prepare ourselves for the future.” She talks about the collective as a group of individual projects, each with something different to offer. This way they support one another by including many different interests. Claudia explains, “the objective of the future is to create everything like fruit and vegetables within the community itself - to go forward together... like a community.” Her reiteration of the term “community” reflects both the political advantage of collective efforts and the egalitarian relationships she holds as very important. Similarly, the collective gives the whole group more strength than any one individual would have, so the community members generally feel more secure and more political power in a group. Claudia’s advice for continuing these efforts, “*Vamos logrando* [let’s keep achieving],” carries those concerns of community, egalitarian relations, and maintaining pride in Rancho, meanwhile

instrumentally marketing the village and surroundings to attract growing interest in ecotourism.

Most of the people in Rancho Quemado expressed that the town stands out because of its rural tourism and the collective effort involved. Matt attributes this, in large part, to Victoria, and adds that the biggest weakness towards achieving rural tourism goals concerns lack in marketing. He wants to offer English classes only based upon tourism, as only one person in the village speaks English. Matt simply states, “people want income... and they see the best way to get that income is from tourism.” The perception that there is a “lack of any recognition that Rancho exists,” refers to the external “tourist map,” in which a locality must appear in order to be a desired place. Conservation must work parallel to this type of rural tourism if it is to be sustainable, and Matt expresses that “people seem in general pretty favorable to conservation and protecting the environment,” and that people understand the importance of minimizing their impact. Assuring that “none of the projects are that destructive” means that tourism in Rancho follows the description of ecotourism and maintains a conservationist ethos of sorts. Rural tourism is a “push away from the resorts” off the “little compound,” Matt mocks resort-based and mass market tourism, to a place where “you’re supporting Costa Ricans, meeting the locals, and interacting with them... a unique experience.” Generally put, Matt states, “Rancho Quemado has a vision, a general goal, with people working together to create rural tourism while respecting the environment – of course not everyone subscribes to it – but that’s the general vision.”

Jackson has a formed opinion of where Rancho places within the gaze of tourism and the broader socio-economic geography of Costa Rica. “*Rancho Quemado no esta en el mapa* [Rancho Quemado is not on the map],” he claims. He describes the importance of being “on the map,” being recognized, and being able to support and sustain the livelihoods that Rancho migrants have worked to create. “Many people do not know” of the existence of Rancho, and Jackson, in a position of some influence, makes claims for what the town should do. He argues for communication and cooperation, “we should talk [amongst ourselves],” and to remain both brave and forceful (“*efuerzo y valentia*”), adding that the qualities mutually complement one another and it is less politically potent to either courageously do little or do a lot of what is easiest. He challenges the residents to drop “egoism,” remembering that “*todos somos importantes* [everyone is important],” and to

push the collective rural community into a place where they hope to find financial stability and eager rural tourism.

Victoria, someone Jackson describes as a “leader” and very “enterprising,” has been in the Rancho Quemado area for nine years and arrived with experience in tourism that included working in Drake Bay. She met her husband, Teo, while working there and later moved in with him to start a family in Rancho. Victoria has been assisting the development association and spearheading many of the town initiatives since she arrived. One distinguishing quality of Rancho is that “it’s not common that a town’s development association is interested in tourism,” but here the hope is for tourism to be economically transformative. Sendero Osa, managed by the development association, is meant to be the “principal attraction.” With five years of experience working tourism through the development association’s agenda, she has arrived at the idea that “development is employment.” Only four men go to Drake for fixed-income work – plus the teacher and Teo – and that constitutes the entirety of fixed income in tourism for Rancho’s population. Others go to Drake but not on salary, she clarifies, it is mostly seasonal precarious work.

Rancho Quemado, as many describe it, is really a farming village so there is not much wage labor. Victoria explains the difficulty traveling from Rancho to Drake Bay for work in tourism and construction, considering the heavy rains and river crossings, despite the relatively close distance. People that work in Drake have to stay over, so it can be difficult for families when one spouse is out for days at a time, and Victoria has seen a number of households disintegrate in this way. Victoria emphasizes the important impact this type of precarious labor has on families, mentioning that children have been raised by others, while one or both parents is absent.

“Rural areas are always different than the [rest of the] country,” Victoria states. She explains that only once per month someone comes to see to medical needs and is only able to meet with twenty-five people. Otherwise, someone in need of care would have to go to La Palma or Drake, or travel to Puerto Jiménez if they are in need of medication. The Ciudad Cortez hospital is better than Golfito, she says, but someone would need a boat from either Drake or Sierpe, and this means potentially hours of farther travel. Despite the complications of travel for healthcare and secondary education, Victoria notes some benefits to living where many label tranquil. She describes the lack of robbery and other

crime, reiterating “how calm everything is here.” “*Rancho Quemado no es una comunidad problematica* [Rancho Quemado is not a problematic community],” she asserts, in contrast to neighboring Drake Bay/Agujitas and its outskirts Los Angeles, which she describes as more dangerous. Ultimately, Victoria is offering a portrait of Rancho that fits the quintessential rural stereotype of peaceful farmers working together to achieve a peaceful present and sustainable future.

The “rural” and “eco” variations on tourism are vehicles for achieving and maintaining the financial growth of the community as Victoria imagines it. Tourism is not so much about employment as it is about the families having ownership over their own work. Families get to “unite” over this kind of work. The development association’s work with twenty-three projects is meant to achieve this type of ownership over one’s labor. As Victoria points out, most tourists lack “relations or contact with families,” leaving the country without seeing much outside the resort, and are only in the Peninsula for a few days. This gap is where the opening of camping, *cabinas*, farm visits, gold mining tours, and viewing many other projects are meant to exploit what is hoped to be an emerging opportunity in rural tourism.

The biggest change that Victoria has seen has been “the attitude of the town.” People were very negative regarding tourism at first, but then it developed into a more optimistic tone. She includes the importance of teamwork as a strong contributor to this change. The lights on the plaza were a big achievement and they were done through teamwork, she mentions. The idea of the rural tourism collective and the unity of the twenty-three projects in Rancho is the most obvious indication of this collective collaboration.

Alejandro, the development association president, explains that the aim of the thirty-year-old association is “more than anything else about *community* development.” By stressing “benefits for the whole community,” he emphasizes the power of working together, the strength of collective effort in creating a rural tourism destination, and the importance of equality – regarding both responsibility and rewards. The funds that the development association is able to collect are appropriated towards the schools, *salon*, roads, aqueduct, and plaza with lights. Alejandro was clearly proud of the development association’s work, felt that it has been important, that they have already achieved major

goals, and that currently, “we’re working on beneficial projects for people – trying to create a business, but individually.” Just as the development association’s president acts as the *de facto* mayor within most small Costa Rican towns, Alejandro views the association and its efforts as the “local government” that looks after (and thus prioritizes and defines) the “community’s necessities.” Noting some remarkable achievements for the town, Alejandro maintains that it is easier to take donations as a group – discovering political expediency through greater numbers of individuals.

Alejandro, like founder Don Matias, experienced a serendipitous discovery of the Osa. He and his family, while living on the northern frontier with Nicaragua, had thought that his father died in the fighting between Nicaraguans and Costa Ricans around 1970, but his father appeared in the Osa – the other side of the country – and subsequently, Alejandro left to go find him. Indeed, Alejandro found his father and available land for cultivating, saying, “*era libre todo* [it was all free],” regarding the land as he had found it. Alejandro takes the halcyon image of the land and his past and contrasts it with today on the basis that “*el patron de nosotros es la tierra* [the land is our patron].” Reminiscing about the “plenty” Osa migrants had “back then,” Alejandro is clearly disappointed with many state-led changes in land use policy. In his view, this new order produced restrictions upon the freedoms he and his family had enjoyed, entering into a system where livelihood from land use became more precarious; in his words, “what there is now is poverty.” “Very few people” received FONAFIFO funds, as Alejandro understands it, and although he accepts \$64 per *hectaria* per year, he remains disappointed with the restrictions on land use and the socio-economic consequences witnessed.

