

DEFENDING “UN PEDACITO DE LA SOBERANÍA NACIONAL”: LAND
CONSERVATION AND NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY IN COSTA RICA

A THESIS

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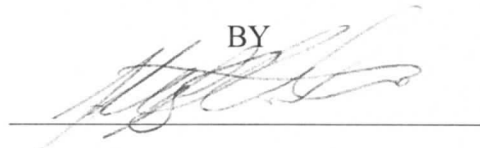
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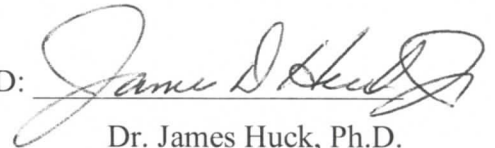
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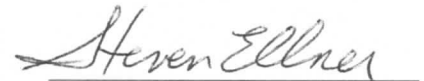


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In 1856, a band of 400 U.S. *filibusteros*, under the orders of Tennessee-native William Walker, invaded Costa Rica with the intention of seizing the fledgling Republic, re-instituting slavery, and adding it to the U.S. confederacy. Walker had already taken control of Nicaragua, Costa Rica's neighbor to the north, and he was intent on expanding his reign. Upon hearing about Walker's intentions, Costa Rican President Juan Rafael Mora stated that *los filibusteros* planned to "tear away...our independence, our property, our wives, and our children."¹ (Obregón Loría, 1976:66) When *los filibusteros* arrived, a ragtag but united Costa Rican army—under the valiant leadership of President Mora—confronted and defeated the North American imperialists, preserving their sovereignty. Their victory was memorialized years later through the creation of a national park.

More than 100 years later, another group of Costa Rican activists fought to defend their country's sovereignty in Manuel Antonio—a coveted patch of beach-front property on Costa Rica's Pacific Coast, once owned by United Fruit Company and later by a series of foreign developers. They were fighting to seize Manuel Antonio from private, foreign ownership and create a sovereign space for the Costa Rican people in the form of a national park. One activist described their fight this way: "We are here to defend a piece of our national sovereignty from the voracity of some people who have arrived to prevent Costa Ricans from swimming on the beaches of Manuel Antonio" (Salguero, 1972:4). A few months later, Manuel Antonio National Park was established.

¹ I personally translated the Spanish quotations in this paper.

By the year 2000, few Costa Ricans were swimming from the beaches of Manuel Antonio. The park had been overrun by tourists—mostly foreigners—and private capital controlled most of the tourism development in the area. When asked about the changes that had taken place in his community, one activist described tourism as the “third cultural invasion,” after the Spanish conquest and the infiltration of the banana companies in the early 20th century (van der Duim et al, 2001:66). Accordingly, a group of local resisters occupied a municipal building in 2000, demanding more local participation in the development of their community.

These events, though occurring decades apart, tell the story of a country, like many, that has faced repeated imperial threats—some more militaristic in nature, some more economic. They also tell a story of resistance—of a people intent on defending its sovereignty in the face of a threat posed by outsiders. Finally, they tell a story about land conservation in an increasingly complex, globalized economy, and its paradoxical capacity to be a space for resistance and a space for imperialism. There are many things that distinguish these imperial threats—and the resistance that they provoked—from one another. The obvious differences aside, the roles played by the state, local business elites, and the popular sectors in resisting or facilitating these incursions differ considerably. Furthermore, the nature of the resistance, its efficacy, and the way that it interacted with land conservation, vary from case to case. The primary purpose of this paper is to analyze and compare these dynamics in each of the three case studies.

The Cases

A brief description of each event and the dynamics that characterize it is necessary. When William Walker's *filibusteros* invaded Costa Rica from Nicaragua in 1856, the stakes were high. Ruled by the Spanish for more than 300 years, Costa Rica had finally gained full independence in 1838—only to see its sovereignty threatened by Walker 18 years later. Walker, meanwhile, had already conquered Nicaragua and declared himself president. Costa Rica was his next target. The Costa Rican forces, against all odds, routed the invaders in the Battle of Santa Rosa, driving them back across the border before fully defeating them in 1857. The Battle of Santa Rosa was clearly a state-based confrontation. Walker was fighting to add Costa Rica to the U.S. confederacy, though without his government's blessing. President Mora and the Costa Ricans were fighting to preserve their national sovereignty. Spurning the opposition of the local economic elites, Mora united the Costa Rican people in defiance of Walker's conquest. Over 100 years later, the victory was memorialized through the creation of Santa Rosa National Park—Costa Rica's second official national park, and its “first national historic park” according to Mario Boza, founder of the country's park system (Wallace, 1992:18).²

Costa Rica's third national park—Manuel Antonio—was also created as an act of resistance to imperialism. Located on Costa Rica's central Pacific coast, Manuel Antonio

² Poás National Park technically predates Santa Rosa National Park by about two months. Santa Rosa had been established as a national monument in 1966—which explains why Mario Boza referred to it as the “first national historic park”—but it was not officially designated a national park until March of 1971, whereas Poás was designated a national park in January of 1971. Poás was initially considered a “pilot national park.” There are some conflicting accounts in the scholarship about the order in which the parks were created. The uncertainty is largely a problem of semantics. There have been, and still are, many different classifications of protected land—national parks, biological reserves and national monuments, among them. For the purposes of this paper, we will consider Poás the first official national park, followed by Santa Rosa and Manuel Antonio.

was originally owned by the government, before it was traded to United Fruit Company (UFC) in 1939. The land was unsuitable for growing bananas, so UFC sold it to a Costa Rican in 1960, who in turn sold it to a team of international developers. When the developers restricted local access to the beach and began making plans for a tourism complex on the site, the people of nearby town Quepos resisted, repeatedly demolishing the blockades that prevented their access. Meanwhile, a local family proposed the idea of expropriating the land and creating a national park to resolve the conflict. A swell of public support convinced the government to do so. In November of 1972, Manuel Antonio National Park was established (Boza, 1981).

Before long, Manuel Antonio became a first-rate tourist destination. Drove of international tourists flocked to the park, bringing with them big capital—hotels, tour agencies, restaurants—the same kind development that the park had been created to limit. It happened through the country during the 1980s, thanks in part to the blossoming park system, government deregulation, and a series of tax incentives. Many of the policies that ushered in the tourism industry were agreed upon by the Costa Rican state in exchange for U.S. aid during the debt crisis of the 80s. As tourism, much of it labeled “ecotourism,” consumed Manuel Antonio and Quepos, the community again put forth resistance. They directed their anger at the municipal government—for failing to manage the industry properly and for excluding local participation. In November of 2000, a group of local protesters made their voices heard by occupying a municipal government building for two days (Parra Aravena, 2000).

The Theory

The roles played by the state, local capital, and local communities in navigating these encroachments are best analyzed through the lens of Marxist thought. The range of Marxist thinkers that will inform this analysis is admittedly wide-reading—both thematically and temporally. Vladimir Lenin provides useful insight into the dynamics of the Walker invasion. In *Imperialism: the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, he describes the early 20th-century global power structure as he sees it. Nation-states define this structure, with the powerful, core states exploiting the weaker, peripheral states in order to satisfy their accumulation needs. “The colonial policy of the capitalist countries has *completed* the seizure of the unoccupied territories on our planet. For the first time the world is completely divided up” (Lenin, [1917] 1939:76). For Lenin, this process is both territorial and economic.

Nicos Poulantzas, too, writing years later, shed light on the role of the state in the capitalist economy. In contrast to Lenin, Poulantzas was more interested in interrogating the role of the state as an intermediary between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat and its *relative autonomy* in relation to the ruling class. Poulantzas concedes that the structural nature of the capitalist state limits the degree to which the state can exercise autonomy, but he argues that “the degree, the extent, the forms” of the autonomy depend on the specific social and class make-up of the society (Poulantzas, 1976:73). In other words, the state’s autonomy is determined by the balance of social forces; it is a manifestation of the existing power dynamics.

Ralph Miliband, conversely, is an *instrumentalist*. He objects to Poulantzas’ emphasis on both structuralism and autonomy, arguing that the two are incompatible. The

state, as he sees it, operates primarily as an instrument of the dominant classes. The two are not wholly inseparable—they represent rather a “partnership between two different, separate forces, linked to each other by many threads” (Miliband, 1983:72). The connection between them, though, is much tighter in Miliband’s view than it is in Poulantzas’. This debate matters, of course, because the interests of the working class and the interests of the capitalist class are historically—and necessarily—at odds. What the state does, how it negotiates the tension between the two classes, and whose interests are represented through state action are of particular importance in the power struggle over Manuel Antonio.

William Robinson (2008), like the other theorists, writes about global power dynamics in a particular era—the era of globalized capitalism. “There is a new configuration of global power that becomes manifest in each nation and the tentacles of which reach all the way down to the community level,” he writes. “Each individual, each nation, and each region is being drawn into transnational processes that have undermined the earlier autonomies and provincialisms” (xi). In Robinson’s view, global power is no longer defined by nation-states, or by core-periphery dynamics, as Lenin theorized. Instead, in the era of globalization, states, corporations, international organizations act collaboratively on behalf of the *transnational capitalist class*. In other words, the global rich dominate the global power. The nation-state is a helpful instrument in this process, but not in the way that a world systems theorist would predict. Tourism, as Robinson writes, is an important player in the transnationalization of the global economy.

Imperialism, Sovereignty, and Land Conservation

The theories of Lenin, Poulantzas, Miliband, and Robinson will be used, as mentioned before, to understand the dynamics between the state, the elites, and the popular sectors in negotiating imperial threats—threats from the outside. The connections between the three imperial threats discussed in this paper—Walker’s invasion, the ownership of Manuel Antonio by foreign capital, and the tourism boom—might seem so abstract and tangential that a comparative analysis of the three lacks utility. A central claim of this paper is that the connections between the three *are not* abstract, nor are they blurry. They represent the same process—imperialism—occurring in different historical epochs. This much was clear to the activist in Quepos, who referred to tourism as the “third cultural invasion” after the Spanish conquest and the banana company invasion. In the classical Marxist school, represented in this paper by Lenin, the demand to accumulate resources and wealth—and the geographical expansion it requires—define imperialism. Frank (1967), Wallerstein (1974), and other dependency theorists conceive of imperialism as a relationship between the core countries and the peripheral countries, in which core countries control the means of production, while peripheral countries supply the raw materials and the labor. Robinson and others believe that imperial control is defined by “transnational social groups and their struggles to develop hegemonic and counter-hegemonic projects” (38). What they all have in common is accumulation from the outside. Walker sought to accumulate resources through instituting slavery to extract resources. United Fruit Company and other big capital sought to seize Manuel Antonio’s resources and exploit the land’s value as a tourist destination. Transnational tourism, for

the most part, sought the same thing. In each of these cases—and for each of the theorists—imperialism is simply the expansion of capitalism.

The concept of sovereignty, then—at least as conceived in this paper—is close to imperialism’s opposite. According to Wallerstein, “Sovereignty of the state, inward-looking, is the assertion that within its boundaries the state may pursue whatever policies it deems wise...Sovereignty of state, outward-looking, is the argument that no other state in the system has the right to exercise any authority, directly or indirectly, within the boundaries of the given state” (Wallerstein, 2002:22). This definition, of course, refers to national sovereignty, but it can apply just as well to any defined socio-political territory. This conception of national sovereignty, though, presupposes some degree of unity on the part of the state—that it represents the collective will of Costa Rica society. This is a conceivable scenario. That the state would represent the people’s will is, after all, the ideal of democracy. A central claim of this paper, however—in accordance with Marxist theory—is that the nation of Costa Rica is defined by shifting alliances and cleavages between the state, the popular sectors, and the local economic elites. Sovereignty, for our purposes, is *popular sovereignty*. It refers to the collective will of the Costa Rican popular sectors and their authority to control their own resources and make their own decisions, free from the influence of outsiders. The extent to which the state and the local elites represent this popular will is a central concern of this paper.

Control over land and resources is fundamental to this definition, which helps to explain the analysis of imperial threats in relation to formal land conservation projects. Sovereignty is, above all else, territorial. It is also about decision-making. The decision to formally conserve land *can be* both an expression of territoriality and an expression of

Costa Rica's right to choose what it does with its land. It can also be a space that—even if borne out of resistance—ushers in tourists and big capital, undermining the very sovereignty it intended to assert. The three case studies in this paper reflect three different ways that land conservation projects can either express or undermine sovereignty. The William Walker invasion—and the decision to memorialize the battle more than 100 years later with the country's second national park—represent the capacity of land conservation to *symbolically* express sovereignty. The movement to create a national park out of Manuel Antonio was not symbolic—it was a direct solution to the imperial threat posed by private, foreign ownership of the land. It was a way for the people to take the land back, or so they thought. The ensuing influx of tourism in the park, on the other hand, demonstrates the difficulty of “taking back the land.” More importantly, it demonstrates the fact that land conservation can be, and almost always is, a space ripe for the continued spread of capitalism, a space that welcomes in imperialism and undermines sovereignty.

Much has been written about the latter; not much has been written about the former. The conventional wisdom about land conservation, it seems, is that it is itself an imperial project—especially as it relates to indigenous populations. Stan Stevens, who edited a book on the topic, argues that “many Indigenous peoples consider protected areas to be threats to their welfare and denounce them as colonialism and human rights violations” (Stevens, 2014:3). Mary Finley-Brook, in the same volume, refers to “ideals of ‘green’ neoliberalism” and sheds light on the link between conservation and capitalism. She writes that “since the 1990s, Central America has been recast and newly promoted as a sustainable development exemplar: from divided and war-torn to

transboundary environmental protection, from poverty-stricken to eco-commerce” (172). Even within Costa Rica’s borders, land conservation projects have often been imposed upon local communities by “outsiders.” During the creation of Cahuita National Park, for example, the local community was “very obstinate,” according to one park official, and they “viewed the creation of the park with distrust” (Evans, 1999:81). Similarly, the creation of Santa Rosa National Park—though a symbolic expression of sovereignty—was a threat to the sovereignty of local cattle grazers (Evans, 1999:83).

There are other reasons to analyze Costa Rican sovereignty in relation to land conservation. First, Costa Rica has emerged as a global leader in conservation. 28% of Costa Rican land is legally protected (Evans, 1999:7). To match that percentage, the U.S. would have to conserve an area the size of Texas and Oklahoma combined. And second, Costa Rican sovereignty, at least superficially, has been better preserved than that of surrounding countries. Costa Rica has a comparatively mild colonial history and no legacy of major U.S. occupations or political meddling. The country does not even have an active military.

Scholars have put forth various theories about the origins of Costa Rica’s conservation ethic, and how it relates to the idea of sovereignty. The most compelling of these theories mirrors the predominant explanation for Costa Rican “exceptionalism,” more generally.³ During the colonial era, as the story goes, Costa Rica’s sparse population and uneven terrain gave rise to a powerful group of small, family-owned

³ Costa Rican “exceptionalism” refers to the idea that Costa Rica is the most stable and peaceful democracy in the region. It has exceptionally high health and education indicators and generally low levels of inequality. And it does not have a military, which it abolished in 1948. The predominant explanation for this “exceptionalism” is the “yeoman farmer” argument—that a powerful class of independent, peaceful (and white) farmers emerged from the colonial period, creating a favorable balance of power between the people and the ruling class. This balance, as the argument goes, has persisted until today. This account of Costa Rican history, though popular, has been widely contested by scholars.

farms. This ownership structure facilitated a close connection with the land and an environmental consciousness that has persisted to the present-day (Evans, 1999:6-7).⁴

The sovereignty of the small farmers, in other words, and the lack of interference by big capital, helped spawn Costa Rica's conservation ethic. Still, very little has been written about how the specific origins of the national park system—and the origins of two of Costa Rica's first three national parks—are rooted in expressions of sovereignty. This paper intends to help fill that void.

The paper will proceed as follows. Chapter 1 is devoted to William Walker's invasion and the creation of Santa Rosa National Park. It begins with a description of the Filibuster Wars and an analysis of the roles played by the state, the business elites, and the popular sectors in resisting a Walker takeover. After describing a few other imperial encroachments that occurred in the area, the chapter illustrates how the creation and expansion of Santa Rosa National Park were symbolic expressions of sovereignty. Finally, I examine how the Walker invasion—and the decision to memorialize Costa Rica's victory by creating a national park—contribute to the country's conservation ethic and its sense of cultural anti-imperialism.