Alejandro explains that there are not good relations between *campesinos* and the state as a result of this sentiment, the perception of MINAE as a police force, RFGD as an imperial presence that stole ownership from residents like him, and the disintegration of trust and communication. Along similar lines, he explains the “limitations” of conservation, referring to the disruption of subsistence farming, hunting for food, gold mining for income, and other activities the government has come to label ecologically destructive. With the shift towards the service economy, however, Alejandro knows that “if we destroy it [the environment/nature], then there will be nothing left for future generations.” He emphasizes, “we don’t want to leave it [the land/environment] a desert.”

He is thinking about the future of his children and the importance of the conservation of biodiversity as a tool for socio-economic sustainability. He labels the numerous projects of Rancho “micro-*empresas* [microbusinesses],” suggesting that because of the availability of tourists, these subsistence farmers have suddenly transformed into entrepreneurs. “*Cada familia* [each family]” should have their own business and see profits. This benefits everyone, he explains, and solves the “problems” (economic sustainability) of each family. Not everyone likes tourism, so this change will be slow, and take some training. Echoing others, he says the community feels like family. Contrasting, again, with Drake Bay, Alejandro explains “no one is friends,” there is a lack of “trust,” and “it’s very difficult.” He much prefers Rancho Quemado because it is calmer [*mas tranquilo*], thus reflecting some aesthetic connection to the surroundings even though most of his comments do not support “nature for nature’s sake;” but rather, the environment as a mechanism for subsistence. His summary, “look, in conservation, what we’re doing is working on the Sendero,” demonstrates that conservation and socio-economic interests are entangled and dialectically inform one another. For him, the trail – Rancho’s attraction – is conservation; the environment caters to the devices of the service economy.

While Alejandro thinks of conservation as a vehicle to bring benefits to the community, Jackson, the village’s pastor, emphasized a more aesthetic and nature-loving sentiment towards the environment. He arrived when he was young and has been in Rancho Quemado for twenty-seven years, adding that there were no roads and only horse trails for a long time. Jackson began his sugar production project in 2013, approximately the same time as most projects, and aimed to attract tourists with his horse-drawn millstone procedure. After the sugarcane is crushed by the grinding stone, the juice is gathered, boiled, and let to solidify into a block of sugar to be used in various ways including a popular hot sugar drink.

Jackson elaborated his opinions on the village, conservation, and recent changes. MINAE is seen as less of a “police force” now, and especially since the projects began. Jackson submits, “*El mayor conservador somos nosotros mismos* [we are the best conservationists, ourselves].” He agrees with most locals that there cannot be conservation without community, meaning that conservation is not only a socially embedded practice, but also that its enforcement may be impossible without acceptance and integration

negotiated within the community. Jackson calls climate change a “great global problem” and perceives new efforts in Rancho as assisting in not worsening the current situation. The *campesino*, he explains, did not appreciate the environment before but now “we have to appreciate” what we have. Jackson perceives global environmental problems as “ours,” that is, not some distant concern of urban-based scientists, but one he owns as a Rancho community member. He notices that 80% of the Osa is conserved and views this as a unique quality that should not change. He believes visitors will see something “original and natural” in the Osa and especially in Rancho Quemado. “The whole town is very pretty... I wouldn’t change a thing,” Jackson states while pondering the decision to live there and the distinction drawn between the more urban areas. Walking is a way for him to feel at peace, stretch his legs, and he just likes the way it feels in general. He relies on walking in the mountains sometimes, and it is clear that the aesthetic draw of the experience holds some spiritual value for the pastor. These reasons are not enough for all residents to be satisfied, however, and many people have left Rancho because there is not enough work; a transition that exemplifies that not everyone accepts agriculture as their lifestyle.

Collective consciousness is credited with embodying the impetus for recent socio-economic transformations. This consciousness materializes within the practice of conservationism in its various forms: making a living in the fashion of small-scale production, global trends in mass-market tourism, nature loving, and the increasing interest in ecotourism – the commodification of nature. Rather than just a blend of environmentality and the spreading empire of conservationism shot through with corporate interests, that mixture is nuanced by the reasoning of *campesinos* that negotiate and accept such changes. Their agency is better represented within movements like the environmentalism of the poor, liberation ecologies, and community-based conservation.

**Conclusion: “*El Patrón de Nosotros Es La Tierra* [The Land is Our Patron]”**

Surely, extractive corporate interests are different scenarios than *campesinos* opening their properties for tours, selling food, and offering demonstrations of their farming practices. It would be reductionist, then, to label all cases of budding ecotourism

interests as capitalist, extractionist, careerist, and entrepreneurship in the most modernist sense. There are scales to the exploitation of resources, and the practices of *campesinos* in Rancho Quemado and La Tarde are more needs based than previous large extraction interests in the area. In a sense, rural tourism reflects a type of community-based environmental practice, one where the quotidian concerns for livelihood are omnipresent.

Much of the literature on the conservation-capitalism nexus has argued that such initiatives reproduce many of the inequalities and hierarchies of power that they had hoped to mitigate, while normally focusing upon larger-scale pursuits. The cases offered above contribute to this literature by providing an ethnographic portrait of burgeoning grassroots interests within ecotourism, and by contrast, show tourism pursuits as relatively democratic, egalitarian, and bottom-up. That said, however, Santiago still felt jealousy from his neighbors. In Rancho Quemado, social divides along religious lines, between the Catholics and Protestants, greatly impacted social relations and were quite apparent during town hall meetings. I remember Protestant Rodrigo or Jackson fighting for speaking time and expression of opinion against the floor held by Catholic development association president, Alejandro. The town is even organized with Catholic houses nearer to the school, and Protestant residents towards the bridge on the other side of town, creating a particular sociality and group identification, in addition to segregated places of worship. Perhaps nowhere is free of tensions and politics; but the distinctive qualities within the cases above open another dynamic category of environmentalism in practice that demonstrates the overlap of the proverbial “economic alternatives” to gold mining, expanding agriculture, and hunting, along with environmentality, nature loving, and quotidian subsistence in a forested setting.



## **Conclusion**

### **Anthropological Method and Environmentalism As a Research Object**

This thesis has been a survey of environmental practice in Costa Rica's Osa Peninsula. As the conservation of biodiversity is pursued through various methods, it becomes clear that the practice is an ambiguous one – full of tensions and complexities. The ethnographic data provided contributes to many interdisciplinary discussions regarding the politics of land use and political ecology; and I outline here some connections between the findings, the argument, and the contribution to such discussions in general. Ethnography is especially well suited to highlight democratic and socially integrated conservation initiatives. As a method, ethnography interrogates practice and exposes difference and variety within perceptions, feelings, interests, and behavior that mark environmental movements. It seems that as conservation becomes more “social,” ethnography becomes more helpful for explaining how that process works – the departure from fortress conservation – and what it means for those involved.

The first two chapters narrate a political history of resource extraction and land use, while discussing the development of Costa Rican nationalism entangled with the emergence of the landed elite. Chapter One identifies the landed elite in the context of the nation's political economy as it developed from colonial contact to the present. Costa Rica's development as a globalized space informs some particularities within environmentalism, the meaning of the conservation-capitalism nexus, and implications for the overlap between tourism and conservation, given the context of the world system. Costa Rican exceptionalism uniquely infuses with the type of elitism seen in environmental practice, both within the privilege of scientific knowledge and within the methodological condescension prominent throughout many interrelations with communities in the Osa. Mirroring the global systems, accounts of nationalism, and political economy of Costa

Rica's development, Chapter Two discusses the growth of conservationism as it shifted from the passionate pursuit of creating fortresses for scientific research to an integrated economic concern for the country's future. Just as "sustainable development" rhetoric emphasizes the future, we see the politicization of temporality with consequences that result from such claims over space. The chapter proposes an understanding of conservationism going public, fracturing, becoming ambiguous, integrating in various ways, and becoming a central political-economic concern for the nation. The Osa Peninsula's political ecology within the established context of Costa Rican history, nationalism, global economic flows, and the conservation movement at large, illuminates environmentalism as inherently political. Similar to conflicts born between Osa settlers and resource extraction interests, tensions between the establishment of agrarian livelihoods and political claims to space within environmentalism are paramount for understanding environmentalism in practice.

Chapter Three examines the institutionalizing of the green agenda at work, state and NGO initiatives in the Osa, and some issues with the top-down model for conservation. With the president's visit to the Osa and claims over the importance of biodiversity, we clearly see environmentalism as a national and socio-economic concern, and as a field of tensions where certain subjectivities are negotiated. As environmentalism shifts from state-centralized to a decentralized mix that includes beleaguered NGOs, the chapter also documents cases of rangers and practitioners, like Maria, that demonstrate vulnerabilities within the greening republic and apparent criticisms of ecological governance.

Within Chapter Four, voices of *campesinos*, entrepreneurs, and other longtime residents illuminate dissent from the greening regime and the mainstreaming of land use – the normativity of socio-ecological trends – already outlined. The recollection of conflict with past extractive industries in the Osa marks current attitudes of resentment towards incoming interests. An understanding of what this dissent means for those who have been marginalized demonstrates the political tension within socio-environmental conflict and problematizes the sincerity of many environmentalist claims. It also implicates knowledge and regimes of value within this field of tensions, reflecting differing epistemological understandings of resources.

Chapter Five, then, examines the pedagogical approach to environmentalism in practice. The most impactful regional outreach initiative, environmental education, guides particular types of eco-citizenship based upon certain environmental value systems; and is also marked by differing approaches from Freirian to mainstream. Mirroring the growth of progressive education, environmental education strategies attempt an integrated, engaged, and empowering approach, but often fall short, reproducing the condescension and imposition of values that many of the educators had critiqued. Games and play demonstrate the importance of embodiment and engaged practice while affecting consciousness, informed by the environmental ethos.

The blurry line between grassroots activism and green imperialism, discussed in Chapter Six, disturbs the idea that there might be a “pure” practice or an easily categorical definition for grassroots environmentalism. There are tensions and contradictions within the practice of environmentalism that especially become evident through giving talks, advocating ecological awareness, and collective action. Following the previous chapter, a pedagogical bottom-up style of environmentalism is proposed by practitioners who believe they work within the new school of the movement; but we have seen that the new school, as well, is troubled by misrepresenting its intended audience as “backward,” and assuming *a priori* solutions to self-assessed problems rather than negotiating alongside community concerns.

More variance within the practice of environmentalism, outlined in Chapter Seven, portrays the Osa as cosmopolitan and offers a portrait of global influences that have changed the economic landscape with growth in tourism. The commodification of nature, and experiences like those of spirituality-seeking groups, reaffirm the multiplicity of nature in terms of what the allure of the Osa Peninsula’s rainforest affords. The overlap between capitalism and conservation is apparent within voluntourism, paid scientific research experiences, and the efforts of environmentalist initiatives to appeal to tourism and prospective donors. The multiplicity of nature, mirrored in the multiplicity of environmentalisms, reorders the meaning of knowing nature and the meaning of values underlying environmentalist strategy.

Finally, Chapter Eight details the cases of collective rural tourism growth in Rancho Quemado and early ecotourist entrepreneurship in La Tarde. Both cases offer insight into

*campesino*-led projects, which are underrepresented within the regional literature. Small-scale projects, and even bottom-up approaches, are not without problems of power dynamics and political hierarchies; but they do offer relatively subversive models of sustainability initiatives in the face of extractive capital, state controls, and larger-scale ecotourism pursuits. They offer counter-examples to greenwashing and less sincere environmentalist pursuits, and demonstrate quotidian forms of livelihood rather than modernist careerism or the pursuit of a foreign-born fantasy project within the rainforest.

With this logic in place, the findings substantiate the argument that environmentalism is fluid, hybrid, and is constituted by at least five themes. Firstly, nature loving is arguably fundamental to the environmentalist position, advocating on behalf of flora and fauna for the right to exist. Nature loving implies an aesthetic appreciation, and at times, a spiritual connection to the non-human environment. It does not always reify a distinction between social and natural, but often – as with Gaia theory – suggests oneness between human and non-human, an ecological harmony that reflects a sense of energy that connects all life. This is not an ethos that belongs to one geographic region of the world or one economic class, although it frequently parallels elitist sensibilities. Indeed, it can take the form of resistance to consumerism and extractionism. Represented here are the sincere efforts and good intentions to sustain ecosystems and non-human life, similar to community-based conservationism and management, bottom-up approaches, and what my interlocutors promised to be the new school of environmentalism.

While there has been a distinction between need-based resource use in the South and leisure-based resource protection in the North, this dichotomy is too reductive; these are not mutually exclusive forms of interaction with the environment. What I have called quotidian engagement with the environment is evident in what many *oreros*, *precaristas*, and *campesinos* are doing. Similarly, many Osa residents exhibit interaction with the surroundings that reflect an aesthetic embodiment of a particular ethos: the forester who leaves the “big trees,” the *orero* who brings the wounded toucan to town for safekeeping, the *oreros* who establish rest-stops with stunning views, Don Mateo’s excitement for tapirs and caregiving for his wounded parrot, David’s regret for participating in the development he feels compelled towards, Santiago’s insistence on a conservation-based livelihood, Rodrigo’s link between nature and Rancho’s community values, Teo’s love for venturing

through the forest with his dogs, and Doña Silva's commentary on proper forms of land use. These examples inform the way engagement with the surroundings is fluid and dynamic, enacted through practice. There is a normalcy created through everyday agrarian practice that maintains socio-economic concerns for making a living, and speaks to the concerns of liberation ecologies that clarify the need for protecting resources for socio-historic reasons and not because of the convincing rhetoric of the international scientific community.

The overlap between capitalism and conservation adds a sense of greenwashing to environmentalism, opens the movement up for critique based upon its own system of sustainability ethics, and often reproduces inequalities and hierarchies familiar in the Osa. The adoption of environmental movements as tools for capitalist expansion incorporates the environmental ethos into global flows of tourism. Even comments like Edgar's, within one of the most interactive and public of settings for engagement with environmentalism, advocate for Osa residents to treat the rainforest as a supermarket – to exploit, use it, and to extract value from it. The attitude presumes a pre-given value, and is commonly used as a tactic to convince others to join the cause of environmentalism for economic gain. This strategy reduces local interaction with land to materialist terms, but advocates believe that they are only responding to needs for economic alternatives for making a living and pursuits of sustainability.

There is often a sense of imperialism within the practice of environmentalism that reflects a condescending attitude attached to the dissemination of knowledge. This can lead to patronizing interactions and critiques from Osa residents embodied within complaints of “the angry-faced foreigner” who fails to thoughtfully relate the importance of recycling. Traces of imperialism within conservationism also reflect an imposition of values and environmentality – making particular subjectivities in relation to the mainstreaming of environmental controls. These subjectivities, however, become their own dynamic identities, and break from the mainstream, which means Costa Rican environmentalism is not simply an adoption of a foreign value system but it has become its own force for socio-political organization, within which people continue to renegotiate meaning and direction.

Nationalism is normally underrepresented within such typologies of environmentalism, but it is paramount within this ethnographic study in Costa Rica because

of the politically centralized role environmentalism plays informing the ethically charged sense of being Costa Rican – performing eco-citizenship. Paraphrasing President Solís, the president of the republic does not travel to the most biodiverse area of Costa Rica on World Environment day for nothing. He goes to reinforce Costa Rican values, which are expressed parallel environmentalist values, with economic underpinnings abound. So what does this say about Costa Rican “exceptionalism,” if it is another neoliberal state responding to global rhetorical trends? The fact that Boza’s and Ugalde’s passion and purpose for the conservation movement has not entirely disappeared, in addition to the fact that Costa Rican environmentalism has appeared in a particular way since the sixties means that there is a Costa Rican conservationist movement with unique structuring potential for its citizenry. Perhaps we can rethink global environmentalism in light of Costa Rican conservationism, rather than the other way around.