Chapter 2 describes another threat to Costa Rican sovereignty—the private ownership of Manuel Antonio. The chapter begins with a brief history of the ownership of Manuel Antonio, then describes in detail the resistance put forth by the people in the local community, with an emphasis on the community's mobilization and the state's passivity. After describing the creation of Manuel Antonio National Park, the chapter

⁴ Both Sterling Evans (1999) and Mario Boza (1981) allude to the “yeoman farmer” idea to help explain Costa Rica's conservation ethic. Their works—together with David Rains Wallace's work (1992)—represent the most comprehensive accounts of 20th-century land conservation in Costa Rica. Boza and Wallace focus on the national parks, specifically, while Evans' text is a broader and more historically-rooted account of conservation in Costa Rica.

relates the ownership struggle in Manuel Antonio to the broader debate in Costa Rica at that time about foreign ownership of land.

Chapter 3 describes the tourism boom that consumed Manuel Antonio beginning in the 1990s. The chapter begins with a description of the political and economic context that ushered in tourism development throughout the country. It then analyzes the nature of Manuel Antonio's development—the ownership structures, the presence of international versus local capital, the views of the local citizenry. Finally, it outlines the community's resistance to the tourism onslaught in Manuel Antonio, again with a focus on the state's corruption and inaction in defending Manuel Antonio's sovereignty.

Together, the three case studies shed light on the evolving nature of imperialism in Costa Rica; the ever-changing roles of the state, local elites, and popular sectors in defending Costa Rican sovereignty; and the way that these confrontations manifest themselves through land conservation.

CHAPTER 1

Santa Rosa: *Cuña de Nuestra Soberanía*

On March 16th, 1856, William Walker and a band of 400 *filibusteros* invaded Costa Rican territory and declared war on the fledgling Republic. Walker—best described as a 19th century *conquistador* and land-grabber—had clear intentions: to annex Costa Rica, along with four other small Central American nations, and establish them as slave states belonging to the American confederacy. His mission in Costa Rica was decidedly unsuccessful. Under the leadership of President Juan Rafael Mora and Chief General D. Jose Joaquin Mora, the Costa Rican army confronted *los filibusteros* at the Santa Rosa Hacienda on March 20th. General Jose Joaquin Mora described the Costa Rican army's victory in a letter to President Mora, "even at the beginning of the fighting, on seeing our troops take possession of the corrals, several filibuster officials mounted their horses and fled without our being able to reach or harm them." He continued, "fourteen minutes after the first discharge, my troops were formed in the most orderly of ranks and calmly took possession of Santa Rosa" (Boza, 1981:33). The Battle of Santa Rosa has been called "the greatest heroic gesture of the Costa Rican people" (Boza, 1981:30). As such, on March 20, 1971, exactly 115 years after the battle, Santa Rosa was established as Costa Rica's second national park—memorializing this proud chapter in Costa Rican history and helping to initiate a now world-renowned system of land conservation (Evans, 1999).

This narrative might seem unremarkable. A group of Costa Ricans fought off a group of delusional invaders in an otherwise tumultuous 19th century in Central America. The severity of the threat posed by Walker, though, was real, and the consequences of his defeat—for both Costa Rica, the United States, and the Americas—were vast. A discussion of the political context will help shed light on the Battle of Santa Rosa’s significance. Just 80 years after American independence, and on the eve of the American Civil War, the United States was firmly under the grasp of the ideology of Manifest Destiny—a racist worldview that justified American conquest at all costs. William Walker was one of its biggest proponents. Just a few years earlier, in 1853, Walker had invaded Mexico in an attempt to annex some of the country’s territory. The annexation of Mexican territory was designed to allow the U.S. south to maintain a parity of slave and non-slave states and their respective representation in the Senate. After being defeated by Mexican forces, Walker retreated to the United States, stood trial for his actions, and was acquitted (Carr, 1963).

Central America, meanwhile, was ripe for conquest. After achieving independence in 1821, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica were briefly united into the Central American Confederation, but the union dissolved in the 1830s, paving the way for state-making processes in each country. In Nicaragua, Conservatives and Liberals battled for control of the country (Carr, 1963). In an attempt to gain the upper hand, the Liberals signed a contract with Byron Cole, who agreed to provide 300 North American mercenaries to aid the Liberal cause. Cole, in turn, offered the job to Walker, who originally turned it down, but—after renegotiating the contract to label Walker’s men as “colonizers,” rather than “mercenaries”—agreed to the terms. On

June 16th, 1855, Walker and 58 *filibusteros* arrived in Realejo, Nicaragua. Walker quickly established himself as the leader of the Liberal army, defeating the Conservatives and taking control of Granada. He immediately established a new government in Nicaragua, selecting Patricio Rivas to be president and naming himself Commander-in-Chief of the Nicaraguan army. Walker strengthened his grip on the Nicaraguan state by encouraging the migration of more *filibusteros* from the United States. By May of 1857, at least 5,000 new *filibusteros* had arrived in Nicaragua (Geserick, 2013).

His intention to establish Nicaragua as an English-speaking slave state was clear. Walker, himself, wrote: “the introduction of negro-slavery into Nicaragua would furnish a supply of constant and reliable labor requisite for the cultivation of tropical products. With the negro-slave as his companion, the white man would become fixed to the soil; and they together would destroy the power of the mixed race which is the bane of the country” (Walker, 1860:261). For Walker, the institution of slavery in Nicaragua was also a political issue, a means of helping the “Southern States” to “preserve their present social organization” (263). Walker, it seems, was concerned that new territories acquired by the U.S. “would necessarily enure to the use and benefit of free labor” and that this would tip the balance in favor of the abolitionists. “It is impossible,” he wrote, “in the present condition of affairs, for the South to get the labor it lacks; and the only means of restoring the balance to its industry is to send its unemployed intellect to a field where no political obstacles prevent it from getting the labor it requires” (264). Perhaps even more important than labor was congressional control. The breakdown of free states and slave states was a contentious political issue at the time—as evidenced by the Missouri

Compromise of 1820 and the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854. Annexing portions of Central America could have altered that breakdown in favor of the slave states.

The Costa Rican state, upon hearing of Walker's rise to power in Nicaragua, was suspicious of his intentions and wary of the threat he posed to their sovereignty. On November 20th, 1855, Costa Rican President Juan Rafael Mora delivered an impassioned and defiant proclamation, vowing to defend Costa Rica's sovereignty in a way that Nicaragua had not. "A gang of foreign hoodlums, the dregs of all the countries in the world...these troublemakers are planning to invade Costa Rica to satiate their passions and unrestrained greed in our wives and children, in our homes and haciendas" (Boza, 1981:30). In clear contrast to the fragmented Nicaraguan state that had practically invited Walker's take-over, Mora presented the fledgling Costa Rican state as a unified force, intent on defending its sovereignty. "The invaders will never find support, spies or traitors. Woe to the citizen or the foreigner who tries to seduce innocence, provoke disputes or sell us! Here they will only find brothers, true brothers, irrevocably determined to defend our country as the holy mother of all we cherish and to exterminate the last of our enemies" (Boza, 1981:30). Scholars have pointed out the importance of this proclamation in the formation of Costa Rican nationalism (Geserick, 2013). Costa Rica, having gained its independence in 1838, had only been a sovereign nation for eighteen years at the time of the invasion, yet the concepts of "traitors" and "foreigners" were powerfully evoked as threats to Costa Rican "citizens." In a second proclamation, Mora stated "we will not fight for a piece of land, not for acquiring ephemeral powers, not for miserable conquests, nor for the sake of sacrilegious parties" (Boza, 1981:30). Here, Mora draws a clear contrast between the imperialists and the anti-imperialists,

those who fight to take land and those who fight to defend it. Around the same time, Mora issued a proclamation to the other Central American republics, calling on them to “fight for the salvation of our brothers...for the honor of our idolized homeland and Hispano-American independence” (Jimenez et al, 1914:312). It was not just about defending the sovereignty of Costa Rica, but rather the sovereignty of Central America as a whole.

The “imperialist” Nicaraguan state—led by North American William Walker—responded with a proclamation of its own: “The Supreme Provisional Government of the Republic of Nicaragua having formally declared war, by decree of March 11th, 1856, against the State of Costa Rica, the army will be held in readiness to commence active operations” (Walker, 1860: 181). The “anti-imperialist” Costa Rican state—guided by Mora’s rhetoric of nationalism and defense of sovereignty—took swift action to prepare for the impending *filibustero* invasion from the north. Mora issued a decree increasing the size of the Costa Rican army and imposing a war tax on large-scale coffee growers. On March 4th, 2500 Costa Rican soldiers, led by President Mora’s brother Jose Joaquin Mora, marched northward from San Jose, confronting—and defeating—Walker’s troops at the colonial-era Hacienda Santa Rosa. In describing the battle, Walker wrote: “In five minutes, the whole command, led by its colonel, was in full and most disorderly retreat. Major O’Neal, with several other officers, strove in vain to turn the men and carry them back toward the enemy; but the panic was such that they found few willing to listen or to follow” (Walker, 1960:184). Costa Rican statehood and sovereignty had been preserved, at least for now. Walker and the *filibusteros* retreated back to Nicaragua, where a

coalition of Central American armies—led by Costa Rica—defeated him in 1857. The government of Honduras executed Walker in 1860.

The State

The Battle of Santa Rosa was a decidedly state-based conflict. According to Albert Z. Carr (1963), Walker “believed ardently in the nation’s ‘Manifest Destiny’ to establish its institutions and its power throughout the Western Hemisphere” (28). Walker, as it turns out, thought that he could “save” the United States by preventing it “from tearing itself apart over the slavery issue.” To do so, he needed to rally the nation behind a common cause: the Monroe Doctrine. The Monroe Doctrine had been established in 1823—just two years after Central America had gained independence from Spain. It served as a warning to European nations—a powerful assertion of U.S. political and economic dominance of the Americas. In spite of the Monroe Doctrine, in the 1840s the U.S. was still competing with Great Britain for strategic control of the Mosquito Coast of Nicaragua. As James Buchanan wrote at the time, Great Britain sought to “obtain control of the route for a railroad and canal between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans” (Carr, 1963:31). By Walker’s estimation, the U.S. was not aggressive enough in defending the Monroe Doctrine in Nicaragua. He believed, as Robert Houston wrote, that “American civilization had a right and duty to expand itself, and if the government wouldn’t do that, there were plenty of private citizens who could” (Walker, 1860:6). Walker’s actions, then, are best described as being *on behalf* of the state. By his interpretation, he was carrying out the will of the state and protecting its political and economic interests.

Costa Rican resistance to Walker's invasion was state-based, as well. Initiated by President Juan Rafael Mora, led by the president's brother, and inspired by the rhetoric of nationalism and the defense of national sovereignty, this was a battle between a Nicaraguan state—albeit one that was acting on behalf of the United States—and a Costa Rican state. According to Raul Francisco Arias Sanchez (2007), the Costa Rican people were eager to fight on behalf of their country: “many Costa Ricans lined up for the army, heeding the call from President Mora to combat the filibusters. Citizens came from all parts of the country to San Jose to enlist as soldiers in the national army” (85). Though just over 2,000 soldiers fought in the Battle of Santa Rosa, the army consisted of nearly 4,000 men, some veterans and some newly-enlisted volunteers, all between the ages of 15 and 50. In total, about 8% of the country's male population was represented in the army—the majority from San Jose, and a significant percentage from Alajuela, Cartago, and Heredia (Arias Sanchez, 2007:85-86).

It could be argued that in the case of the Battle of Santa Rosa, the Costa Rican state's hands were tied, that it had no choice but to aggressively resist the invaders. But as the case of Nicaragua illustrates, the Costa Rican state *did* have a choice. It could have fallen victim to political fragmentation, like Nicaragua did. Mora, himself, could have declared allegiance to Walker to protect his own elite status. That the Costa Rican state had the legitimacy and the will, and that the Costa Rican people displayed such unity—just a few years after the country had gained its independence—is a testament to Costa Rican nationalism.

Vladimir Lenin, writing decades later, aptly described the power dynamics that were at play in the Battle of Santa Rosa. In his work *Imperialism: the Highest Stage of*

Capitalism (1917), Lenin defines imperialism as “that stage of development in which the dominance of monopolies and finance capital has established itself; in which the export of capital has acquired pronounced importance; in which the division of the world among the international trusts has begun; in which the division of all territories of the globe among the great capitalist powers has been completed” (89). Later, he describes imperialism as “the exploitation of an increasing number of small or weak nations by an extremely small group of the richest or most powerful nations” William Walker’s actions were a clear attempt to seize control of the Central American territory, to add it to the American empire, and to assert U.S. dominance of the Western Hemisphere. Costa Rica, meanwhile, represented a source of resources to extract and labor to exploit. For Costa Rica, the U.S. and Nicaragua, the conflict was decidedly state-based.

The State and the Economic Elites

Juan Rafael Mora’s leadership in defending Costa Rica against William Walker’s invasion was critical—especially given the political and economic context of post-independence Costa Rica and the economic interests that aligned themselves against him. By the mid-19th century, Costa Rica was in the midst of an unprecedented coffee boom, solidifying its position as the world’s foremost producer of coffee. Accordingly, a powerful class of elite merchant-planters had emerged, and they were exerting considerable influence over Costa Rican policy. In fact, the president who preceded Mora, José Maria Castro Madriz, had been ousted by this class of economic elites. A drop in coffee prices and allegations of corruption crippled Castro's administration. As a result,

“the planter-merchant group, distressed by how the country was foundering and untied ideologically, reacted swiftly and forced Castro to resign” (Sancho-Riba, 1982:108).

Indeed, Juan Rafael Mora was one of the most powerful members of the merchant-planter class. He owned several of the largest plantations in the country, and, with his business partner Vicente Aguilar, managed an enterprise that processed and exported coffee. Economic elites in Costa Rica lined up in support of Mora’s presidency. A letter written by members of Congress during Mora’s presidency states: “The fact that Mr. Juan R. Mora is a property owner of the first rank qualifies him without reservations for leading the Executive Branch. This is an important factor that guarantees that the president will know the men and the interests of society and is essential for an effective administration” (Sancho-Riba, 1982:108).

Mora’s policies in the early years of his administration proved that he was a worthy representative of the Costa Rican elite. He eliminated a 10% tax on imports, strengthened laws of commerce, improved transportation infrastructure, and created a climate of political stability—all of which directly benefited the merchant-planters (110). Over the course of his presidency, though, Mora developed a tight-knit patronage network, alienating large segments of the economic elite and contributing to general discontent about his leadership.

That discontent was perpetuated by Mora’s handling of the William Walker controversy. His decision to confront *los filibusteros* threatened the interests of the economic elites in several ways: 1) it undermined Costa Rica’s sense of neutrality and stability, creating a less favorable business climate, 2) it demanded that a good portion of the coffee industry’s labor force be reassigned to the war effort, and 3) perhaps most

importantly, the war was expensive, especially for the elites, who were each forced to provide loans to fund the war. As Sancho-Riba describes, “the war against Walker in Nicaragua became a major factor in stopping the process of economic development that for some years had been growing” (113).

The financing of the war turned out to be one of its most contentious elements—creating divisions and alliances that ultimately led to Mora’s downfall. On February 28, 1856, Congress mandated the collection of 100,000 pesos “distributed among the capitalist sons of the country, in this form: 45,000 pesos from the province of San Jose, 20,000 from Cartago, the same amount from Heredia, and 15,000 from Alajuela” (128). In October of 1856, Congress again instituted a forced loan, this time a “general loan of 75,000 pesos paid by all Costa Ricans with assets worth more than 1,000 pesos, in three parts and in proportion to the assets of each one.” Mora’s plan to finance the war was met with resistance from the country’s economic elites, and even became “a source of doubt on the part of the members of President Mora’s cabinet” (129).

After 1856, tension between Mora and the merchant-planters continued as Mora attempted to address the financial aftermath of the war. One of his first post-war goals was to establish a national bank, which he hoped would resolve the money shortage problem and would help Costa Rica pay off the \$635,000 of debt that the state had accrued during the war. This, too, was perceived as a threat to the economic elites, who “had control of the capital market through the financing of the coffee crop for smaller farmers and as lenders of money at usurious interest rates” (116). The creation of a national bank, in short, would undermine the merchant-planter’s control over credit. In

response to the opposition, the Mora administration went on the offensive, issuing the following statement:

Interest rates for loans have continued to rise sharply and speculators have been evading the law through deliberate subterfuge. Money lenders have been obtaining large benefits to the detriment of those who have no other alternative but to borrow from them in order to keep in business. It was impossible to avoid these evils under the previous system, but by creating a banking system where one can get, without sacrifice, a cash advance on securities, we will remedy the problem. The government understands very well the difficulties inherent in the execution of this project, especially regarding those who speculate with interest rates, who are the enemies of this project (116-117).