The shift towards more socially integrated approaches within conservationism means that anthropological methods appropriately illuminate the tensions, power dynamics, and political hierarchies present throughout the emerging interrelations between communities, NGOs, globalization, and governments. The processes through which these actors make political claims based upon shared understandings of space and regimes of value inform the particular fervor within the so-called Osa frontier. The sociality and politicization of the tensions explored within this thesis amplify the multiplicity of environmentalisms in practice.

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<sup>80</sup> Excerpts from transcripts of Alvaro Ugalde Oral History. Recorded by Evelyne T. Lennette, copyright Nectandra Institute, San Ramon, Costa Rica. 2007.

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## Appendices

### A

Included as Appendix A are two examples of the questionnaire created with OC; one from a teacher and one from a student. We listed just five questions with multiple-choice answers including some room for embellishment and other comments.

Questions were as follows: (1) why is environmental education important? (2) Which themes of environmental education do you remember imparting to your students? (3) Which themes of environmental education should be included in a curriculum for environmental education? (4) What do you consider to be the best teaching strategy for implementing a curriculum of environmental education? (5) What resources would be necessary to implement a curriculum of environmental education? For question 1 both students answered (a) “to conserve natural resources.” On question 2 one student answered (b) “the biodiversity of the Osa Peninsula” and the other answered (e) “mangroves.” One left question 3 blank, and the other wrote: “the sea and nature, trees, and turtles.” Both answered (b) “theory (classroom) and practice (outdoors)” for question 4. One answered (a) “training” and the other (b) “materials” for question 5. All the teachers used the blank spaces provided for embellishing upon their thoughts. Every teacher answered (a) “to conserve natural resources” for question 1, and three added (b) “to promote ecotourism.” Most answered (b) “biodiversity of the Osa Peninsula” for question 2, (a) “ecosystems of the Osa Peninsula” was also popular, but (c) “climate change” was the least popular by far. For question 3, the most common answers mentioned recycling and waste management. Every teacher responded with (b) “theory (classroom) and practice (outdoors)” for question 4, while four embellished, including one who clarified that environmental education should only be practical without a classroom component. For question 5, both answers, (a) “training” and (b) “materials”, were quite popular, and most teachers continued to list other helpful ideas.

## Encuesta de Educación Ambiental a Docentes

1. ¿Por qué es importante la educación ambiental? (seleccione 1 opción)

- a) Para conservar los recursos naturales  
b) Para promover el Ecoturismo  
c) Para beneficio de las comunidades

2. ¿Cuáles temas de educación ambiental recuerda se han impartido con sus estudiantes?

- a) Ecosistemas de la Península de Osa  
b) Biodiversidad de la Península de Osa  
c) Cambio climático  
 d) Manglares  
 e) Tortugas marinas  
f) Ecosistema marino  
g) Otros: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. ¿Cuáles temas de educación ambiental considera se deberían incluir dentro del currículo de educación ambiental?

Manejo adecuado de los desechos  
plásticos en los manglares

4. ¿Cuál considera es la mejor estrategia pedagógica para implementar un currículo de educación ambiental?

- a) Teórica en la aulas  
 b) Teórico (aulas) - práctica (campo)  
c) Otros: Talleres abiertos a la comuni-  
dad.

5. ¿Qué recursos necesitaría para implementar un currículo de educación ambiental?

- a) Capacitación  
 b) Materiales  
c) Otros: Equipo para dar propaganda.

Muchas gracias por su tiempo

## *Estudiantes*

### Encuesta de Educación Ambiental a Docentes

1. ¿Por qué es importante la educación ambiental? (seleccione 1 opción)

- a) Para conservar los recursos naturales
- b) Para promover el Ecoturismo
- c) Para beneficio de las comunidades

2. ¿Cuáles temas de educación ambiental recuerda se han impartido con sus estudiantes?

- a) Ecosistemas de la Península de Osa
- b) Biodiversidad de la Península de Osa
- c) Cambio climático
- d) Manglares
- e) Tortugas marinas
- f) Ecosistema marino
- g) Otros: \_\_\_\_\_

3. ¿Cuáles temas de educación ambiental considera se deberían incluir dentro del currículo de educación ambiental?

*mar y Natavelesa*  
*las tartugas*  
*mas arboles*

4. ¿Cuál considera es la mejor estrategia pedagógica para implementar un currículo de educación ambiental?

- No*  a) Teórica en la aulas
- b) Teórico (aulas) – práctica (campo)
- c) Otros: \_\_\_\_\_

5. ¿Qué recursos necesitaría para implementar un currículo de educación ambiental?

- a) Capacitación
- b) Materiales
- c) Otros: \_\_\_\_\_

Muchas gracias por su tiempo

## B

Included as Appendix B is the Osa Campaign Summary, given to me by one research participant and campaign practitioner.

### Results of the **Osa Campaign** (2003-2008)

*The Osa Campaign serves as a model to replicate in Costa Rica since it is the first experience where efforts by public, private, and entrepreneurial organizations come together for the conservation of biodiversity.*

#### **Letter from the Steering Committee**

The undersigned, duly authorized representatives of the partners in the recently completed Osa Campaign and current members of the Steering Committee of the Trust for Conserving the Osa Peninsula, have underwritten this report on:

- a. The results of the efforts by the Osa Campaign to obtain donations, cope with an emergency that threatened biodiversity in the Osa Conservation Area (ACOSA in Spanish), and provide funds for conservation and sustainable development based on the four priorities (components) specified in the Campaign incorporation documents.
- b. The use of these donations to support various important projects to facilitate conservation and sustainable development within the ACOSA, projects managed by some of the partners or organizations designated by the project manager to execute the work included in the project.

In relation to the donation amounts attained by the Osa Campaign, which have undergone a rigorous audit, the representatives of the partners, Conservation International (CI), the Costa Rica-United States of America Foundation (CRUSA), The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and the Ministry of the Environment, Energy, and Telecommunications (MINAET) through the National Conservation Area System (SINAC), are satisfied with the results contained in this report.

In relation to the use of the donations received from Campaign efforts, the description of each of the benefitted projects and how the funds are invested, are the sole responsibility of the partner managing the project. In addition, the Trust Steering Committee, whose members are CI, CRUSA, TNC and MINAET are responsible-- now and in the future --of the Trust's accounting and auditing.

#### **Manuel Ramírez Umaña**

President of the Steering Committee and Director of the South Central America Program,  
Conservation International

**Zdenka Piskulich Crespo**

Director of Costa Rica Program, The Nature Conservancy

**Francis McNeil**

Vice President, Costa Rica – United States Foundation

**Marco Vinicio Araya Barrantes**

Manager of Protected Areas, National Conservation Area System

**Introduction**

*“The diversity of the eco-systems found in the Osa Peninsula are unsurpassed by any other area of a comparable size on the Earth.”*

**Dr. Larry Gilbert**

Osa is recognized internationally as being a site with the ideal conditions to house great species diversity without an extremely small area. In this area, the flora and fauna are rich and abundant and species unique to Central America may be found.

The Osa Conservation Area (ACOSA) is the home to more than 375 bird species, of which 18 are endemic, i.e., they only live in this region. In addition, it houses 124 mammal species, 40 fresh water fish species, approximately 8,000 insect species, and 117 reptile and amphibian species.

Added to all this, this Area is home to almost 50% of all the animal species found in the Costa Rican territory.

Other outstanding characteristics of the area include being surrounded by invaluable water and marine resources, such as wetlands, gulfs, coral reefs, the feeding and breeding areas for several type of cetaceans, and nesting beaches for four of the seven sea turtle species in danger of extinction.

For example, the Terraba-Sierpe National Wetland is considered to be the largest mangrove on the Central American Pacific coast. It is a globally important site for protecting water birds and is a key breeding ground for a wide variety of fish and invertebrates.

The Dulce Gulf is also remarkable, with its deep seas close lying very to the coast so the inhabitants and visitors can see humpback whales and different dolphin species there. These characteristics make the Gulf a unique geological formation along the Pacific Coast of America, placing it on the list of the four tropical fjords that exist in the world.

***ACOSA Shelters 2.5% of the Biodiversity on Planet Earth***

Osa's enormous wealth has caught the attention of thousands of tourists and scientists.

Nevertheless, the site is threatened by activities such as fish and wildlife poaching, illegal logging, unsustainable agriculture, and unplanned development.

The need to preserve the natural resources and the multitude of factors that threaten ACOSA led Conservation International, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), the Costa Rica – United States Foundation (CRUSA), the government of Costa Rica through the Ministry of the Environment, Energy and Telecommunications (MINAET), and the National Conservation Area System (SINAC) to form a working alliance called the Osa Campaign. As the Steering Committee, the members were in charge of coordinating the four organizations in relation to a strategy to facilitate the fundraising processes to carry out ACOSA projects.

This Campaign was born in 2003, thanks to the encouragement and support of Álvaro Ugalde and other visionary leaders. The Campaign's main objective was to manage the monetary resources to provide technical and financial support to projects in each member organization to ensure that future generations would be able to enjoy the region's biodiversity. This way, the Osa Campaign became a unique effort in relation to conservation and sustainable development.

This was all achieved within the scope of the following components or primary objectives:

1. Protect the biodiversity of the parks, wildlife refuges, wetlands, and forest reserves in the Osa Conservation Area by improving how the private land in the parks was managed and paid for.
2. Establish a biological corridor between the Corcovado and Piedras Blancas National Parks and the Térraba-Sierpe National Wetland.
3. Establish a comprehensive protection program for the marine and coastal resources on the Osa Peninsula.
4. Strengthen the ability of the local organizations and communities to ensure conservation activity sustainability.

Two parallel processes were carried out during six years of work: The Osa Campaign as a fund raising effort and the execution of projects within the Area - through member institutions – with the amounts raised during the Campaign. It bears mentioning that the activities were carried out independently by each organization although the costs were booked to the Campaign.

Within this context the Steering Committee's member organizations were responsible for raising funds under the umbrella of the Osa Campaign, but the Committee did not function as the project executor. The funds were managed by different organizations, depending on their technical know how and experience working in the area.

As part of the accountability for the work done, the Committee members are presenting a summary of the activities carried out with a view to achieving the four large objectives established in 2003, as listed below.

### *The Osa Campaign: A Fundraising Effort for Biodiversity Conservation*

## I. Activities and Projects Carried Out

From the outset, the Osa Campaign had four strategic objectives (also called components) in mind and each of them included diverse activities to be carried out. The following shows the details about the actions taken in each component, the amounts involved, and the participating stakeholders between December 2003 and 2008.

If you would like more information about any activity described in this recap, please contact the donor institution.

### Component 1

Protect the biodiversity of the parks, wildlife refuges, wetlands, and forest reserves in the Osa Conservation Area by improving how the private land in the parks was managed and paid for.

Category	Activity Carried Out	Donor(s)	Executor(s)	Amount Invested
Payment for land in the Piedras Blancas National Park	Payment for 1,704.9 hectares to owners in the Piedras Blancas National Park and conveyance to the Costa Rican government (MINAET)	-TNC with funds from the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation ( <i>hereinafter Moore</i> ), "Adopt an Acre" and private funds (\$2,434,278) -The Ministry of the Environment, Energy, and Telecommunications (MINAET) (\$877,924)	-The National Parks Foundation -MINAET -Universidad para la Cooperación Internacional (UCI)	\$3,312,202
Land Zoning	Preparation of 6 management plans covering the 7 protected areas in the Osa Conservation Area (ACOSA) The Piedras Blancas National Park, the Golfito National Wildlife Refuge, the Corcovado National Park, the Isla del Caño Biological Reserve, the Ballena	TNC with funds from Moore and private funds	UCI	\$254,107



	National Marine Park, and the Térraba-Sierpe National Wetland			
	Preparation of canton and coastal regulatory plans for the Osa and Golfito Cantons and the canton regulatory plan for Corredores.	TNC with funds from Moore and private funds	The Program for Research and Sustainable Urban Development (ProDUS) through the University of Costa Rica Research Foundation (FUNDEVI)	\$554,752
Checks and Balances / Protection	Strengthening of the “Corcovado and Piedras Blancas National Park Control and Protection Program” through food supplies and providing the equipment needed to patrol the area.	CI with funds from Bert G. Kersteller and the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) monies	The Corcovado Foundation	\$87,214
	Hire 67 new employees for ACOSA for three years (including 53 park rangers, an attorney, legal assistants, a forestry engineer, accountants, and administrative assistants), who are already part of the state’s regular budget	TNC with funds from Moore	The Corcovado Foundation	\$1,583,105
	Purchase equipment and materials, infrastructure	-TNC with funds from Moore (\$961,601) -CRUSA (\$161,421)	-The Corcovado Foundation -TNC	\$1,141,955

	maintenance, food and technical assistance, etc., for ACOSA.	--TNC with CEPF funds (\$18,933)	(administrative expenses)	
	Construction of 4 operating centers for ACOSA Los Planes, Los Patos, Naranjal and Rancho Quemado.	TNC with funds from Moore and private funds	The Corcovado Foundation	\$535,334
	Support for maintenance activities for the Piedras Blancas National Park, repairing the control centers, and institutional strengthening.	TNC with funds from Moore	ACOSA	\$47,698
	Launch the State Natural Heritages in the Osa and Golfito cantons to delimit and certify areas of relevance for conserving a large variety of ecosystems	TNC	The Corcovado Foundation	\$19,317
The Heritage Fund (\$1,802,262)	Create a Heritage Fund or a trust to be used to provide a source of permanent stable income that is private and apolitical to finance activities related to public and private conservation in the Osa, Corredores and Golfito Cantons (see the Chart called <i>An Innovative and Ambitious Idea: The Creation of a</i>	-TNC (\$477,722) -CI (\$84,000) -The National Osa Campaign Committee through "Osa On Your Skin" (see the chart called <i>"What did the "Osa On Your Skin" Campaign Consist of?"</i> ) (\$145,738) -Friends of Costa Rica Foundation and other donors (\$146,554) -Interest earned (\$94,234)	CRUSA (directed by the Steering Committee)	\$948,248

	<i>Heritage Fund).</i>			
	Contribution by the CRUSA Foundation, one of the Campaign partners, as part of its pledge to donate one additional dollar for every dollar raised during the six years that donations were taken. The contribution doubled the total amount raised to make up the Trust (the pledge does not include interest earned).	CRUSA	CRUSA	\$854,014
<b>Total</b>				<b>\$9,337,946</b>

### Component 2

Establish a biological corridor between the Corcovado and Piedras Blancas National Parks and the Térraba-Sierpe National Wetland.