The merchant-planters ultimately won out. Their opposition to the national bank, combined with the bankruptcy of the British firm that provided financial backing, caused the national bank experiment to fail. This event is largely considered the tipping point that sowed the seeds of Mora's downfall. On August 14, 1859, a military coup—orchestrated by disgruntled economic elites—overthrew and imprisoned President Mora. Three days later he was exiled to El Salvador (Sancho-Riba, 1982).

In his attempts to defend Costa Rican sovereignty, Mora had placed himself firmly at odds with the nation's powerful economic elites. And though he successfully defeated Walker, he paid a heavy price, ultimately losing the presidency and being forced out of his home country at the hands of the merchant-planter class. Clotilde Obregon Quesada (1993) has also described the tension between Mora and the coffee elites during the mid-19th century, writing that some of the nation's elites did not simply oppose the war because it threatened their interests, but were rather *supporters* of William Walker: “a group called the pro-yankee party that always hid its identity under a different name gave Mora many problems in the following years” (121). One of these U.S. sympathizers,

according to Armando Vargas Araya (2007), wrote an article for the newspaper that Walker used to disseminate filibuster propaganda in Granada, Nicaragua. The article stated that in Costa Rica “everyone opposes the war for the simple reason that good Costa Ricans are excellent coffee laborers, but are not cut out for a bloody war” (106). Mora, in response, claimed that the news media had overstated Costa Rican support for the filibusters. He lambasted the writer of the article. “The more serious the slander against his character, the more he desires the publicity. The lunatics in their spiteful treason, who find common cause with the declared enemies of Central America, try in vain to trick the people. The Costa Rican people are just, patriotic and loyal. They would never compromise with those who turn their backs on the homeland” (Vargas Araya, 2007:107).

What is clear is that the Costa Rican business elites offered considerable resistance to Mora’s nationalist project. They were more concerned about threats to their economic standing than they were about threats to Costa Rican sovereignty. And in a country still in its infancy and built on coffee wealth, these elites were powerful enough to ultimately overthrow President Mora a few years after the Battle of Santa Rosa. This political context makes Mora’s achievements even more remarkable. It also makes Mora’s decision to confront the filibusters—and alienate the elites—seem like a riskier, less obvious choice, one that could have easily gone the other way. Moreover, it challenges our simplified notions of centuries-old military conflicts, suggesting that each side is not a monolithic, unified force, but rather a complex tug-of-war between economic elites, popular sectors, and the state.

The apparent disloyalty of Costa Rica's business elites suggests that they represent something like the *comprador* class—a term used to denote local capitalists more concerned about capital accumulation than nationalism. Costa Rica was still in the primitive stages of its integration into the global economy, so it cannot be said that their actions were necessarily on behalf of international capital. Still, the fact that the local bourgeoisie was more concerned about their own profits than they were about the potential conquest and enslavement of an entire nation is a good indication of where their allegiances fall.

The Costa Rican state's willingness to spurn the elites and defend the nation's sovereignty contributes to the Marxist debate about the role of the capitalist state. The contributions of Nicos Poulantzas are particularly useful in analyzing this case. As Poulantzas has argued, Marxist thought has been somewhat dismissive of the importance of the state in negotiating class conflict. Poulantzas rightfully asserts in his article "The Problem of the Capitalist State" that Marxist thought is dominated by *economism*, which "considers that other levels of social reality, including the state, are simple epiphenomena reducible to the economic 'base'" (Poulantzas, 1969:68). In other words, social dynamics—the state included—are manifestations of class dynamics. To study them in their own right, therefore, is futile.

Ralph Miliband—with whom Poulantzas' writings are in direct conversation—strays from this tradition, though not very far. In describing the state's position vis-à-vis the ruling class, Miliband makes two important points. First, he argues that the members of the state apparatus tend to *come from* the ruling class. And second, the ruling class establishes "personal ties of influence, status, and milieu" with state actors (Poulantzas,

1969:73). Miliband's hypotheses seem to aptly describe the position of President Mora in the Costa Rican state. Mora came directly from the ruling class of merchant-planters, and—at least initially—seemed beholden to their economic interests. Where Miliband's theory falls short, according to Poulantzas, is in his assertion that the state serves as an instrument of the ruling class, whose sole purpose is to protect the interests of the bourgeoisie:

However, if one locates the relationship between the state and the ruling class in the social origin of the members of the state apparatus and their inter-personal relations with the members of this class, so that the bourgeoisie almost physically 'corners' the state apparatus, one cannot account for the relative autonomy of the state with respect to this class (Poulantzas, 1969:74).

The autonomy of the state that Poulantzas observes and describes applies directly to the Costa Rican state's role in defending its sovereignty against Walker and the filibusters. The elite classes—of which Mora was a part—opposed the war, viewing it as a threat to their economic interests. Still, the state acted *autonomously* in confronting Walker. And it did so largely on behalf of the popular sectors of Costa Rican society—those that had the most to lose if the country were to become a slave state under Walker's rule. The role that the popular sectors played in this conflict, and the degree to which they supported the war, is discussed next.

The State and the Popular Sectors

The Costa Rican people, meanwhile, were seemingly more supportive in the war effort, both financially and otherwise. A group of people from Alajuela, for example, signed a letter addressed to President Mora, stating that “it is necessary to go to war

without delay against the unjust invaders of Central America.” They offered themselves and their “possessions in general” to support their country and defend its sovereignty (Quesada Camacho, 2006:129-130). This group of Alajuelans offered material support in all different forms—including mules and other livestock, corn, and beans. Many contributed money, as well, typically ranging from a few pesos to 50 pesos. One Alajuelan, Ramona Paniagua, voluntarily contributed 740 pesos to the war effort. A group of citizens from Heredia wrote a similar letter to President Mora on November of 1856, stating that they recognized the “imminent danger’ posed by the filibusters and agreed to “offer as a voluntary loan the following...” (131). What followed was a list of donations, including “food supply, coffee, livestock, and money,” ranging from 17 to 200 pesos.

In addition to the material support offered by popular sectors of Costa Rican society, disenfranchised and excluded segments of society also contributed to the war—though their contributions tend to be glossed over by existing scholarship. Quesada Camacho (2006), conversely, highlights the role that women played in the conflict. In particular, he highlights the role of Francisca Carrasco, who “went to Nicaragua as President Mora’s chef in 1856. She was in the Battle of Rivas, and those who defended the Costa Rican state say that the intrepid cook abandoned the pans that she was cooking lunch in and went to fight, carrying in her apron ammunition for the soldiers, and with her spirited and threatening words, went to attack the enemy” (135). He also writes about a group of women—including Bernabela Chavarría, Mercedes Mayorga, María de Jesús Lunn, Rita Gutiérrez y Bernarda Durán—who cooked and washed clothes for the soldiers. A 2006 article in *La Nación* shed even more light on the role of women in the

war, arguing that “the women held up the country’s economy” and “allowed the country to survive” (Bermudez, 2006).

Quesada Camacho has written about the participation of another disenfranchised demographic—the Costa Rican indigenous groups. A group of indigenous people from the community of Pacaca, for example, wrote a letter to President Mora in November of 1856, stating their support for the war against the filibusters: “We also offer our small fortune, which won’t mean anything if we allow the filibusters to impose their disgraceful oppression” (138). In December of that year, the support of indigenous groups was summoned once again, though this time not on a volunteer basis. On December 11, the government wrote a letter to the governor of Cartago, demanding that he provide 50 indigenous people to serve as *cargueros* for the war effort. The *cargueros* were paid for their work, but they were prohibited from serving as soldiers in the war. Regardless of the predictably racist terms under which indigenous people participated in the war, their contributions were significant. As Quesada Camacho writes, they displayed “faithfulness to the native land” and were valuable protectors of Costa Rican sovereignty (139).

The Expression of Sovereignty through Land Conservation

Though Costa Rica had successfully defended its sovereignty—and that of Central America, generally—in the Battle of Santa Rosa, its control over this parcel of land in Guanacaste was far from resolved. In fact, Santa Rosa was the site of several other imperial incursions over the course of the next 100 years. In 1930, U.S.-backed Nicaraguan dictator Anastasio Somoza *bought* Santa Rosa “as though some British

gangster had bought Lexington.” (Wallace, 1992:16). Outsiders had, once again, encroached on Costa Rican sovereignty—this time through economic means, rather than military means.

Somoza’s attempts to wield power military in Costa Rica came later. In the 1940s, Costa Rica was in a state of political turmoil. President Rafael Angel Calderon had been president of Costa Rica from 1940 to 1944. He was succeeded by Teodoro Picado, who allied himself with the Communist Party—led by Manuel Mora. Allegations of corruption and political repression picked up steam after the elections of 1948, in which Calderon—on the ballot again—had been defeated. He subsequently declared the elections fraudulent and demanded a revote. Political violence and chaos ensued. Meanwhile, Jose Figueres Ferrer and his National Liberation Army entered the conflict in March of 1948, eventually defeating the government troops. Figueres ruled a provisional government for a little more than a year, abolishing the military and holding elections for a Constitutional Assembly, which rewrote the Costa Rican constitution in 1949. He then ceded power to Otilio Ulate—the rightful winner of the 1948 presidential elections (Rankin, 2012).

Somoza, who had supported Calderon during the conflict, made his presence felt in 1955. In January of that year, groups of invaders from Nicaragua—with the support of the *Calderonistas*—crossed the Costa Rican border and began marching south in an attempt to overthrow the Figueres government. Figueres “accused the invaders of receiving support directly from the president of Nicaragua, Mr. Anastasio Somoza” (Boza, 1981:35). The Organization of American States (OAS) intervened, establishing a buffer zone along the border of the two countries and helping to expel the invaders.

On July 1, 1966—after more than 100 years of repeated imperial conflicts—the Costa Rican assembly passed Law Number 3,394, expropriating Santa Rosa with the intention of managing the hacienda as a national monument, under the jurisdiction of the Institute of Tourism (ICT). As Mario Boza describes, “the historical importance of Santa Rosa was the main reason why it was decided to nationalize the hacienda” (36). The initial plan was to expropriate 3,000 acres of land surrounding the Casona, the house where the Battle of Santa Rosa took place, but the region’s unique and highly threatened *bosque seco* ecosystem convinced legislators to expropriate 30,000 acres. Somoza was compensated \$500,000 for the land. On March 20, 1971—on the 115th anniversary of the battle—the national monument became a national park through Executive Decree Number 1,562A. It was the second national park in Costa Rica (Boza, 1981). The law declaring Santa Rosa a national park made repeated references to defending Costa Rican sovereignty. The law’s first clause, in fact, states “considering that it is the function of the state to watch over the conservation of sites and buildings that have been the sites of heroic acts by Costa Ricans in defense of freedom and national sovereignty.” The second clause calls the Battle of Santa Rosa “one of the most brilliant pages of our country’s history” and refers to Costa Rica’s “unwavering decision” to “defeat and conquer all of the foreign powers that try to taint our sovereignty and independence” (Ley No. 1562).

To celebrate the park’s opening, the parks department hosted an inauguration ceremony that day. The celebration was laden with nationalistic rhetoric, and made explicit the connection between the national park and the Battle of Santa Rosa. First Lady Karen Olsen de Figueres, a prominent advocate for the parks, spoke at the event, calling Santa Rosa 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” (Evans, 1999:80). Daniel Oduber, president of the Legislative Assembly and future President of Costa Rica, also delivered a speech, calling on the children in the audience to be wary of “contemporary filibusters.” “To you we hand over a united and peaceful country,” he said, “assured of the fact that you will defend this sacred land, tree for tree and palm for palm.” Later, he urged the schoolchildren in attendance “to show the world that here in Costa Rica we defend natural resources and the beauty of nature, and that we know how to respect religiously...the nature that God has given us” (80).

The park was expanded in 1978—again as a form of resistance to foreign control over Costa Rican land. Nicaraguan dictator Anastasio Somoza Debayle—son of the former dictator by the same name, whose land had been expropriated in 1966—owned a 28,600-acre parcel of land adjacent to Santa Rosa National Park, called *El Murciélago*. On September 13, 1978, Costa Rican president Rodrigo Carazo issued a decree expropriating *El Murciélago* and adding it to the park. According to Carazo, he was wary of Somoza’s “growing investments” in Costa Rica. In his memoirs, Carazo wrote: “he didn’t deserve to be an owner of one square centimeter of our soil” (Evans, 1999:117). By adding it Santa Rosa National Park, Carazo ensured, at least for the time-being, that the land would belong to the Costa Rican people.

The Santa Elena Controversy

In the 1980s, Costa Rican sovereignty was challenged yet again—and Guanacaste was again the site of the conflict. The U.S. government took a particular interest in

Guanacaste during the 1980s, when the rise to power of the Communist *Sandinistas* in Nicaragua challenged U.S. hemispheric domination and birthed a new Cold War threat. The U.S. response—led by the National Security Council, the CIA, and Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North—was predictably swift and aggressive. Its main intention was to arm the *contras* in Nicaragua and ensure the overthrow of the Communists. The operation, called “Project Democracy” by North, began in El Salvador in 1985. Arms suppliers, funded by the U.S. government, used Ilopango Air Force Base in El Salvador to supply the *contras* in northern Nicaragua (Allen, 2001).

In order to arm *contras* in the south, North had his sights set on Costa Rica as a staging grounds. In August of 1985, he traveled to Guanacaste to scout out potential sites for an airstrip to supply the *contras*, eventually settling on a small, pre-existing airstrip in Santa Elena—a peninsula adjacent to Santa Rosa National Park, just 12 miles from Nicaragua. A few months later, Admiral John Poindexter, Ronald Reagan’s newly-appointed national security advisor, visited Guanacaste to check out the Santa Elena airstrip and brief Reagan about whether it was suitable. The project quickly earned the approval of Poindexter and Reagan (Allen, 2001).

Costa Rican President Luis Alberto Monge also approved the plan—though under intense political pressure. Monge later stated that Oliver North had threatened to put a hold on the millions of dollars in foreign aid that the U.S. government was offering Costa Rica if Monge rejected the proposed airstrip. North also convinced Monge that if the *Sandinistas* invaded Costa Rica, they would destroy the airport in Liberia, thus making the clandestine airstrip in Santa Elena seem vital for Costa Rican defenses. With Monge’s approval, the plan to establish an airstrip in Santa Elena proceeded. North and his

comrades arranged to lease the land from Joseph Hamilton, a North Carolina man who owned land in Santa Elena and ran textile factories in Costa Rica. To complete the transaction, North set up a “dummy corporation,” called Udall Research Corporation and Udall Resources, Inc., S.A. The company claimed to be “building a game preserve and a tourist attraction” in Santa Elena (110). Local workers built the facility and members of the Costa Rican Civil Guard served as guards. The real purpose of the airstrip was kept secret (25).

When Oscar Arias was elected president the following year, he demanded that the U.S. stop using the airstrip to supply the *contras*. The U.S. government did not oblige. They continued to use the airstrip, but did not tell the Costa Rican government. It was Daniel Janzen, a U.S. biologist stationed at Santa Rosa and prominent advocate for its conservation, who blew the whistle on the continued presence of the U.S. military in Santa Elena, notifying Arias that the airstrip was still in use. Consequently, Janzen proposed that Santa Elena be expropriated and added to the national park—now composed of Santa Rosa and *El Murciélago* (Allen, 2001). Located between Santa Rosa and *El Murciélago*, Santa Elena would have completed the conservation corridor.

Arias was receptive to Janzen’s ideas, and he was intent on expelling the U.S. military from Santa Elena, regardless of the political costs. In September of 1986, under orders from Arias, 60 Costa Rican Civil Guard members raided and occupied the airstrip, effectively preventing its use. The closing of the airstrip prompted both Reagan and CIA Director William Casey to meet with Arias. It also triggered a decline in U.S. economic aid to Costa Rica. When the media caught wind of the CIA’s clandestine operations in Santa Elena, the CIA went on the defensive, arguing that no U.S. money or personnel had

been used to construct the airstrip. CIA wrongdoing was further exposed in October of 1986, when a plane delivering 10,000 pounds of ammunition to the *contras* was shot down by the *Sandinistas* (Allen, 2001). Ensuing investigations by the U.S. government revealed the full scope of the Iran-contra affair.