Category	Activity Carried Out	Donor(s)	Executor(s)	Amount Invested
Private Conservation Strategies	Buy the Cerro Osa and Remaga de Osa properties (1,212.3 hectares) to support consolidation of the Osa Biological Corridor (CBO in Spanish)	-TNC with funds from Moore, "Adopt an Acre," and private funds (\$2,726,775) -CI with Global Conservation Fund (GCF) monies (\$500,000)	-Friends of Osa for Cerro Osa -TNC for Remaga de Osa	\$3,226,775
	Identification, selection, and establishment of ecological easements as a tool that can be used to consolidate the CBO.	-CI with GCF funds (\$800,000) --TNC with funds from Moore (\$143,073)	CEDARENA	\$943,073

Strengthening and Monitoring	Actions to strengthen and monitor the CBO: Support for activities by the CBO Technical Coalition, diagnosis and organizational strengthening and fly-overs.	-CRUSA (\$165,423) -TNC with funds from Moore and private funds (\$41,859)	-The Neotropical Foundation (support for Coalition activities) -CEDARENA (support for Coalition activities) -UNED (Tiempo de Esperanza [A Time of Hope] music) -The Center for Civil Society Indigenous Development (strengthening the cultural identity of the indigenous lands) -Calm Air Visibility Unlimited (CAVU) (fly-overs)	\$207,282
	The Coastal Mountain environmental education project	TNC with private funds	CAVU	\$52,424
Sustainable Production	Support for sustainable production initiatives such as: sustainable agriculture, micro-enterprises compatible with conservation and integral farms.	-CI with CEPF funds (\$207,759) --TNC with funds from Moore (\$35,100)	-The Neotropical Foundation --Various consultants	\$242,859
Scientific Research and Monitoring	Redefinition of the CBO boundaries through the	-CI with CEPF funds	The National Biodiversity Institute (INBio)	\$115,752

	“Biological Information Based on Conservation Objects to Establish the Biological Boundaries of the Osa Biological Corridor.”			
	Research and identification of invasive species.	TNC with funds from Moore and private funds	-Various consultants	\$26,420
	Design of a research and biological monitoring program to support the management decisions for natural resources at ACOSA and to be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the conservation strategies carried out in the area.	TNC with funds from Moore and private funds	INBio	\$204,760
	Ecological, socio-economic, and institutional evaluation of the sectors at Punta Burica, Fila Cruces, the Térraba-Sierpe National Wetland, and the Golfo Dulce Forestry Reserve.	TNC with funds from Moore	The International Wildlife Conservation and Management Institute, the National University (ICOMVIS in Spanish)	\$60,000
	Scientific research to ensure the effectiveness of the conservation activities.	TNC with funds from Moore	-Various consultants	\$54,348
<b>Total</b>				<b>\$5,133,693</b>

### Component 3

Establish a comprehensive protection program for the marine and coastal resources on the Osa Peninsula.

<b>Category</b>	<b>Activity Carried Out</b>	<b>Donor(s)</b>	<b>Executor(s)</b>	<b>Amount Invested</b>
Protected Marine and Management Areas	Definition of the competencies of the Protected Marine Areas (AMP in Spanish) and the Multiple Use Marine Areas (AMUM in Spanish)	CI with funds from the Walton Family Foundation (WFF)	MarViva	\$10,000
	Create maps of the marine environments in the Isla del Caño Biological Reserve to continue consolidating an information bottom line for the ACOSA marine ecosystems.	TNC	Sea and Limnology Research Center (CIMAR in Spanish), University of Costa Rica.	\$35,000
	Quick biological evaluation of the Punta Burica marine-coastal area, one of the proprietary ACOSA sites for researching and diagnosing the state of the marine-coastal ecosystems.	TNC	The Keto Foundation	\$22,930
Marine Conservation Plan	Design a marine conservation plan for ACOSA	TNC	CIMAR, through FUNDEVI	\$15,010
Checks and Balances / Protection	Purchase equipment for security at the ACOSA marine areas and communication between the guards.	CI with WFF funds	ACOSA	\$10,632
	Develop a	TNC	Promar	\$22,119

	sustainable marine tourism program at Sierpe and Agujitas.			
Marine Species Monitoring	Develop a sea turtle conservation, research, and education program at beaches such as Carate, Rio Oro, Pejeperro, Piro and Drake.	-CI with funds from the Bordes Family (\$49,464) -TNC (\$25,194)	-The Corcovado Foundation and the Friends of Osa in the case of the CI funds -Widecast in the case of the TNC funds	\$74,658
<b>Total</b>				<b>\$190,349</b>

#### Component 4

Strengthen the ability of the local organizations and communities to ensure conservation activity sustainability.

Category	Activity Carried Out	Donor(s)	Executor(s)	Amount Invested
Organizational Strengthening	Organizational strengthening for allied organizations in ACOSA, such as: SINAC-ACOSA, the Osa Community Trust (FICOSA in Spanish), the Regional ACOSA Council (CORAC-Osa in Spanish), the Independent Producers' Union of Osa Canton (SIPRAICO in Spanish), the Corcovado Foundation, the Neotropical Foundation, and the Natural Resource Environmental Law Center (CEDARENA in	-TNC with funds from Moore and private funds (\$226,822) -CRUSA (\$9,557)	Allied organizations and various consultants	\$236,379

	Spanish)			
	Institutional strengthening of the National Resource Security Committee Association (ASOCOVIRENAS in Spanish)	TNC with funds from Moore	Various consultants	\$186,478
Identification and Strengthening of Local Leaders	Strengthen the Responsible Development Entrepreneurial Association (ASEDER), an organization that trains young entrepreneurs.	TNC with funds from Moore	ASEDER	\$45,100
	Train members of the civil society in Osa about eco-tourism so they can work as nature and specialized culture guides.	CRUSA with funds from Hewlett-Packard	The Neotropical Foundation	\$50,000
Environmental Education	Execution of an environmental education program to train the inhabitants of the Osa Peninsula about the importance of conserving the banner species.	CI with CEPF funds	The National University through the National University Economic Development Foundation (FUNDAUNA in Spanish)	\$15,342
	Management program for waste that goes to rubbish heaps, the ocean, rivers and beaches in ACOSA.	TNC with funds from Moore	The Corcovado Foundation	\$23,569
<b>Total</b>				<b>\$556,868</b>

**Total amount carried out by the projects:**

**\$15,218,856**

**In a chart:**



### **What did the “Osa On Your Skin” campaign consist of?**

Part of the work carried out by the Osa Campaign in 2007 was focused on raising funds for the Heritage Fund to finance public and private conservation activities in the cantons of Osa, Corredores, and Golfito. This work had the support of the National Campaign Committee, which became fully involved in carrying out fundraising events and the “Osa On Your Skin” tattoo campaign.

This Campaign was launched to stimulate participation by Costa Ricans in conserving the biodiversity on the Osa Peninsula through sales of tattoos representing species in the area. It raised funds to feed the Heritage Fund allocated to ACOSA conservation projects.

The “Osa On Your Skin” campaign was not just successful because it helped raise more money for conservation; it also served to increase people’s knowledge and awareness of the importance of doing something to preserve our natural wealth.

**The Challenge:** raise funds that are vital for conserving the Osa Peninsula.

**The Way:** washable, non-toxic tattoos about species from the Osa Peninsula

**End of Chart**

### **In a chart:**

#### **An innovative and ambitious idea: the creation of a Heritage Fund**

The Heritage Fund is considered to be one of the Osa Campaign’s main achievements since it became a source of permanent, stable income that is private and apolitical to finance the public and private conservation activities in Osa.

The specific purposes for creating it were:

- Ensure that the protected areas really have the resources needed to protect biodiversity in ACOSA and the surrounding area.
- Ensure that the wilderness areas protected in ACOSA are developed and managed in an orderly, efficient, and planned fashion.
- Stimulate and facilitate scientific research and environmental education.
- Promote economic self-sufficiency for these areas.
- Maximize the positive impact by these areas on the sustainable economic development for the southern region of Costa Rica.

This Fund was created thanks to the donations received from organizations and people who committed themselves to the cause of saving biodiversity in Osa and also thanks to the participation by one of the Campaign partners, CRUSA, which promised to make a donation of one dollar in addition to each dollar raised for the Fund.

The Steering Committee members agreed to set up a trust to manage the Heritage Fund because this legal vehicle offers more transparency and a better guarantee that the contributions will only be used for specific purposes from the beginning of the fundraising process based on the intentions of the donor individuals and institutions.

The Steering Committee for the Osa Peninsula Conservation Trust is a legal entity empowered to decide how to invest the profits returned by the Fund. The CRUSA Foundation also functions as a manager directed by the Committee.