Guanacaste, meanwhile, had been the site of yet another imperial invasion—akin to the invasion by William Walker and *los filibusteros* in 1856. As William Allen aptly describes, “Oliver North had just been another twentieth-century William Walker, and the United States had still been trying to control Central America. North’s boys had holed up in Santa Elena rather than Santa Rosa. They had used airplanes rather than rifles. But North, like Walker had sent them down to do what had to be done. He might not have called the Ticos ‘greasers,’ but his contempt for Costa Rican sovereignty reflected the same attitude” (115).

The threat posed by Reagan, the CIA and the U.S. imperialist state was not lost on the Arias administration. Arias’ response was a familiar one: defend Costa Rican sovereignty—both literally and symbolically—by annexing Santa Elena and conserving the land as part of the existing national park. In doing so, Arias could establish Santa Elena, along with Santa Rosa and *El Murciélago*, as a public space that belonged to the Costa Rican people—not to the U.S. military. Arias, though, had to tread lightly. The existence of the airstrip in Santa Elena was a source of considerable embarrassment for the Reagan administration. Having already drawn the ire of the United States for shutting down the airstrip, the Arias regime was hesitant to further alienate the U.S. government by politicizing the annexation of Santa Elena—even though it was clearly a political gesture.

Around the same time, the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) donated \$100,000 to the project. In a press release to celebrate their donation, WWF highlighted the political importance of the annexation. “Turning an airstrip into a national park is...” the press release stated, “an important expression of President Arias’ commitment to peace in the region.” The release went on to say that “Costa Rican officials told us there are six owners of the land, but five of them still remain anonymous. Apparently the owners are embarrassed that they sold the land to a corporation that used it as an airbase to resupply the contras.” (Allen, 2001:167). As William Allen describes, the Arias administration was furious that WWF had politicized the issue. Despite going against Arias’ wishes, though, the press release did well to point out the symbolism of converting a foreign military facility into a national park.

Arias, himself, made little mention of politics during the ceremony announcing the annexation of Santa Elena. Instead, he alluded “people” who had tried to draw Costa Rica into the conflict in Nicaragua. “What do we do with this region of conflict? We make it into an area to study nature. We don’t send soldiers with instruments of death. We send students scientists, and naturalists with the instruments they need for their intellectual work.” (Allen, 2001:171). In an interview conducted years later, Arias admitted that he wanted to teach “a moral lesson to those who tried to deceive the Costa Rican people and the Costa Rican government authorities by helping the contras against the will of the government.” (172) Regardless, in July of 1987, the CIA airstrip in Santa Elena was added to Guanacaste National Park. To its south was Santa Rosa—conserved a few decades earlier to memorialize Costa Rica’s defense of its sovereignty against William Walker and *los filibusteros*. To its north was *El Murciélagos*—expropriated from

Nicaraguan dictator Somoza and added to the national park ten years earlier. The inclusion of Santa Elena in the park created an impressive corridor of conservation, one that distinctly celebrated and expressed Costa Rican sovereignty.

Arias' leadership role in negotiating the annexation of Santa Elena was crucial. As William Allen describes, Arias "took presidential support for conservation to another level" (170). Furthermore, as Allen aptly points out, past Costa Rican presidents had been more cautious in their support for national parks, requiring Mario Boza and other conservationists to persuade them to take action. Arias, conversely, was bolder and more aggressive in pursuit of conservation objectives. In his defense of Costa Rican sovereignty, he directly antagonized perhaps the biggest imperial threat of all: the United States government. And he did so against the wishes of many political figures in Costa Rica, who claimed that the expropriation would be too expensive and the political consequences too costly. More, he did so at a time when the Costa Rican government was facing a crippling debt crisis and was reliant on U.S. foreign aid. When CIA Director William Casey and U.S. President Ronald Reagan met with Arias directly, Arias was unwavering and resolute about his commitment to conservation and sovereignty.

The conflict, though, was not over. Even after Arias' announcement that Santa Elena would become a part of the park, contentious legal proceedings over the actual expropriation continued for years. The main point of contention between the two sides was the valuation of Santa Elena. Whereas the Costa Rican government was willing to pay between \$2 million and \$3.5 million for the 39,000 acres of land, the owners of the land wanted up to \$41 million—a figure they derived from the potential value of the land as a tourist resort. The arbitration process began in 1997 under the World Bank's

International Centre for the Settlement of Investment Disputes. The Santa Elena landowners were a powerful and well-connected group of international businessmen—Joseph Hamilton was a U.S. textile manufacturer, George Livanos was a Swiss investor, and Edward Carey was a U.S. oil tycoon (Allen, 2001).

Jesse Helms, a conservative U.S. senator and friend of Joseph Hamilton, was perhaps the landowners' biggest advocate, launching a campaign to hold the Costa Rican government accountable for the land seizures. Helms “got the State and Treasury departments to withhold \$10 million in AID funds to Costa Rica and threaten to block a \$175 million loan from the Inter-American Development Bank” (247). In a 1992 letter to Costa Rican President Rafael Angel Calderon, Helms wrote: “until this and other American properties are returned to their rightful owners, I will be in the unfortunate position of being obliged to oppose the release of aid or debt relief for Costa Rica” (248). The situation was finally resolved in February of 2000. The World Bank arbitrators ruled that the Santa Elena landowners were entitled to \$16 million in compensation. The Costa Rican government paid, and on April 28, 2000, Santa Elena became an official part of the park—now called *Área de Conservacion de Guanacaste* (ACG) (Allen 286).

The role of Guanacastecans in negotiating the Santa Elena conflict is unclear, especially given the fact that the airstrip's existence was shrouded in secrecy until after it had been shut down. Most local people, after all, were not even aware of the airstrip. This legal battle over the valuation of the land, however—occurring more than a decade later—was well-known by the area's residents. Without the veil of secrecy that characterized the early years in the Santa Elena controversy, the roles and perceptions of local residents were revealed. Like the Costa Rican state, many Guanacastecans viewed

the political pressure—as well as the threat to withhold foreign aid—as an encroachment on Costa Rican sovereignty. According to William Allen, local residents wore T-shirts in the 1990s reading “Santa Elena is our National Heritage; We Must Not Lose It.” In their opposition to the threat of outside influence, the Costa Rican state and Guanacastecans were united, says Ugalde: “They have the Costa Rican presidents saying since 1978 that it should be part of the park, and they’ve got the Costa Rican conservation community saying that, and they’ve got the Guanacaste people ready to go to the streets for that” (248).

There was, however, a sizeable anti-*Sandinista* and “pro-Yankee” contingent in Guanacaste. As William Allen describes, Guanacaste’s distance from the Costa Rican capital, as well as its proximity to Nicaragua, have contributed to a unique, autonomous identity. This identity, particularly during the 1970s and 80s, was perpetuated by the perception that Guanacaste was neglected in terms of government services and infrastructure projects. When the *Sandinistas* came to power in Nicaragua in the 80s, this feeling of neglect was matched by a sense of fear about the threat of the *Sandinista* government. As a result, “a shadowy autonomy movement widely believed to have a small paramilitary arm. Some merely sought greater economic and political autonomy within Costa Rica, while others spoke seriously of securing U.S. links for Guanacaste similar to those of Puerto Rico” (Allen, 2001:54).

The Santa Elena controversy—one of several threats to Costa Rican sovereignty in the Guanacaste region, dating back to William Walker’s invasion in 1856—reveals an important point about the nature of the imperial threats facing Costa Rica. It demonstrates a strong alliance between the U.S. government and a powerful class of international

businesspeople—working in tandem to promote U.S. political and economic interests. When the U.S. government needed access to Santa Elena to defend capitalism and defeat communism, Joseph Hamilton and the other Santa Elena landowners complied. When the landowners needed the U.S. government to go to bat for them during the legal dispute over Santa Elena, the government obliged, withholding aid from Costa Rica.

The Santa Elena case also reveals a great deal about the dynamics that characterize Costa Rica's defense of its sovereignty. In particular, the role of the Costa Rican state was crucial in negotiating the conflict. There were powerful—mostly foreign—business interests involved, to be sure, and there was some dissent about the political and economic costs of challenging the U.S. government. Nonetheless, the Costa Rican state, led by President Arias, put forth a steadfast defense of its sovereignty, expelling the imperial threat. Also notable in the Santa Elena case, and clearly in line with Guanacaste's conservation history, was the government's choice to resist imperialism and express sovereignty through land conservation. Arias designated the land as belonging to the Costa Rican people, as being a manifestation of the nation's unique sovereign identity. Costa Rica's system of land conservation had planted its roots nearby in Santa Rosa, in honor of the defeat of William Walker and the invaders from the north. Santa Elena represented a notable continuation of that trend.

Sovereignty, Anti-Imperialism, and a Conservation Ethic

The role of the Filibuster Wars in the formation of Costa Rican national identity has been described at length by historians—many of whom characterize the Filibuster

Wars as a unifying force, the consolidation of Costa Rican society in the face of a threat posed by outsiders. Juan Rafael Quesada Camacho, for example, writes that “it has been said that the greatest ideological legacy left by the National Campaign was its contribution to the development of a national consciousness and the fact that it brought together all sectors of Costa Rican society” (Quesada Camacho, 2006:125). Manuel Belgrano, similarly, points out that “our enemies can have our liberty all they want, they can experiment with all our differences. In reality, those things are necessary for the formation of our national character” (127). Other scholars have alluded to Filibuster Wars’ role in implanting “the values of liberty, autonomy, and solidarity that unite the Costa Rican people” (126).

The Filibuster Wars not only united the Costa Rican people and consolidated a sense of national identity and sovereignty, but that it also instilled in Costa Rican consciousness a sort of cultural anti-imperialism—an enduring suspicion of political and economic encroachment on the country’s homeland. Marco Cabrera Geserick (2013) has written an insightful dissertation on the topic, arguing that “the fear of the return of a return of the filibuster is ingrained in Costa Rican consciousness, and it defines its national identity” (233). This cultural anti-imperialism, Geserick argues, took on new meaning during the 20th century, as a new wave of North American expansionism took hold. Geserick cites a 1907 article in *La Prensa Libre*, which states that “being Yankee filibusterism defeated fifty years ago, it still has not abandoned the main idea that guided it from the beginning. Now it takes the name of expansionism and it works, works without truce to reach the goal of its purposes. The danger grows larger against these five little pieces of a nation” (Geserick, 2013:237-238) The fear of the filibuster was

awakened once again in 1919, when a group of Costa Ricans and Nicaraguans marched into Costa Rica from the north with the intention of overthrowing President Federico Tinoco Granados. The government troops defeated the invaders, but only after at least 15 people were killed (Boza, 1981:34). In 1955, almost exactly 100 years after William Walker's invasion, another group of outsiders invaded Costa Rica from the north. Ordered by Nicaraguan dictator Somoza, and aided by a group of Costa Rican malcontents, the group attempted to overthrow President Jose Figueres—who had emerged victorious from the Civil War seven years earlier. The invaders were once again defeated. As Geserick points out, observers were quick to draw connections between the Somoza invasion and the Walker invasion 100 years earlier. One newspaper ran the headline “The Battle of Santa Rosa was as Definitive as the one a Hundred Years Ago” (317). The following year, Costa Rica commemorated the 100 year anniversary of the first Battle of Santa Rosa. Throughout the celebrations, the more recent threat to Costa Rican sovereignty was invoked. A 1956 article in *La República* explicitly connected the two events: “There, there are the heroes of 1856, and next to them, underlining the heroism of their grandparents, the sacrifice of their successors. God wanted to give Santa Rosa the double honor of being the scenario of two battles in which, with a hundred years distance, Costa Ricans fought for the same goal and achieved the same success” (Geserick, 2013:324). Repeated threats to Costa Rican sovereignty—as this type of discourse indicates, and as Geserick argues—had contributed to Costa Rican national identity. This identity was characterized by a fear of the filibuster and a firm commitment to defending its sovereignty and autonomy.

The contentious history of Guanacaste also made another important contribution to Costa Rican identity—this time in the form of a land conservation ethic. When William Walker invaded Costa Rica in 1856, the Costa Rican forces defeated Walker, then chose to memorialize—albeit over 100 years later—the defense of their sovereignty by creating a national park. A few years later, the government responded to another imperial threat—the presence of an estate owned by Nicaraguan President Somoza in *El Murcielago*—by expropriating the land and adding it to the park. When the CIA set up a covert airstrip in nearby Santa Elena in the 80s, the Costa Rican state responded in familiar fashion, seizing the land and again adding it to the park. Each time, land that was threatened by outsiders was converted into land reserved for the Costa Rican people. The establishment of Santa Rosa National Park in 1971 helped to initiate a wave of land conservation projects in Costa Rica—now constituting 28% of all land in the country.

It also contributed to an identity forged around the people's relationship with the land. Alvaro Ugalde—considered one of the two “fathers” of Costa Rica's national parks—once stated: “The way I used to explain it was that the parks were part of the Costa Rican soul” (Wallace, 1992:127). Noted conservationist Gerardo Budowski has described the parks as “a source of pride for the majority of Costa Ricans” (Evans, 1999:191). A government official in the Arias administration claimed that conservation was “as important to Costa Ricans as health and education” (Evans, 1999:181). Karen Olsen de Figueres—former first lady and influential advocate for the parks—described her intention to help “people become conscious of what God has given us...and of our responsibility as stewards of the land” (76). She went on to say “each person's value and responsibility brings unity and balance...and instills a consciousness of *who we are in*

Costa Rica” (76). For the former first lady, Costa Rica’s system of land conservation is a manifestation of Costa Rican identity. Former President Carazo, who expanded the park system greatly in the 1980s, invokes similar religious rhetoric to describe Costa Rica’s connection to the land: “Insofar as our faith teaches us that man was made in the image and likeness of God, we know that the creator gave us an important responsibility: to take care of that environment so wisely prepared as our home” (110).

Undoubtedly, Costa Rica’s responsible stewardship of the land and commitment to land conservation can trace its origins much farther back than 1971, or even 1856. Still, it is important to recognize that the national parks not only benefited from this ethic, but also contributed to it. It is *the parks* that are part of the Costa Rican soul, as Ugalde stated, not just the land more generally. It is also important to acknowledge that two of Costa Rica’s first three national parks were direct expressions of sovereignty, a symbolic statement about Costa Rica for Costa Ricans. The connection, then, between Costa Rican sovereignty, conservation, and national identity should be clear.

This process—of imperial threats spurring expressions of sovereignty via land conservation, thus contributing to national identity—is complex. It depends on the interactions between the Costa Rican state, the economic elites, and the popular sectors. The history of imperial incursions in Guanacaste, from the Walker invasion to the Santa Elena airstrip, brings to light several observable trends about the nature of these interactions. In each case, the conflict was state-based, pitting a powerful, foreign threat—acting at the behest of its economic interests—against a Costa Rican state intent on preserving its sovereignty. And in each case, we see a general trend of the Costa Rican

state spurning the interests of its own economic elites in favor of the perceived interests of the popular sectors, or perhaps the nation as a whole.

CHAPTER 2

Manuel Antonio: *Un Pedacito de la Soberanía Nacional*

Manuel Antonio National Park, located on the central Pacific coast of Costa Rica, is widely considered the gem of the Costa Rican national park system. Vernon Cruz, former park service employee, describes the park's magnificence: "all the vegetation from the whole coast, the dry forest in the north and the wet forest to the south, is combined there. And the forest comes right down to the water, so you can watch monkeys in the trees while you're watching the sunrise. The ocean is the best too, and when you combine it with the fragrance of the forest it's just fantastic. It's a pearl" (Wallace, 1992:46). Journalist and park advocate Miguel Salguero offers a more biblical depiction of Manuel Antonio: "if there's any place where the earthly paradise could be realized, it's Manuel Antonio. Here Adam and Eve could have lived happily, while the serpent would never have started the trouble." (Wallace, 1992:48). Salguero is right, at least in part—Manuel Antonio's scenery does bring to mind visions of paradise on earth. Its beauty, though, masks a contentious history—one in which the serpent plays a crucial role.

Manuel Antonio's history is marked by a power struggle for ownership between local communities, big capital, and the Costa Rican state. In the 1930s, Manuel Antonio was—like all beaches in Costa Rica at the time—public property. In 1939, though, the government traded Manuel Antonio to United Fruit Company (UFC) for another parcel of land. Albert Blackburn, a U.S. retiree and developer who eventually bought the land,

describes the agreement this way: “The government wanted several *finchas* belonging to United Fruit, so it traded the Manuel Antonio land for them. United Fruit got clear title to the land, including the beaches, by a special congressional dispensation” (*Tico Times*, 1/17/75). As part of the agreement, according to Blackburn, Manuel Antonio was exempted from the Costa Rican law proclaiming all beaches public property. United Fruit had little use for the land—the beach and the “steep headlands” above it were not suitable for growing bananas or oil palms (Boza, 1981:47). Furthermore, UFC was wary of resistance from local communities, according to Blackburn: “In 1960, United Fruit began to feel a little pressure, so rather than hang on to the land and incur the wrath of the Costa Ricans, it sold it to its chief engineer, a Tico by the name of Fabio Gongora” (*Tico Times*, 1/17/75). Gongora, in turn, sold the land to Blackburn in 1967. There was speculation that Blackburn “had ideas of developing a resort” (Wallace, 1992:47), In a 1975 interview, though, Blackburn made his development plans seem much less ambitious, consisting of a “nice development” with “a few homesites.” He intended to develop the area “carefully” with an eye towards “preserving its natural beauty,” he claimed (*Tico Times*, 1/17/75). His intentions aside, Blackburn erected iron gates on the two roads leading to the land, restricting local access.

The local community of Quepos, meanwhile, offered formidable resistance to the privatization of their local beach. The Costa Rican Communist Party, which had gained political power in the wake of the Great Depression and massive land takeovers by UFC, had a strong presence in Quepos, and provided the ideological opposition to the project. Not long after Blackburn constructed the iron gates, a group of Quepos residents tore them down. “Later the municipality of the region decreed that as a public road, the entrance could not be blocked.” (Boza, 1981:199) In 1971, Blackburn sold the land to a

group of French developers, led by Arthur Bergeron. Mario Boza claims that Blackburn grew tired of the community's aggressive opposition to the project. A 1972 newspaper article from *La Nación* seems to confirm Boza's opinion. It also sheds light on the almost universal—and passionate—opposition to the closing of the access road.

An old path, that for more than 40 years has been at the service of the people, which we have used to enter Manuel Antonio in the Jeep for 10 years, and that is the only way to block access to the area, was obstructed with an iron gate and other obstacles. Immediately the town, the media, the tourists, everybody reacted against the claims of the North American, and finally one night the people of Quepos destroyed the gate and the municipality indicated, as is logical, that a public path cannot be closed. Because of this, the owner of the property got tired of it and sold the land to the Frenchmen Arthur Bergeron (*La Nación*, 5/25/72).

In 1972, the new owners—led by French developer Arthur Bergeron—once again tried to prevent locals from accessing the beach. By this point, journalist Miguel Salguero was investigating the mounting tension in Manuel Antonio. In his article, he describes discovering “a gang of pawns” on the road, as well as “three enormous holes to position cement obstacles to prevent the passing of motorized vehicles.” When Salguero confronted Bergeron about the illegal closing of the road, Bergeron insisted that his actions were legal, arguing that “his lawyers had told him that he could close the route. And that he would only permit people entering on foot” (*La Nación*, 5/25/72).

Undeterred by the mounting opposition from the community, Bergeron and the developers “aggressively began to implement plans for a hotel, restaurant, and houses” (Wallace, 1992:47). Their plans, though, were again met with resistance from the people of Quepos. Protesters destroyed the barricades on numerous occasions, demanding access to Manuel Antonio. In response, the developers “went to a town meeting in Quepos and threatened to cut the forest, bulldoze the entire site, and sue the town for two million

dollars if the protests continued” (48). The developers’ hostility enraged the local residents. Shortly thereafter, they bombed the property’s newly-constructed fence.

As tension over control of the land continued to escalate, a prominent Quepos family—the Mora family—offered up a solution: the creation of a national park. “They’d heard about the national parks, and they called up Mario and told him about the beach, and wanted the Park Service to help them save it. So we began to take a look at that place. I went down there and talked to the people about the importance of national parks” (Wallace, 1992:48). The movement had an important ally in journalist Miguel Salguero, who quickly became a strong advocate for the creation of a national park. In a 1972 newspaper article about the Manuel Antonio controversy, Salguero formally declared his support for the national park idea. “To solve the problems that have come forth in this exceptional corner of our country, it seems to us that the best way forward is that the representatives, and we first offer the suggestion to Don Pedro Gaspar Zuñiga, make the decision to declare this site a national park” (*La Nación*, 5/25/72). Salguero’s advocacy for the project did not stop there, however. Trumpeting the suggestions of the Moras, Salguero urged local legislators to take a tour of the area and offered to accompany them.

Around the same time, the municipality of Quepos held a community meeting to discuss the national park proposal. Support for it was overwhelming, according to Mario Boza, prompting a group of legislators to agree to tour Manuel Antonio. Led by Deputy Zuñiga—and accompanied by public officials from Aguirre and Parrita, students from the local school, political activists, and other members of the public—the legislators visited Manuel Antonio in September of 1972 and investigated the possibility of creating a national park. They encountered a decidedly dire situation. Bergeron “has taken down the

trees and bushes and continues his plan to construct cabins with utter disregard for the natural treasure that this forest bordering the beach represents” (*La Nación*, 9/25/72). His plan, as they found out, was to build a tourist development consisting of a 20-room hotel, 12 cabins, a restaurant, and a marina. Bergeron had already begun to bring in construction materials for the project. Worse, but perhaps unsurprising, Bergeron’s development plans were being carried out with total disregard for the environmental health of the land. The lawmakers discovered that a patch of mangrove trees—vital components of the ecosystem—had been destroyed by the dumping of toxic chemicals (*La Nación*, 9/25/72).

When the group confronted Bergeron, he was characteristically defiant and hostile. He initially refused to speak with the legislators, and when he was approached a second time, he stated: “I won’t speak with anyone else except for the judge.” In light of Bergeron’s hostility, and inspired by the seemingly uniform support for the national park idea, the legislators filed a motion that day to halt Bergeron’s destructive activity in the area. “They also included in this motion a request to the budget commission to set aside half a million colones to cover the value of the property that would be acquired through the recreation of a national recreation park in Manuel Antonio” (*La Nación*, 9/25/72). The government agreed. In November of 1972, it passed Law Number 5,100, establishing Manuel Antonio Beach National Recreation Park, later changed to Manuel Antonio National Park. The land was valued at \$700,000, causing considerable dissent within the legislature about whether the expropriation was worth the money. Ultimately, “the Committee for the Development of the Manuel Antonio National Park, led by Mrs. Margarita Black de Mora, an enthusiastic local leader, together with the National park

Service, fought to maintain the park and to obtain the necessary funds, which were raised by 1975, by means of bonds issued by the government” (Boza, 1981:199). The community of Quepos had succeeded. The land was expropriated from the team of international developers—and in turn their clientele of wealthy tourists—and returned to the people of Quepos in the form of public land.

A Movement of the People

The process by which the people of Quepos demanded and asserted their sovereignty—and the complex and interacting roles of the state, bourgeoisie and the popular sectors—merit further attention. Journalist Miguel Salguero’s articles in *La Nación*, in which he passionately advocates for the creation of a park, offer valuable insight into the fears and concerns of local residents about the private ownership of Manuel Antonio. In one of these articles, Salguero described a conversation with local resident Don Hernan Ramirez, who told him that “now all the ocean-front land has been bought up.” Later, Salguero professed that “within a few years” Manuel Antonio will be “a place filled with houses and businesses” (Salguero, 5/25/72). Salguero also alluded to seeing “for sale” signs throughout the region, as well as a swath of prospective buyers. In his article, Salguero openly questioned the intentions of these buyers and alluded to the insidiousness of private ownership: “Are these buyers interested for themselves, or are they simply representatives of big companies? Is the presence of these people beneficial for the country, or on the contrary are they depriving the Costa Ricans, little by little, of one of the marvels that nature gave them?” (Salguero, 5/25/72a) The solution to the private ownership problem, he wrote, was a national park, through which “all Costa

Ricans would be assured that they can enjoy these marvels of nature, not just tourists with a lot of money” (Salguero, 5/25/72). Salguero was also quick to point out that Costa Rican beaches are, by law, public spaces—reserved for the Costa Rican people and free from private ownership. There were three exceptions to this rule, as Salguero outlined—the Anastasio Somoza estate in Murcielago, a property in Cascajal, and Manuel Antonio (Salguero, 5/25/72).

Here, Salguero makes an interesting pivot—shifting from articulating concerns about private ownership to highlighting concerns about private ownership *by foreigners*. These three exceptions, he wrote, were vestiges of the colonial era, and could be blamed on the King of Spain. Notably, Salguero also placed blame on the Costa Rican municipalities that were both empowered by and subservient to the interests of the Spain.

It seems that here the will of the King of Spain was applied. That is, in order to fund themselves, municipalities (“cabildos,” as they were called at this time) could make use of pieces of land that they sold or auctioned. The King’s will, that had been applied to these pieces of land, stated that the property lasts until “the water of the sea,” and not until the beach and, consequently, the owners affirm that they are the owners of the beach (Salguero, 5/25/72).

Here, Salguero drew clear parallels between the imperial threat posed by the predominantly foreign, 20th-century capitalists who were trying to privately control and profit from Manuel Antonio, and the Spanish colonists who conquered the land a few hundred years earlier. These two impositions not only parallel one another, but one *directly paved the way* for the other—suggesting that the legacies of imperial control are vast and self-perpetuating, and that they demand resistance.

Salguero also alluded to a more contemporary form of imperialism—financial imperialism—in describing the development of Manuel Antonio. “With international

financing—presumably from the IDB—InterAmerican Development Bank,” he wrote, “they constructed a road to the coast that puts these beaches just 10 minutes from a major interstate” (Salguero, 5/25/72a). With the help of the IDB, *los extranjeros* had bought up nearly all the farms along the road to Manuel Antonio, some at “an extremely low price.” He then offered the example of a farm that borders Manuel Antonio. Purchased for 60,000 colones five years prior, the farm had recently sold for 350,000 colones. There is a lot to dissect in Salguero’s commentary about the IDB and the increase in land value. Salguero, himself, wrote that the story is an indication of the “the tremendous increase of value of property in Quepos” (Salguero, 5/25/72a). Still, his reference to the IDB reveals a more nuanced, even if unintentional, point about the nature of 21st-century imperialism. Salguero suggests that the invasion of foreign capital in the Manuel Antonio region is not simply an organic phenomenon—a natural stage in the development and modernization of Costa Rica, governed by the laws of the market. Rather, an international organization that is ostensibly dedicated to providing foreign aid is directly facilitating this invasion, providing the infrastructure necessary to usher in foreign capital for development.

Scattered throughout Salguero’s writings about Manuel Antonio are other references to outsiders who threaten Costa Rican sovereignty—as the King of Spain did, and as current developers were, with the help of the IDB. The danger, according to Salguero, is not just private ownership, but rather private ownership by *extranjeros*—those incapable of understanding Manuel Antonio’s beauty and its place in the Costa Rican consciousness and identity. “Perhaps we are blinded by our nationalism. And the foreigners are not,” he wrote. And while it is easy to acknowledge that Manuel Antonio is unique, “they say it, we understand it” (Salguero, 5/25/72a). Elsewhere, Salguero makes

a more explicit connection between nationalism and the public ownership of Manuel Antonio. “Within a few days we will have the pleasure of singing our national hymn in a part of Manuel Antonio that is now in the power of just one person.” Later, Salguero openly questions whether international capital even belongs in Costa Rica: “But is it counterproductive, by definition, to have these businesses in Costa Rica? From an economic standpoint, no, but if we look at it from a social angle, yes” (Salguero, 5/25/72a).

Echoing the concerns of the local residents he interviews, Salguero also expressed skepticism about the influx of international tourists that would result from foreign development in Manuel Antonio. On this point, his tone was more conciliatory—more accepting of the benefits that foreign tourism can bring, but still concerned about some of its deleterious impacts. “What concerns the residents of the zone and the visitors is that the gradual occupation of the land will put all of the region in the hands of outsiders” (Salguero, 5/25/72a). While the presence of foreign owners and foreign tourists does not necessarily exclude access for Costa Ricans, practically speaking it almost certainly does. As hotel and lodging prices go up, “national tourism goes away.” And even if the beaches *were* public, but surrounded by tourist development, “it is very difficult for a local man that goes with his family to camp beneath the trees to want to do so among extravagant buildings and in the midst of a rich class of people with luxurious things” (Salguero, 5/25/72a). The problem, Salguero writes, is “the excesses,” “the luxury,” and “the showiness.” If the development of Manuel Antonio is left to the whims and desires of

developers and their foreign clients, and if it is done without “small hotels and cabins,” the Costa Ricans will be “displaced.”¹

Salguero’s activism was not limited to expressing the concerns of the citizenry, or even his own concerns. His writings contain direct calls for action by the state—stylistically more reminiscent of an editorial. He repeatedly called on the Costa Rican *state* to take action on behalf of the people—to represent the will of the Quepos residents, rather than the moneyed interests of foreigners. The state, he said, must “intervene to reserve zones that the local people can access without feeling diminished by the luxury and ostentatiousness” (Salguero, 5/25/72b). He then urged the state to do “a careful study of the region.” In his writings, he formally invited legislators to take a tour of Manuel Antonio. And he called on the state to create a national park. Based on the interviews he conducts for the articles—and the clear activism on the part of the Quepos community—his proposals and demands were representative of the will of the people. Salguero was, in some sense, a mouthpiece for the community.

Salguero wrote another article about Manuel Antonio in September of 1972, after visiting the area with the group of legislators and community members. In the article, he quoted several participants in *la gira*—revealing seemingly unanimous support for seizing the land from private developers and creating a sovereign, public space for the Costa Rican people. Nearly all the interviewees make reference to the threat posed by *extranjeros*—the potential for outsiders to undermine the access of *los costarricenses* to their own land. Marcial Aguiluz, for example—a member of *Acción Socialista* in San

¹ Within the literature on tourism, there is considerable discussion about the idea of exclusion. For a comprehensive account of the social challenges involved with tourism, see Martin Mowforth and Ian Munt’s book *Tourism and Sustainability: New Tourism in the Third World*.

Jose—stated: “We are here to defend a piece of our national sovereignty from the voracity of some people that have arrived to prevent Costa Ricans from swimming on the beaches of Manuel Antonio” (Salguero, 9/25/72). Another local deputy stated that his intention was to help “rescue and incorporate this beautiful patch of land for the service of the Costa Ricans.” Another stated that “anything that prevents this land from being for the Costa Rican people, must be eliminated.”

The intention of these organizers, it seems, was not to keep all *extranjeros* out of Manuel Antonio. Most struck a more moderate tone—asserting that outsiders must respect Costa Ricans’ access to the land, Costa Rican laws, and the land itself. “I’m not against foreign investment when they submit to our laws and don’t come to humiliate us.” Aguiluz stated. “The foreigners that want to live here with us,” another organizer proclaimed, “must respect our laws” (Salguero, 9/25/72). The local church was even involved in the movement, claiming that they were offering support for the creation of a national park “because it hurts to see nature getting destroyed.” Though each organizer articulates his concerns differently, they all express a fundamental desire to defend Costa Rican sovereignty—to protect the land, the laws, and the rights of the people.

The enthusiasm for the project was overwhelming, according to Miguel Salguero, drawing support from activists, the clergy, schoolchildren, and other residents of Quepos. “United we will rescue this piece of Costa Rica,” one organizer proclaimed. In describing the community meeting to discuss the possibility of a national park, Mario Boza also alludes to the widespread support for a park at Manuel Antonio: “The entire town, including the Association of Small Farming Enterprises, the Union of Progressive Councils, the Student Council of the Quepos High School, the Youth Movement of

Quepos and, at a national level, the Federation of Students of the University of Costa Rica, all declared themselves, in the middle of a gigantic rally, enthusiastically in favor of the creation of the park” (Boza, 1981:199). Compelled by this swell of public support for the national park idea, the state acquiesced and the park was established.