The contributions made for creating the Trust came from the following organizations:

Source	Amount Contributed
CRUSA	\$854,014
TNC	\$477,722
CI	\$84,000
National Committee (through the "Osa On Your Skin" Campaign)	\$145,738
Friends of Costa Rica Foundation and other donors	\$146,554
Interest Earned	\$94,234
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$1,802,262 (as of December 31, 2008)</b>

End of Chart

## II. Funds to Be Used

Prior to the end of 2008, investments were approved for projects within the Osa Campaign framework. Nevertheless, some of them have not been executed although there are funds available to invest in Osa in Campaign component 3. "Establish a comprehensive protection program for the marine and coastal resources on the Osa Peninsula." The following itemizes the projects related to marine and coastal conservation to be done with the Campaign partners, such as MarViva.

Organization	Amount
Conservation International	\$180 000
The Nature Conservancy	\$68 112
The CRUSA Foundation	\$147 219
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$395 331</b>

## III. Administrative Management of the Osa Campaign

In addition to the amount used in the projects by each member of the Campaign, CRUSA contributed a total of **\$1,442,874** for administrative matters between 2003 and 2007. Likewise, TNC contributed a total of **\$112,500** for that purpose. This money was invested in operating and maintenance expenses, payments for daily expenses, and investment in the tattoo and consciousness raising campaign "Osa On Your Skin," etc.

**Total Administrative Expenses: \$1,555,374**

## IV. Costa Rica Closer to Reaching Its Conservation Goals

The Osa Campaign contributions for biodiversity conservation in the southern part of Costa Rica have been crucial for being able to carry out projects focused on sustainable development, training, institutional strengthening, monitoring, control, and protection, etc. The partner organizations in this initiative worked for six years on raising funds to establish a financial basis to support those efforts.

This section shows a summary of the financial goals established at the beginning, the total amounts raised, and the percentage reached.

The Osa Campaign invested \$1,555,374 (administrative expenses) to raise a total of \$17,169,561. This means that approximately \$0.09 was spent for each dollar raised.

Based on the parameters set by the Fundraising School of the University of Indiana, the United States, this amount indicates a high efficiency percentage. According to that institution, for an initiative such as the Osa Campaign, the maximum recommended for investing in each dollar received ranges between \$0.15 and \$0.20. These costs far exceed the Campaign costs.

<b>Organization</b>	<b>Total Funds Contributed</b>
Conservation International	\$2,079,096
The Nature Conservancy (with a contribution of \$8,000,000 by the Gordon & Betty Moore Foundation)	\$10,883,007
The CRUSA Foundation	\$1,387,634
The Ministry of the Environment, Energy, and Telecommunications	\$877,924
The National Committee and Other Donors	\$292,292
Interest Earned on the Heritage Fund	\$94,234
Campaign Administration (CRUSA)	\$1,442,874
Campaign Administration (TNC)	\$112,500
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>\$17,169,561</b>

**Initial Goal**                      **\$32,500,000**  
**Amount Raised:**                **\$17,169,561**  
**Percentage Reached:**        **52.83%**

**In a chart:**

### **Expectations for the Future: A Projection**

The pioneering efforts made as part of the Osa Campaign have been used to stimulate other organizations that work on conservation and sustainable development. Each positive result echoed and spread farther than expected since many people became interested in preserving natural resources in Costa Rica based on this initiative.

ACOSA will be the beneficiary of far reaching projects whose purpose will be to protect the wealth it shelters. The following is a summary of two activities that will contribute money to invest in the Area.

#### ***The Heritage Fund***

**Projected Investment:** Approximately **\$800,000** in the next 10 years

The Heritage Fund created as part of the Osa Campaign endeavors is still open to new contributions. With the amount raised thus far, this Fund provides a return of approximately \$80,000 per year, which is used to support conservation actions and activities related to ACOSA.

That amount could change but the Steering Committee for the Osa Peninsula Conservation Trust estimates that a total of \$800,000 will be invested in critical projects for ACOSA during the next 10

years (if you would like more details about the Heritage Fund, please see page 8 of this report).

### **Trading Debt for Nature**

**Projected Investment:** Approximately **\$5,000,000** in the next 16 years

Thanks to the Osa Campaign and other national leaders, the Debt-for-Nature Swap process between Costa Rica and the United States was negotiated and finalized. Through this agreement, the U.S. will pardon part of the external debt that Costa Rica has with it in exchange for that money being invested in conserving tropical forests. The total amount swapped is \$26,000,000, which will be invested during the upcoming 16 years. This money may be invested in protecting natural resources in 6 regions that are rich in biodiversity: The Osa Peninsula, La Amistad International Park, Tortuguero, Maquenque, Rincón de la Vieja, and Nicoya.

Out of this large amount, approximately \$5,000,000 will be invested in ACOSA, one of the 6 priority sites benefited by the swap. This figure, however, is not booked within the grand total raised in the Osa Campaign, despite it being considered to be the direct result of that initiative and a fund boosted thanks to the joint work of multiple organizations during the preceding six years.

### **Total Projected Funds: \$5,800,000**

It bears mentioning that the exact amounts of future contributions for conservation and sustainable development derived from the Osa Campaign efforts cannot be accurately established because they depend on events in the future. In particular they depend on: 1) interest rates and the return on the Heritage Fund and 2) the number of projects presented as a proposal for ACOSA to be able to receive donations in a possible debt swap. Regardless of the exact amounts, it is clear that the fruit of the Osa Campaign will be harvested for years to come.

**End of Chart**

## **The Osa Campaign Achievements**

The Osa Campaign is an initiative that was created with the mission of managing technical and financial assistance resources to ensure conservation of the biodiversity in the Osa Conservation Area for future generations. Six years after this Campaign started, we are presenting the main achievements reached by the four partners and their allies.

### **Checks and Balances / Protection**

#### **1. Hire Employees and Add their Positions to the Regular MINAET Budget.**

The presence of more park rangers has been successful in protecting the species in the area. Some tangible results are:

- An increase in patrols and security in the area, which has a direct impact on the decrease in poaching and illegal logging. During 2005, the Dulce Gulf had approximately 38 control and protection activities take place each month, while in 2007, that figure climbed to 83 activities monthly.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> The Corcovado Foundation. *Informe de terminación del proyecto Plan de Control y Protección para los parques nacionales Corcovado y Piedras Blancas y las zonas aledañas.* (Reporto n the termination of the Control and Protection Plan for the Corcovado and Piedras Blancas National Parks and the Surrounding Areas) [Documento in PDF format]. Unpublished Manuscript. San José, Costa Rica: June 2005.

- An increase in the number of problems reported: For example, from 2006 to 2007, the problems reported increased 369% in the Golfito National Wildlife Refuge.<sup>82</sup>

## **2. Improvement in the ACOSA Park Ranger Job Conditions**

Four park ranger operating centers were built, maintained and equipped and pathways and ACOSA refuges were built and maintained. This has helped the park rangers' work, their quality of life has improved, and they have been given appropriate conditions so their work supports a decrease in illegal acts such as poaching and invasions that are a detriment to the area's natural heritage.

## **3. Preparation of Management Plans for the Protected Areas and Regulatory Plans**

Six management plans were prepared for the following seven conservation areas: the Piedras Blancas National Park, the Golfito National Wildlife Refuge, the Corcovado National Park, the Isla del Caño Biological Reserve, The Dulce Gulf Forest Reserve, the Ballena National Marine Park, and the Térraba-Sierpe National Wetland. Canton and coastal regulatory plans were also prepared for Osa and Golfito, as was a canton plan for Corredores.

The management plans have made it possible for the protected areas to have a guide for decision making, while the regulatory plans will give the communities a tool for organizing the land and making good use of the land outside the protected areas.

## **4. Putting a Stop to the Emergency Situation in the Area Related to Threats to Biodiversity**

All the previously mentioned actions made it possible for the emergency situation on the Osa Peninsula to gradually subside. In addition, it set off a warning in the population to not just become aware but to deploy initiatives that minimize the crisis suffered by biodiversity in ACOSA.