Despite the state’s apparent responsiveness to the will of the people, the precise role of the state in negotiating this conflict warrants further attention. It would be easy to portray the Manuel Antonio controversy as a stand-off between the international bourgeoisie and the local community of Quepos, backed by the Costa Rican state. This portrayal is largely misleading, though—especially in its treatment of the state. And while parallels can be drawn between Manuel Antonio and Santa Rosa—both involve imperial encroachments and the ensuing expression of sovereignty through land conservation—the two cases’ differences are equally notable. Indeed, the state’s role in protecting Costa Ricans’ access to their land in Manuel Antonio is dubious at best, and completely reactionary at worst. When Mario Boza—head of the national park service—first heard about the community’s desire to create a national park, he was reluctant. According to Vernon Cruz, “Mario was in some ways furious at what was happening because he had enough trouble with Poas, Santa Rosa, and Cahuita” (Wallace, 1992:46). The “trouble” that Cruz refers to was the resistance by local communities towards the creation of national parks in those three sites. What distinguished the Manuel Antonio case was that the movement was *driven* by the local community. The people wanted a national park, and they wanted the private developers out. Still, Boza had little interest in inserting the park service into a contentious political situation, or in confronting the powerful international developers who controlled the land. He “wished that it would just

go away at first” (Wallace, 1992:46). It was only after repeated acts of protest by Quepos residents—many of which were violent—that Boza began to consider the national park idea. And even then, he seemed hesitant. He originally intended to send a Peace Corps volunteer to check out the site. “He’d never been there; he didn’t have time,” (46) according to Vernon Cruz. But after another desperate call from the Mora family, and news of Bergeron’s continued defiance, Boza agreed to visit the site himself. Even after Manuel Antonio was established as a national park in November of 1972, there was considerable dissent within the government about the law’s passage. As Mario Boza describes, a group of legislators tried to “abolish the law with the pretext of the high cost of the expropriations (199). Boza credits the Committee for the Development of Manuel Antonio National Park, led by the Mora family, for fighting to “maintain the park and obtain the necessary funds” (199).

Similarly, Albert Blackburn’s account of the ownership struggles in Manuel Antonio lends itself to this more nuanced version of the land’s history and the social actors that have defined it, as well as the state’s complicity with big capital. As Blackburn points out in his interview with the *Tico Times* (1/17/75), it was the Costa Rican state that traded away this coveted stretch of beachfront property to United Fruit in 1939. And it was the Costa Rican state that agreed to exempt Manuel Antonio from the law declaring all Costa Rican beaches public spaces. This second point seems like a particularly big concession. The actual beaches of Manuel Antonio were—from the standpoint of agricultural productivity—presumably of little use to United Fruit. In fact, none of the land was particularly productive, according to Mario Boza’s assessment. Why the state would trade away some of its most beautiful beachfront property to a

multinational corporation that has little use for it demands further research. Once in possession of the land, according to Blackburn, United Fruit felt “pressure”—not because of fear of reproach by the state, or fear that the public beaches exemption would be stripped away. Rather they feared the “wrath of Costa Ricans.” It was the will of the people that threatened the private ownership of Manuel Antonio—not the power of the state.

Aside from the reluctance of the state to protect Costa Rican sovereignty in Manuel Antonio, there were other social actors—many of whom were Costa Ricans—who obstructed the cause. There is, for example, evidence of disloyal elites in the struggle over Manuel Antonio. The threat of the “wrath of the Costa Ricans, as it turned out—combined with the relative lack of productivity in Manuel Antonio—prompted United Fruit to sell the land to Costa Rican Fabio Gongora, who happened to be United Fruit’s chief engineer. While it is perhaps unsurprising that United Fruit had Costa Ricans—aside from its field workers—on its payroll, Gongora’s status as the *chief engineer* is enough to raise eyebrows. Again, it calls into question the clean characterization of the Manuel Antonio conflict as a confrontation between the imperialists and the Costa Rican resisters. It would be easy to label Gongora a member of the *lumpenbourgeoisie*—a term coined by Andre Gunder Frank to refer to the local elites who are subservient to and aligned with the neocolonial elites. United Fruit Company is, after all, a U.S. corporation seeking to profit from the exploitation of Costa Rican land and labor. And Gongora is a Costa Rican helping to advance UFC’s imperial project. Furthermore, United Fruit Company chose to sell the land to Gongora, providing further evidence for his stature as a protector of United Fruit Company interests. It seems

that local people also recognized the role of disloyal elites in the Manuel Antonio controversy. In one of Miguel Salguero's articles, a local activist blamed "a group of bad Costa Ricans, bad lawyers" who "advise these foreigners, whereby they appropriate the fringes of the law" (*La Nacion*, 9/25/72). The activist vowed to not let them succeed.

After Fabio Gongora sold the land to Albert Blackburn, the story of Manuel Antonio's ownership becomes more complicated—a tangled web of foreign capitalists and attorneys. As Blackburn described in his interview, he sought investors to develop the land, eventually reaching an agreement with French-Canadian Bergeron and an Austrian developer. The agreement came with a 3-month option, and when the two investors allowed the option to expire, Blackburn "assumed the deal was off" and started looking for new investors. Bergeron and his partner responded by filing a \$2.7 million lawsuit against Blackburn. On the advice of his lawyer, Blackburn agreed to Bergeron's demands to avoid the lawsuit, ultimately selling him the land in December of 1971 (*Tico Times*, 1/17/75). It was Bergeron who began restricting access to Manuel Antonio, not Albert Blackburn—at least that is what Blackburn says. This, of course, is a different story than the one told by Mario Boza, David Rains Wallace, and other scholars who have written about the topic. In their version, Blackburn began restricting access to the land and was met with local resistance, forcing him to sell the land. Regardless, Blackburn's testimony paints a vivid, but muddled, picture of the controversy. This picture has many subjects, with different alliances and cleavages. It is not simply a picture of the U.S. and its capitalists dominating the Costa Rican state and its land and workers.

Agrarian Reform

The people of Quepos' apparent concern about foreign ownership of Costa Rican land was part of a larger trend of economic nationalism sweeping across the country during the 1970s. In fact, in January of 1975—right around the time that the Manuel Antonio expropriation was being completed—Monseñor Roman Arrieta, Bishop of Tilaran in Guanacaste, publicly called for restrictions on the sale of land to foreigners (*Tico Times*, 1/31/75). 38% of land in Guanacaste, he claimed, was owned by foreigners. This, along with the size of landholdings, needed to be regulated through a quota system (Schmidt, 4/11/75). Shortly thereafter, President Oduber met with Arrieta to discuss his proposal. The Costa Rican people, at least those interviewed in the *Tico Times* article, were generally supportive of the idea. “There are people here with inexhaustible sources of money, and if land purchases are not watched carefully, the moment could conceivably arrive when we awaken to the fact that our land is completely in the hands of foreigners,” one interviewee stated (*Tico Times*, 1/31/75). Another lamented: “That’s the whole trouble. What if they do come here to work the land? Aren’t there enough starving Costa Ricans who could just as well do that? Foreigners only come here to take from us and never to give” (*Tico Times*, 1/31/75). As was the case with the Manuel Antonio situation, some people seemed more concerned about the *private* ownership of the land than the *foreign* ownership of the land. One respondent stated: “I’m not in favor of us selling our whole country, either to a handful of ‘Gringos’ or to a handful of ‘Ticos’” (*Tico Times*, 1/31/75). A local student expressed his opinion that the problem was not foreign or private ownership, but rather the way the land was used. The student recalled stumbling onto Anastasio Somoza’s uncultivated land in Guanacaste and being “thrown off by a

rifle-carrying guard.” The sale of land to people who do not intend to cultivate it, he claimed, should be illegal.

The real estate agents and retirees—those who would be most affected by the proposal—had mixed reactions. One retiree stated his belief that “there will be limits set on land utilization and also on size,” (*Tico Times*, 1/24/75) but that he didn’t think it would “really hurt *pensionados*” because the law would not be retroactive, and many retirees rent instead of buying. A U.S. real estate agent was more critical of the plan: “This will create total confusion for a while. It won’t help the economy, because anything that reduces economic activity is detrimental to the country. Everybody is saying to themselves: ‘Here we go again’” (*Tico Times*, 1/24/75). One North American landowner told *Tico Times* that he was “terrified,” and that he would advise any prospective foreign buyer to “get on the first airplane and go as far away from Costa Rica as they can” (Schmidt, 4/11/75). Costa Rican real estate agents, meanwhile, tried to reassure their predominantly North American clients. “Purchasing land in Costa Rica is always a good investment,” one real estate agent said. “But I am advising my clients that the way things are right now, an investment today is much better than an investment tomorrow” (Schmidt, 4/11/75:28).

Spurred by Bishop Arrieta’s proposal, and emboldened by the people’s enthusiasm for it, President Oduber spurned the capitalist class by announcing his support (Schmidt, 4/11/75). In his position paper about the topic, Oduber wrote: “The non-exploited lands of foreign companies must be exploited, in addition to transferring their property to Costa Rican companies and worker communities in an efficient and orderly fashion, to permit the formation of small landowners” (*Tico Times*, 4/4/75:1). He also

called for a freeze on land purchases in Guanacaste. In March of 1975, three proposed agrarian reform laws were presented to the National Assembly. Two of the proposals were moderate—calling for limitations on the size of landholdings, but making no reference to foreign ownership. The third plan, put forth by the communist party, proposed severely limiting foreign ownership of land. There was considerable dissent about agrarian reform within the Costa Rican political establishment. Former president Jose Figueres called the proposals “absurdities” (*Tico Times*, 5/2/75:10). Alfonso Carro, president of the National Assembly and key figure in Figueres’ National Liberation Party disagreed with Figueres. “Our land must not be in the hands of a few. If the land has been obtained legally, then it must be expropriated...I stress that all men have the natural right to enjoy the land” (*Tico Times*, 5/2/75:10).

In May of 1975, the *Tico Times* interviewed Vice President Carlos Manuel Castillo about agrarian reform. In a clear attempt to reassure foreign elites, Castillo emphasized throughout the interview that foreigners and foreign capital were welcome in Costa Rica, stating that they have “the same rights, privileges and obligations as Costa Rican citizens” (Schmidt, 5/16/75:1). He also stressed his belief that it would be “to the benefit of foreigners as well as Costa Rican nationals to control, in some fashion, the degrees of land ownership” (Schmidt, 5/16/75:1). President Oduber, too, seemed to take a more moderate position on agrarian reform in the months following Bishop Arrieta’s initial proposal. In a meeting with U.S. textile executives in August of 1975, President Oduber condemned “idiot nationalism,” stating that “if we don’t respect foreign investment, we will have to—please excuse the expression—continue planting *chayotes* and never escape from poverty.” (*Tico Times*, 8/15/75:1) A week later, he publicly stated

that “there will be no expropriation law here” (*Tico Times*, 8/22/75:1). Later, he admitted that his statement—and his seemingly more business-friendly tone—were direct responses to economic pressure. “Some months ago an anti-Costa Rican campaign started abroad, and various local businessmen and industrialists called me, alarmed by its effects. We felt a slump in both investment from abroad and in tourist movement” (*Tico Times*, 8/22/75:7).

This admission reveals a great deal about the state’s role in navigating the issue of agrarian reform. The theories posited by Nicos Poulantzas and Ralph Miliband, in particular, are useful in analyzing this role. In this case, the state’s dynamism seems to be its defining feature. The term *dynamism*, though—like Nicos Poulantzas’ formulation of the *relative autonomy* of the state—implies a certain degree of agency. As Ralph Miliband points out in his critique of Poulantzas’ theory of the state, this agency seems at odds with a structuralist understanding of capitalist society (Poulantzas, 1976). Poulantzas responds to this criticism by arguing that the relative autonomy of the state “can only be examined with reference to a given capitalist state, and to the precise conjuncture of the corresponding class struggle” (73). In other words, the autonomy of the state is limited and constrained by the existing balance of power in a particular context, characterized by “the relations between the bourgeoisie and its different fractions on the one hand and the working classes and supporting classes on the other” (73). In this formulation, the state is *close to* a blank slate, upon which a society’s class dynamics are transposed. The Costa Rican state’s apparent malleability in the agrarian reform negotiations lends itself to this interpretation. When a powerful member of the Catholic clergy called for restrictions on foreign ownership of land, and when those calls were

echoed and reinforced by economic nationalism among the popular sectors, the state responded. President Oduber positioned himself firmly in support of the Bishop's proposals—imposing a freeze on land sales in Guanacaste and advancing legislation to address the problem.

When the bourgeoisie, both local and international, countered by exerting pressure on the state, Oduber moderated his rhetoric and distanced himself from the more radical elements of the agrarian reform proposal. Ultimately, he supported a land reform bill that was some combination of elements from the three existing proposals in the National Assembly—a plan that was “acceptable to a wide spectrum of the country's political community” (*Tico Times*, 8/15/75). The plan stipulated that all agricultural and cattle land holdings exceeding 1,235 acres have 50% Costa Rican ownership. It was a notable victory for the economic nationalist movement, but not one that fundamentally altered the distribution of land and power in Costa Rica.

The state's support for land reform in response to pressure from popular sectors does provide evidence for the relative autonomy of the state. Still, it seems safe to characterize the state's actions as a concession—a way to appease the masses without alienating the elites. This fact speaks to another fundamental characteristic of the capitalist state, according to Poulantzas. “The (capitalist) state, in the long run, can only correspond to the political interests of the dominant class or classes” (73). In other words, the default image on the state's “blank slate” will always be the one dictated by the dominant classes.

The creation of Manuel Antonio National Park, like the contemporaneous agrarian reform debate, is best analyzed through the lens of Marxist theories of the state.

Unlike the case of Santa Rosa, the state's role in the Manuel Antonio conflict is complex, involving negotiations and changing alliances among several different actors—local communities, international capital and domestic capital. It was the state that initially ceded Manuel Antonio to United Fruit Company—a massive concession to international capital and a breach of Costa Rica's vow to maintain all beaches as public property. And it was United Fruit Company, no less—the dominant imperial enterprise in early 20th-century Central America. The land changed hands several times over the next few decades, mostly between international capitalists. Whereas at Santa Rosa, the state provided the impetus to both resist William Walker's initial imperial incursion and to express its sovereignty through the creation of a national park, in Manuel Antonio local community-members, with the help of journalist Miguel Salguero, were the driving forces. Their sustained resistance—sometimes violent—created an environment inhospitable to international capital. Only after Quepos residents had bombed barricades blocking entrance to the park, and only after Arthur Bergeron had become belligerent in the face of this opposition, did the state reinsert itself into the conflict over control of Manuel Antonio. Still, it was the Mora family, combined with the efforts of Salguero, who advanced the idea of a national park. Though the government was receptive to the idea, it was clearly reluctant.

The dynamic during the struggle over Manuel Antonio played out largely as Nicos Poulantzas would have predicted. Poulantzas, in his work *State, Power, Socialism* (1978), suggested that the state served as an intermediary between the masses and the ruling class. The state, he wrote, was closely aligned with the ruling class, but was cognizant of the need to appease the masses. Furthermore, according to this book, which

was his last, the state was the “condensation” of class expressions and a “strategic field” which reflected the relative strength of each class. This formulation helps to explain the Costa Rican state’s apparent reluctance to challenge capital interests, but its eventual capitulation in the face of sustained protest from local actors.

Aside from the social actors involved in Costa Rica’s defense of economic and territorial sovereignty in Manuel Antonio, the *form* that this resistance took is worthy of further analysis. The people of Quepos had a clear desire to seize Manuel Antonio from private foreign ownership and create a public, sovereign space for the Costa Rican people. They wanted to “defend a piece of national sovereignty” by creating a national park—a conservation zone in which both *la naturaleza* that contributes to its national identity, and the people’s sovereign right to access *la naturaleza*, could be conserved. Santa Rosa, too, was conserved as an expression of sovereignty in response to William Walker’s imperial project and several other encroachments during the 20th century. The creation and expansion of Santa Rosa National Park, though, was largely state-driven and was more symbolic in nature—evidenced by the fact that it was conserved more than 100 years after Walker’s invasion. The imperial threats that it was responding to—Walker’s invasion, the ownership of land by an unpopular Nicaraguan dictator, and the CIA airstrip—were more tangible threats, more militaristic and politically-charged. As a state-sponsored and largely symbolic gesture, the actual conservation of land at Santa Rosa did not have overwhelming public support, even if the expulsion of the imperial threats did. Manuel Antonio, on the other hand, was driven by the people. It was hardly symbolic. Rather, it was about *real public access* to the land. That a state-sponsored movement would be more symbolic, and perhaps less substantive, than a people-driven movement

should come as no surprise. The state, with the exception of the Santa Elena annexation, was less interested in challenging the dominant class than it was in celebrating a decades-old military victory.

When Manuel Antonio National Park was created in November of 1972, it was Costa Rica's third national park, right behind Santa Rosa. Both had been sites of imperial incursions. Both were created as expressions of sovereignty in resistance to those incursions. Together, they helped lay the foundation for a national system of land conservation that is now the envy of the world, and that represents an integral part of Costa Rican identity. This fact, perhaps more than any other, is a testament to the capacity of popular struggle and sentiment to alter history.

CHAPTER 3

The Third Cultural Invasion

Beginning in the mid-1980s, the tourism boom swept across Costa Rica. For 300 years, the country had survived by selling its cacao, coffee and bananas—and now, in the era of globalization, it was selling its biodiversity, its rich flora and fauna, its beaches and volcanoes. They came in droves. In 1984, 274,000 tourists visited Costa Rica, pumping \$117 million into the economy. Just 10 years later, 761,000 tourists and \$626 million arrived. By 1992, Costa Rica had been labelled “the number one ecotourism destination in the world” by the U.S. Adventure Travel Society. And by 1993, tourism was the country’s number one source of foreign exchange (Honey, 1999).

The customers were primarily upper-middle class North Americans and Europeans, many of whom were seeking a more wholesome, culturally-sensitive, and eco-friendly brand of tourism—termed “ecotourism.” Martha Honey (1999), who has written perhaps the most comprehensive account of the ecotourism phenomenon, defines ecotourism as “travel to fragile, pristine and unusually protected areas that strives to be low impact and (usually) small scale. It helps educate the travelers; provides funds for conservation; directly benefits the economic development and political empowerment of local communities; and fosters respect for different cultures and for human rights”¹ (25).

¹ Honey’s book contains a thorough description of the ecotourism phenomenon, as well as several in-depth case studies—one of which is Costa Rica’s ecotourism industry. Notably, she sheds light on the blurry distinctions between ecotourism and conventional tourism. Honey (1999) cites one of the participants in the 1994 World Congress on Tourism: “The word *ecotourism* became a buzz-word in the early 1990s, but so

For a host of reasons, Costa Rica was the ideal ecotourism destination. The system of national parks and protected land—initiated in 1971 to memorialize Costa Rica’s successful defense of its sovereignty in the Battle of Santa Rosa, and continued in 1972 in Manuel Antonio as a way to resist private development—had accelerated tremendously. By 1990, Costa Rica housed more than 200 protected areas. Today, nearly 30% of the country’s land is protected, far outpacing the global average of just 3%. For the United States to match Costa Rica’s percentage of protected land, it would need to conserve an area the size of Texas and Oklahoma, combined (Evans, 1999:7).

Two of Costa Rica’s early parks—Santa Rosa and Manuel Antonio—were clear expressions of national sovereignty. Furthermore, they were intended to protect Costa Rica’s unique biodiversity—representing 4% of the world’s total—and to foster scientific research. Tourism, as it turns out, was far from a priority, at least in the early years. In 1982, Alvaro Ugalde, director of Costa Rica’s *Servicio de Parques Nacionales* (SNP, later changed to SINAC), stated: “I will not resort to tourism as a way to maintain parks. Management of the ecosystem in parks in perpetuity is the Park Service’s main goal” (Evans, 1999:224).

Ugalde’s vision for the parks, however, was compromised by the debt crisis that consumed Latin America in the 1980s. Costa Rica, in its economic desperation, turned to the United States and international lending agencies to resolve the crisis. Financial assistance from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) poured into the country during the 1980s.

many different people used it in so many different ways that it has become virtually meaningless” (55). Given the difficulty of differentiating between conventional tourism and ecotourism, this chapter will focus on tourism at large.

Martha Honey (1994) aptly describes the magnitude of foreign aid in Costa Rica during this time.

By 1983, AID assistance had soared to \$212 million, a 27-fold increase over 1978. U.S. funding for the three-year period 1983 through 1985 equaled 35.7 percent of the Costa Rican government's operating expenses and averaged about 25 percent of export earnings. Between 1982 and 1989 Costa Rica received over \$1.2 billion in economic, military, and food aid, six times more AID support than in the previous three decades combined. During the 1980s, Costa Rica became the world's second-largest per capita recipient of U.S. economic aid, surpassed only by Israel (62).

But it came at a cost—namely, reliance on outsiders to save Costa Rica undermined the nation's economic and political sovereignty in concrete ways. In exchange for foreign aid, the U.S. enlisted Costa Rica as an ally in its covert war against the *Sandinistas*. Moreover, the U.S. government, World Bank, and IMF imposed several rounds of structural adjustment policies on Costa Rica, requiring the privatization of state-owned industries, promotion of exports, devaluation of the Costa Rican currency, the tearing down of domestic barriers to international investment, and decreased public spending—including for the national park system (Honey, 1994).

The tourism industry, and international capital, benefited tremendously. In 1984, the Costa Rican government passed a law providing tax incentives for hotels, transportation companies, car rental agencies, and travel agencies. The following year the Tourism Development Incentives Law went into effect, shielding tourism projects from property taxes, as well as import duties for construction materials and tourism-related vehicles. The tax incentives favored large-scale, international capital. To qualify, tourism facilities were required to have at least 20 rooms and conform to strict international standards and building codes, largely precluding local and small-scale investors. In 1987, the Costa Rican Tourist Board (ICT) passed another round of legislation to bolster the

tourism industry and encourage international investment, this time with USAID, which began offering tourism loans to U.S. and Costa Rican investors (Honey, 1999). As a result, the tourism structure in Costa Rica was two-tiered, “with small-scale tourist operations catering to less affluent visitors and passing on most profit to national and transnational tour operators” (Robinson, 2002:138).

Starting in the mid-1980s, tourism exploded in Costa Rica, thanks in large part to the legislation favoring international capital. Between 1985 and 1995, the number of hotel rooms in Costa Rica nearly tripled. Tourism surpassed coffee and bananas as the country’s primary source of foreign exchange in 1993. As Martha Honey describes, “Costa Rica’s world-renowned system of national parks and protected areas has served as the springboard for ecotourism” (140). Once envisioned as bastions of biodiversity, scientific research, and minimal domestic tourism, the national parks became the centerpiece of this new, outwardly-oriented tourism strategy. Foreign visitation to national parks doubled between 1984 and 1988, then doubled again between 1988 and 1992. 63% of international tourists visited at least one national park during the early 1990s. Total visitation to the national parks during this period was evenly split between foreigners and Costa Ricans, but the two groups had vastly different preferences. Between 1992 and 1996, for example, 66% of visitors to Santa Rosa National Park were Costa Rican—perhaps unsurprising given the park’s historic importance to Costa Rican nationalism. Tortuguero National Park, meanwhile, which some scholars have pointed to as an example of culturally-responsible tourism, saw just 4% of its visitors come from Costa Rica during this time period. 37% of visitors to Manuel Antonio National Park during the early 1990s were Costa Rican (Evans, 1999).

While international tourism and national park visitation was exploding in Costa Rica, funding for the national parks was running dry—in part because IMF- and World Bank-imposed structural adjustment policies mandated budget cuts. “Between 1981 and 1995, Costa Rica’s national park system received more than \$50 million in foreign donations, equivalent to about half its total budget and covering 90% of all parkland purchases” (Honey, 1999:140). Foreign capital infiltrated the national park system in other ways, too. Beginning in the late 1980s, “debt-for-nature” swaps came into fashion as a way to “avoid both the twin global disasters of economic collapse brought about by massive debt default and ecological collapse brought about by rampant deforestation.” (Evans 1999; 159) As part of the plan, foreign banks and international lending agencies would forgive some of Costa Rica’s national debt in exchange for conservation initiatives, typically carried out by the NGO Fundación Neotrópica. The negotiations were complex, involving international and Costa Rican banks, governments, and conservation organizations. Costa Rica, deemed a worthy target because of its economic and political stability, was just the third country to participate in the program. By 1991, \$40 million in Costa Rican debt had been wiped off the books. A large portion of the debt was erased in exchange for the creation of Guanacaste National Park, an expansion of Santa Rosa National Park and an attempt to protect and restore the region’s tropical dry forest. In describing the plan, Mario Boza remarked: “Debt swapping is the most important tool to achieve conservation. You multiply money by five. It’s a lot of money that’s free. We can use it to buy land, pay personnel, and do everything. It’s an incredible scheme” (Evans, 1999:159).

While the money may have been free, it represented part of a larger trend of private and international control of Costa Rica's economy, and its land. By the early 1990s, 80% of Costa Rican beachfront property was owned by foreigners (Honey, 1999:134). A 1996 survey revealed that 57% of Costa Rica's Pacific coast hotels and resorts were owned by foreigners. And people were starting to take notice. In 1997, former planning minister and current deputy of the Legislative Assembly Otton Solis stated, "until the early 1980s, the beaches were ours. Now all the best ones are American and Canadian owned. Costa Rican families can't go anymore. It's too expensive, and it's an alien culture. The signs and talk are all in English." Later in the interview, he alluded to the state's role in facilitating the invasion of large-scale, international capital through tax incentives: "to qualify you need a tourism contract, and to get a contract you have to have consultants and present feasibility studies, and all that is possible only for large companies. The big hotels get the tax exemptions, and the little things are left for locals" (Honey 1999; 137).

Private capital was invading Costa Rica's ecotourism industry in other ways, too. Starting in the 1980s, Costa Rica saw a proliferation of private nature reserves within its borders, mostly owned by "foreigners or international conservation organizations such as the World Wildlife Fund, Conservation International, and the Rainforest Alliance" (Honey, 1999:150). By 1996, an estimated 2 percent to 5 percent of Costa Rica's territory was occupied by private reserves. As Martha Honey describes, private reserves "receive a package of benefits including tax exemption on fixed assets, exemption from real estate tax, technical assistance with projects, and guaranteed expulsion of squatters within three days" (Honey, 1999:150).

The most popular of these private reserves is the Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve, now Costa Rica's number one ecotourism destination. In 1951, a group of North American Quakers—seeking to escape the military draft—settled in the area. The Quakers and other local residents set aside a 554-hectare patch of tropical forest to protect their watershed. In the 1970s, they were convinced by American biologist George Powell to create the Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve, to be managed by the San Jose-based Tropical Science Center. Over the course of the next few decades, the reserve continued to expand, funded by land purchases from North American conservation organizations and private individuals. Starting in the 1980s, tourists began flocking to Monteverde. By 1992, about 50,000 visitors were coming each year. Dozens of hotels, restaurants, and other tourist facilities began to spring up in the nearby community of Santa Elena. By 1994, the reserve was generating \$850,000 of revenue each year, more than all of Costa Rica's national parks combined. The money coming into Monteverde, though, has been distributed unequally, as one might expect. According to former director of the Monteverde Institute, “you have people with capital who can afford to build the hotels and people who come in and work as chambermaids and cooks. Yes, it benefits the whole community, but it's creating increasing differences in wealth as well” (Honey 1999; 155).

Manuel Antonio National Park

Manuel Antonio National Park—the origins of which were described at length in the previous chapter—provides a useful case study in analyzing the nature of 21st century global power dynamics, as well as the roles played by the state, the popular sectors, and

local business elites in defending or undermining Costa Rica's economic sovereignty. The establishment of Manuel Antonio National Park had been a clear expression of national sovereignty—a statement by the Costa Rican people that the country's most coveted land belonged to the people, not to private, mostly foreign business interests and international tourists. The legacy of outsider control that spurred the creation of the park, however, persisted after the park's creation in 1972. The influx of international capital into Manuel Antonio followed the same course that it did in the rest of the country—IMF- and World Bank-imposed structural adjustment programs deregulated the Costa Rican economy, ushering in big capital and a wave of international tourism.

Manuel Antonio and Quepos were consumed by this invasion. 31,000 tourists visited the park in 1980—the same year that the road from Quepos to Manuel Antonio was paved. By 1989, that number had more than quadrupled to nearly 130,000 tourist arrivals. In 1993, more than 180,000 tourists visited the park (van der Duim et al, 2001:60-61). And most of them were international tourists. Between 1992 and 1996, more than 650,000 tourists visited Manuel Antonio—just 37% of them were Costa Ricans. While foreign visitation to the national parks at large hovered around 50%, statistics from other parks during that time period reveal huge discrepancies in foreign visitation. Just 3.6% of visitors to Tortuguero National Park were Costa Ricans, whereas 66% of visitors to Santa Rosa National Park were Costa Ricans (Evans, 1999). According to research by DeShazo and Monestel (1999), total tourism expenditures in Manuel Antonio outpaced all the other national parks by a significant margin, reaching nearly \$12 million per year, with foreigners accounting for about \$8.5 million. In Santa Rosa, by contrast, tourists spent less than \$3.5 million—more than half of which was from Costa

Ricans. The question of where, exactly, Manuel Antonio's tourist dollars go—how much benefits the local economy and how much is lost to “leakage”—is worthy of further research. If the experience of the country as a whole is any indication, only a small percentage of tourist spending actually benefits the local economy. A USAID study revealed that for U.S. travelers to Costa Rica, half of their tourist dollars never left the U.S., and only 20% actually benefited the local economy (Honey, 1999:89). Another study showed that in Tortuguero National Park, just 6% of tourist spending stayed within the local community. Given the high rates of both foreign visitation and foreign ownership, it seems safe to assume that leakage in Manuel Antonio may occur at an even higher rate than the national average, and perhaps as high as in Tortuguero.

In their 2001 study on tourist development in Manuel Antonio, van der Duim et al reflect on just how jarring the transition to international tourism was: “Quite suddenly, a primarily agrarian economy, in an area with little or no infrastructure and with a population having little or no education in marketing and business management, had to contend with over a hundred thousand tourists a year” (61). As tourists continued to flock to Manuel Antonio, tourist development followed close behind, thanks in part to *La Ley de Incentivos* of 1985. The law, aimed to facilitate foreign tourist development, offered tax exemptions of up to 50% for businesses in the tourism industry. By the year 2000, there were more than 70 lodging options in the area. An additional 80 restaurants were open for business—60% of which are owned by foreigners (61). Of the 59 kilometers of coastline in the municipality—not including the park itself—50 kilometers are owned by foreigners. The park, according to van der Duim et al “has scattered development with no planning due to the general lack of government assistance, local inexperience in business,

lack of zoning and the influx of foreign investment” (62). A 1999 newspaper article in the *Tico Times* paints a bleak picture of the development of Manuel Antonio. It is worth quoting at length.

Bulldozers and dynamite are used to clear forested hillsides. A rare, endangered monkey species is driven out of its habitat. Sewage drains into a beachfront lagoon. Illegal development is sprouting up in protected coastal lands. Large parcels of land are marked for sale in the middle of the National Park. These are some of the abuses in and around the popular National Park of Manuel Antonio, one of the most scenic stretches of Costa Rica’s central Pacific Coast. Local environmental authorities, business-owners and nature-lovers are extremely worried...At the root of the problem, critics claim, is a local government that openly flouts the law and turns a blind eye to violations...In the hills, overlooking Espadilla beach at Punta Quepos point prized for its spectacular views, dynamite has been used to carve out a niche in a partly-forested hillside to build a luxury house to entertain Hollywood stars...The most glaring evidence of recent development are two half-built three story blocks of apartments on a former wetland, immediately adjacent to the border of the national Park and 250 meters from its entrance (Escofet, 1999).

There is a lot to unpack in this scathing article—reminiscent of the articles Miguel Salguero wrote 30 years earlier to critique the exact same phenomenon. The journalist seems to place the blame squarely on the shoulders of the local government, alluding to corruption and negligence in the regulation of Manuel Antonio’s development. The consequences, according to this article, have been environmental destruction, an influx of “Hollywood stars” and other wealthy outsiders, and distasteful and unplanned development.

The critique put forth by the *Tico Times* seems to loosely reflect the opinions of the people of Quepos. According to van der Duim et al’s survey, 81% of Quepos residents believed that tourism had changed their daily lives. On whether this change was positive, the people were split—54% had a positive valuation of the change. 91% of people believed there was too much economic dependency on tourism. 57% said the

amount of tourist lodging should be limited. 65% said the hotels are seriously affecting the environment. And 45% believed that tourism is causing many problems.

The survey respondents' valuations of both the role of the government and the role of outsiders were considerably more negative. When asked about their assessment of local tourism policy, 54% of respondents had a negative opinion, while 42% had no opinion or chose not to respond. About three-quarters of respondents stated that the government's tourism policy should change. Respondents also cited "'passivity' of the municipality, corruption, and no support of community development" to explain their dissatisfaction (88). Notably, many respondents believed that the government *was not doing enough* to promote tourism. They favored an increase in tourism during the low season (84%), and believed that tourism strengthens their local identity (89%). The problem then, according to Quepos residents, was not tourism; it was the local government.