## **Consciousness Raising in the Country about Conservation**

### **5. Development of a Fundraising Effort and Unprecedented Coordination that Brings Together Various Environment Institutions and Organizations with the Same Purpose.**

The Osa Campaign is an unprecedented alliance that has made it possible to set an example worldwide for alliances between organizations with different natures that have contributed to the many success stories achieved by Costa Rica related to conservation.

### **6. National Positioning and Awareness (Political, Media, and the General Population) about the Importance of the Osa Peninsula**

Thanks to the efforts by the Osa Campaign National Committee involved in carrying out the "Osa On Your Skin" tattoo and consciousness campaign, the Costa Rican population (especially politicians and the communications media) have a greater awareness about the importance of conservation actions in Osa. Osa is a highly valuable site due to its biodiversity and its privileged ranking worldwide as a tropical forest with unique, distinctive features. An example of this is the increase in the number of news articles published in the La Nación newspaper about Osa. From 2001 to 2002, that newspaper published four related articles; while from 2007 to 2008, the number grew to 18 articles with direct allusions to subjects involving conserving Osa's natural resources.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Id.

<sup>83</sup> The figures shown were extracted from a key word search in the La Nación newspaper database during the month of July 2009. These documents are available at [www.nacion.com](http://www.nacion.com).

## Conservation Action Sustainability

### **7. Support for More than 10 Organizations that Work in ACOSA on Institutional Strengthening and Strategic Planning.**

The Osa Campaign, whose purpose is to ensure the sustainability of conservation actions (control, protection, monitoring and promoting environmentally friendly production activities, etc.) supported institutional strengthening for organizations allied in ACOSA, such as: SINAC-ACOSA, the Osa Community Trust (FICOSA in Spanish), the Regional ACOSA Council (CORAC-Osa in Spanish), the Osa Biological Corridor Technical Coalition (CT-CBO in Spanish), the Independent Producers' Union of Osa Canton (SIPRAICO in Spanish), the Corcovado Foundation, the Neotropica Foundation, and the Natural Resource Environmental Law Center (CEDARENA in Spanish), the Natural Resources Security Committee Association (ASOCOVIRENAS in Spanish), the Responsible Development Entrepreneurs' Association (ASEDER in Spanish) and the Conte Burica Integral Development Association.

### **8. Creation and Operation of a Heritage Fund for the Osa Conservation Area Protected Areas.**

A modest Heritage Fund was set up to be used as a source of permanent, stable income that is private and apolitical to finance the public and private conservation activities in ACOSA. Although the projected amount was not reached, it being in operation (as a trust) is a guarantee of good management and growth. In addition, with the contributions made by Costa Rica and international aid, the Fund may be able to continue to grow.

### **9. Payment for Lands Followed by Conveyance to the Government of Costa Rica and the Acquisition of Lands in Strategic Spots in the Osa Biological Corridor (CBO in Spanish)**

A total of 1,704.9 hectares were purchased from private owners for the amount of \$3,312,202 (based on the official appraisals done by experts from the Ministry of Finance) to support the consolidation of the Piedras Blancas National Park; they were donated to the government. In addition, 1,212.3 hectares were acquired in places that are critical to conservation for the amount of \$3,226,775 to support CBO consolidation.

### **10. Positioning to Reach a Nature-for-Debt Swap Agreement Between the United States and Costa Rica**

The Osa Campaign was the motivation, incentive, and generator of skills and inter-institutional coordination behind bringing about the debt-for-nature swap between Costa Rica and the United States under the Tropical Forest Conservation law. The agreement made it possible to invest \$26 million during the next 16 years for natural resource protection in the communities in the high risk areas for environmental conservation, such as the Osa Peninsula.

### **Special Thanks by the Campaign Members**

*"The organizations that were part of the Osa Campaign would like to express our appreciation to all the people, companies and others who made this initiative possible, but we would very much like to thank each of the organizations and people who executed the projects financed by the Campaign.*

*Special recognition should go to the Osa Campaign Team since it was the body responsible for coordinating organizations, preparing project proposals, negotiating agreements and forging true working alliances.*

*All of you, through your efforts, are the people who will make it possible for all of these activities to become sustainable and contribute tangible results over time. The Osa Campaign will be remembered as an initiative that brought about a way to think more in depth about the importance of conserving the Osa Peninsula. There is still a long road ahead of us if we want future generations to be able to enjoy the area's invaluable, incomparable nature, the sanctuary for hundreds of species that are highly important worldwide.*

*We would like to include the Pacheco de la Espriella and Arias Sánchez presidential administrations for the support provided in this acknowledgement.*

*Thanks for believing in the Osa Campaign!*

**If you would like more in-depth information about the Campaign and the projects involved, please contact a Committee member:**

- The Costa Rica – United States Foundation (CRUSA)

Web: [www.crusa.cr](http://www.crusa.cr)

Telephone: (506) 2283-0665

- The Nature Conservancy (TNC)

Web: [www.nature.org](http://www.nature.org)

Telephone: (506) 2520-8000

- Conservation International (CI)

Web: [www.conservation.org](http://www.conservation.org)

Telephone: (506) 2253-0500

- Sistema Nacional de Áreas de Conservación (SINAC – the National Conservation Area System)

Web: [www.sinac.go.cr](http://www.sinac.go.cr)

Telephone: (506) 2522-6500

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**Photographs:**

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C.1. Alleyway near a restaurant on Puerto Jiménez's main street.



C.2 Same alleyway with more signage and "jungle" themes.





C.3. Ecotourism signage with rainforest themes.



C.4. Osa Wild office in Puerto Jiménez.



C.5. Tourism office in Puerto Jiménez using colorful and attractive signage.

## D

Included as Appendix D are my translations from Spanish of the main objectives within two Costa Rican laws: the Forest Law and ITCO Law.

### **Forest Law:**

The major objectives are: (1) establish this law as an “essential function and priority of the State.” Oversee the “protection, conservation, use [*aprovechamiento*], industrialization, administration, and promotion of the rational use of the natural renewable resources concerning the country’s forests.” (2) “through the effective incorporation of forest-like and industrial activities, generate employment and increase the standard of living for rural populations.” (3) “establish a national forest development plan, considering the priorities and recommendations of the established incentives within the present law. Regenerate and reforest the tree species with respect to a forest management plan.” (4) “all of the country’s forest and land fit for forest already belonging to the state, or reduced to a particular dominion, will be submitted at the end of this law.” (5) “the effects of this law consider fit forest land indicated by the *Dirección General Forestal*, following the methods of land classification deemed official.” (6) “all woody vegetation and associated vegetation is considered part of the forest.” (7) “it’s understood for the forest regime with set provisions, among others, legal, economic, and technical, established by this law, their regulation, all other norms and acts derived in its application, governing conservation, renovation, use and development of the forest and the country’s land fit for forest.” (8) “devise a forest management plan with set technical norms that govern executive action in the forest, towards the ends of conservation, development, and improvement of forest vegetation or intended vegetation, in accordance with the principal of rational use for natural renewable resources” (*Ley Forestal* 4465, 1969).

### **ITCO Law:**

The main objectives of this law are: (1) to “elevate the social condition of the farmer”, and ensure that the land promotes the most efficient participation within the “socio-economic development of the nation.” (2) to “contribute to republican virtues,” and a “healthy possession of the land” which benefits both public and private sectors. (3) “contributes to a just distribution of wealth.” (4) “contributes to the conservation and adequate use of the Nation’s renewable natural resource reserves.” (5) eliminate use in conflict with national interests. In such cases, “land should be returned to the state which will determine [what to do] based upon the law and Constitution.” (6) “determine that the land should not be used for the exploitation of agricultural workers, and that the state will stimulate the formation of agricultural cooperatives to combine the dignity of the small farm with the efficiency of a large company.” (7) “to recognize, out of conformity of what has been previously exposed, the existence and legitimacy of private property” (*Ley* 2825 ITCO IDA, 14/10/1961).