The Resistance

One local activist seemed to disagree with this assessment. By his estimation, tourist development *was* the problem, and it represented a continuation—albeit in a different form—of centuries of imperial control of Costa Rica. The activist referred to tourism as the "third cultural invasion," after the Spanish conquest and the infiltration of the banana companies. "Not the tourists themselves are the biggest problem, although their environmental consciousness leaves a lot to be desired. The biggest problem are foreigners who use Manuel Antonio as a 'laundry,' laundering their money" (61).

The people of Quepos, too, were wary of who was exerting influence over the local government. 89% of respondents believed there was too much external influence on tourism policy. This “external influence” came at the expense of the people’s own influence, according to the survey. More than half of them believed that opportunities for local participation in policy-making were inadequate. This particular grievance was forcefully expressed by the people of Quepos in 2000. On November 21st, 20 Quepos community members went to a Municipal Council meeting with the intention of presenting a petition to the municipal leaders. Their petition demanded the resignation of the current municipal leaders on the grounds that they were corrupt and had mismanaged tourist development in the area. Specifically, the protestors opposed the sale of a parcel of public land near the entrance to Manuel Antonio. The other, perhaps more serious, grievance was that the municipal government had halted the construction of a community center for art, culture, and sport “for which the community had fought for more than 10 years” (Parra Aravena, 2000). Mostly, though, they sought public participation in the decision-making process. One protestor, a member of *El Comité de Lucha y Defensa del Cantón de Aguirre*, articulated the protestors’ concerns: “The problem is not so much that the council doesn’t execute projects. It’s that they prevent the community from participating and that they’ve taken away our right to express ourselves” (Parra Aravena, 2000).

When the petitioners arrived at the council meeting, petition in hand, the council refused to receive them. Instead, they terminated the meeting and left the facility, seemingly confirming the protestors’ claim that their voices were being ignored. In response, the group of protesters vowed not to leave the building until their demands

were met. Other Quepos residents, meanwhile, gathered outside the building in a show of solidarity. The occupation lasted more than 24 hours (van der Duim et al, 2001: 88). Though their demand for the resignation of municipal leaders was not achieved, the protesters brought national attention to the ills of tourism development in Manuel Antonio—namely, that the government was listening to outside influences, but not to the local people.

The people of Quepos resisted outsider control of their government and their land in other ways, too. One of the biggest sources of contention was a proposed \$30 million tourist development project managed by Spanish-owned *Inversiones Turisticas del Pacifico S.A.* The company planned to “construct three marinas for 800 boats (cruise ships and yachts), two malls, a bus terminal, a parking lot, a hotel, a gas station, and a sports complex” (*La Nación*, 9/6/2000). The gaudiness of the proposal aside, “the spark that lit the fire” was again the government’s allegedly corrupt role in authorizing the project. In 1999, the government of Quepos had granted the company a 50-year concession to complete the project “without first presenting to the project to the Interinstitutional Commission of Marinas and other state agencies, as the law stipulates” (*La Nación*, 9/6/2000).

The people of Quepos, led by *El Comité de Lucha y Defensa del Cantón de Aguirre*, resisted what they perceived to be government corruption and the undue influence of outside business interests. A leader of *El Comité* vowed “We’re going to fight until the end on this. We have very good proof. There’s nothing to negotiate with the Spanish because the law has been violated” (*La Nación*, 9/6/2000). Accordingly, *El Comité* filed a complaint with the ICT’s Marina Commission. In light of the apparent

local opposition to the project, Balbino Alegre—representative of the proposed marina—complained about the “anti-outsider” attitude of the people, and seemed to criticize the local government for mischaracterizing their opinions. Costa Rica promotes itself “as a country open to foreign investment, when that’s a myth,” Alegre stated. “They tricked us because they told us that Quepos wanted a marina, and now they don’t want one. This is a mockery. I’m an idiot that arrived here to do something stupid” (*La Nación*, 9/6/2000). The municipal president, meanwhile, remained steadfast in his support for the project. According to *La Nación*, he stated: “this is political ‘retaliation’ and a ‘fear of competition’ on the part of the group that opposes the project, in which there are many business people.” The presence of local businesspeople among the opposition suggests a more loyal faction of the local bourgeoisie.

The municipal government’s alliance with the Spanish developers went beyond the 50-year concession and the rhetorical support, though. The developers were also granted the rights to “continue construction of a \$4 million 100-room hotel and shopping plaza at Playa Espadilla” (Pashby, 9/1/2000:7). In turn, *El Comité*, along with the local business chamber, accused Alegre and Quepos Mayor Joaquin Gomez of corruption. Alegre insisted that he did not bribe Gomez, but admitted that “he did offer Gomez, Municipal Council President Giovanny Acuña and Gomez’ daughter a reconnaissance trip to the Canary Islands to see some of the company’s other marinas.” Furthermore, he claimed that his original intention was to build the marina in nearby Puntarenas, but that the municipal government of Quepos convinced him to consider Manuel Antonio. “I said ‘Sure. Where would you like it?’ Quepos is so beautiful, and it has the third-best sport fishing in the world. This is a logical choice. But if they don’t want me here, I’m

prepared to go somewhere else” (Pashby, 9/1/2000:7). Despite the local government’s support for the project, the marina was never built, thanks in part to the work of *El Comité* and other local activists.

A third threat to the sovereignty of Manuel Antonio also emerged during this time. Though the park had been established nearly 30 years earlier, the government had yet to pay off 46% of the expropriation debts that it owed to the previous landowners. The delay in payment was primarily due to a dispute between the Municipality of Aguirre and *El Ministerio del Ambiente y Energía (MINAE)* about who would pay and how much. Their dispute, as it turned out, had put the park in great peril and threatened to “cut the park in half” (Segnini, 2/4/2000). The dispute’s capacity to erode Manuel Antonio’s sovereignty, in fact, had already begun. According to *La Nación*, “While 120 million colones—raised between 1998 and 1999—wait in a bank account, a nine-hectare property was already separated from the park and now another, of 42 hectares—called La Tepezcuintla—is in the process of being sold to a group of foreign hotel investors” (Segnini, 2/4/2000). Murillo Bejarano, who had owned nine hectares within the park’s boundaries, grew tired of waiting for payment and petitioned MINAE to convert the land into a private reserve. MINAE authorized the plan. “These nine hectares that were previously a part of the park are now part of a private reserve on Playa Espadilla, which can only be accessed by clients of the hotel on the property and those who want to pay \$2 to enter” (Segnini, 2/4/2000). La Tepezcuintla, a 42-hectare farm within the park, was undergoing a similar process—though one that was perhaps even more insidious. According to Mauricio Marin, the farm’s lawyer, the owners of the farm were in negotiations with a group of foreign developers who intended to build a hotel. The

government, said Marin, had already breached the contract and was thus unable to stop the sale of the land. Manuel Antonio National Park—created as an expression of sovereignty—had already been surrounded by foreign capital and infiltrated by foreign tourists. Now, as a consequence of government ineptitude, private interests were threatening to buy up land *within* the park.

In response to the government's mishandling of the expropriations and the apparent threat to the park's future, Harald Holler—a member of *El Comité de Lucha y Defensa del Canton de Aguirre*—published an editorial in *La Nación*. “Although the community of Aguirre has protested on various occasions asking the municipal council and the mayor to step down, to this point those responsible for the destruction of the environment in Canton continue in their posts,” Holler wrote. “I hope that this article can help generate help...to finally solve the problem of PNMA [*Parque Nacional Manuel Antonio*] and protect the virgin terrain inside and on the outskirts of the park” (Holler, 5/23/2000). The dispute was eventually resolved, and Manuel Antonio National Park was preserved.

Other examples of corruption and inadequate government oversight abound—and many of them came to head in 2000. The Maritime Zone Law—passed in 1977 to prohibit construction or private ownership of land within 50 meters of the high-tide mark—was the source of much contention during this time (Pashby, 6/30/2000). On June 13th, 2000 the Marina Hotel, Bar and Restaurant was demolished on the grounds that it was in violation of the law. The owner of the property, José Antonio Zuñiga, was municipal president at the time, and was able to get the project approved despite the fact that it was clearly in violation of the law. Recall that this was the same José Antonio

Zuñiga who decried the privatization of Manuel Antonio in the 1970s and called for a national park—all of which was documented in Miguel Salguero’s articles in *La Nación*. Zuñiga was sentenced to two years in prison for violating the law. According to the *Tico Times*, there were other properties in Manuel Antonio that violated the Maritime Zone Law. And in the country as a whole, between 10 and 15 potential violations were processed each year (Pashby, 6/30/2000). Zuñiga’s actions—both as a local businessperson and as a member of the community council—provide some evidence for an enduring and disloyal local bourgeoisie in Costa Rica. Just as the coffee elites had the audacity to oppose the Filibuster Wars, Zuñiga had the audacity to deliberately violate the maritime law in pursuit of profit. Whether Zuñiga was connected to bigger sources of capital is unclear. According to William Robinson, though “capitalists in any part of the world beyond the smallest of scale find that they must globalize or perish” (30). The threat of perishing in the face of an influx of global capital could help to explain why Zuñiga violated the law in the first place.

Another law related to tourism development—the Law of Tourism Incentives—was the source of ineptitude and corruption on the part of the state. Passed in 1985, the law granted certain tourism companies tax exemptions of up to 50%. The law was rescinded in 1992, but tourism enterprises that were established under the law continued to claim their exemptions throughout the 1990s. An internal audit by the ICT in 1999 “revealed misplaced files, poor accounting, disregard for the incentive’s rules and insufficient on-site verification of projects” (Pashby, 5/19/2000). A report from the Comptroller General the following year found “numerous irregularities and outlandish expenditures,” and estimated that about \$12 million had been illegally kept from the

government coffers. In light of these revelations, the law was abolished in 2000. And despite opposition from the National Tourism Chamber, companies who qualified between 1985 and 1992 were no longer eligible.

The state was forced to take further action to protect Manuel Antonio in November of 2000 by expanding the park from 683 hectares to nearly 1800 hectares. The reason for the park expansion was clear: overdevelopment was ruining Manuel Antonio. In justifying the measure, one park official stated “If we continue to build and build, allowing hotels without proper planning or thought, we are going to have a cement jungle.” In order to “counteract nearly three decades of virtually untrammelled tourism-directed growth,” the state intended to create a biological corridor to protect the land’s ecological integrity. On November 17th, the land—already state-owned, and thus not requiring expropriation—was added to Manuel Antonio National Park, nearly tripling its size (Wolkoff, 12/1/2000). One member of the Ministry of Environment even called for a construction freeze in the area, citing “28 years of poor planning.” A park created in defiance of private, mostly foreign development had been overrun by private, mostly foreign development.

The story of Manuel Antonio’s tourism development—and how private capital came to dominate a space previously reserved for its resistance—is complex, involving a fundamental tension between the people of Quepos and the private interests that control the area’s economic development. In between are local and national governments seeking to negotiate this conflict. The encroachment on Costa Rican sovereignty—the imperial threat—is much the same as the threat posed by William Walker and United Fruit Company and Arthur Bergeron—the control of Costa Rican land and resources by

private, predominantly foreign interests. Still, the dynamics between the state, the people, and private capital differ considerably from the first two cases. The role of the state in particular seems more deferent, more beholden to private interests, less responsive to the desires of the local community. The Costa Rican state had led the resistance against William Walker's imperial project. It had been passive, but still responsive, in the ownership struggle over Manuel Antonio. Conversely, during Manuel Antonio's ecotourism boom, the state more directly facilitated the influx of big capital into Manuel Antonio, mostly through tax incentives and other policies favoring international, large-scale tourism development. The state oversaw "28 years of poor planning." And when it came time to pay off its expropriation debts for the land—to ensure the park's survival—the state failed to do so. Though the state was instrumental in expanding the park in 2000, it only did so to compensate for the unchecked development that it had facilitated.

Still, an understanding of the state's role in Manuel Antonio's ecotourism boom would be incomplete without consideration of the political and economic climate. The debt crisis of the 1980s, and the need to receive foreign aid to resolve the crisis, placed Costa Rica at the mercy of the USAID, World Bank and IMF. One USAID official described the arrangement this way: "We are not Santa Claus. It's obvious with resources come responsibilities" (Honey, 1994:51). In the case of tourism, those responsibilities took the form of tax exemptions and incentives that favored large-scale, international capital. It would be tempting to label this type of manipulation by the U.S. government as state-based hegemony. William Robinson, though, cautions against this conception of global power. "In my view we need to move away from a statist

conception of hegemony—from *statism*—and revert to a more pure Gramscian view of hegemony as a form of social domination exercised by social groups and classes operating through states and other institutions” (38). Instead, the *transnational state* (TNS) is a vehicle through which the rich dominate the poor. The U.S. government, in Robinson’s conception, is not operating on behalf of U.S. capital, but rather on behalf of global capital. “The IMF, for instance,” Robinson wrote, “by imposing a structural adjustment policy that opens up a given country to the penetration of transnational capital...is operating as a transnational institution to facilitate the exploitation of local labor by global capital” (34). Many of the U.S.-imposed structural adjustment programs, after all, paved the way for European, Asian and even Costa Rican capital—not just U.S. capital.

The transnational state represents just one component of the reconfigured global power structure that Robinson describes. Others include “owners and managers of the transnational corporations and private financial institutions...bureaucratic managers and technicians who administer the agencies of the TNS, such as the IMF, the World Bank and the WTO...and an array of politicians and charismatic public figures” (39). Tourism as an industry, according to Robinson, is one of the main beneficiaries—and drivers—of this new stage of global capitalism. This is evidenced by the fact that “Latin American states have actively promoted tourism in collaboration with the local private sector and transnational capitalists” through deregulation, tax incentives, publicity campaigns, and others. The Costa Rican experience seems to confirm Robinson’s assessment. We see an influx of international capital coupled with large-scale local capital—and all of it is subject to the policy demands of transnational financial organizations, namely the World

Bank and the IMF. The public sector, meanwhile—particularly in the area of land conservation—has been defunded and supplanted by transnational NGOs. The results have been “increased social differentiation, reduced access for local people to land and other resources, escalating prices and land speculation, and a deterioration of the local ecosystem” (Robinson, 2008:144). Again, Robinson cautions his reader not to conceive of tourism as a core-periphery accumulation project. “The notion popularized in the underdevelopment literature of tourism as a form of colonialism is valid insofar as it refers to the colonization—for the purpose of providing services and making profits—of some social groups in global society by others, but not some nations by others. Global tourism reflects the domination of the rich over the poor in global society” (140).

The resistance to global capital’s invasion of Manuel Antonio is also worthy of further attention. Notably in the case of Manuel Antonio, much of the counter-hegemonic resistance, at least around the year 2000, was directed at the municipal government. When surveyed about tourism in the region, most of the respondents in Quepos complained about inadequate government oversight and a lack of local participation. In November of 2000, when community members occupied the municipal government building, their primary grievance was the prioritization of tourist development over the town’s new community center. In other words, the threat to Manuel Antonio’s sovereignty—their ability to make decisions about their land and resources—came from their own local government, not just from a group of wealthy outsiders. This perception illustrates a few things about the nature of a globalized capitalist society. First, it lends itself to Robinson’s idea of the transnational state as a vehicle through which the global ruling class exerts dominance. From their viewpoint,

the municipal government is what subordinates them and restricts their participation. While this might or might not be true, the fact that they perceive it as such is indicative of how closely wedded the state and big capital are. That is to say that the potential misidentification of the oppressor speaks to the cooperation and coordination among the transnational capitalist class—the owners and managers, bureaucrats and politicians, the World Bank and USAID. The people’s resentment of the municipal government—and the rejection of *statist* conceptions of global power—both suggest that sovereignty is increasingly difficult to define. If the state is, as Robinson says, thoroughly integrated into the transnational power structure, then perhaps national sovereignty as a rallying cry has been replaced by local sovereignty or popular sovereignty.

The people of Quepos are right, in that sense, that the municipal government is one of the enemies. But the people’s resistance in Quepos and their political victories—the decision not to go ahead with the marina project, the overturning of the Law of Tourism Incentives, and others—illustrate that the transnational state remains “contested terrain.” It is, according to Robinson, a space occupied by “transnational social groups and their struggles to develop hegemonic and counter-hegemonic projects” (38). The hegemonic projects in Manuel Antonio are preeminent, but the counter-hegemonic projects are not invisible. Though Robinson is not in direct conversation with Nicos Poulantzas, their ideas about the role of the state in capitalist society are similar in that they both envision the state as a space for contestation. Still, the resistance that does exist in Manuel Antonio seems more fragmented and ineffectual. The victories seem smaller. The people, according to the surveys, are more supportive of tourism, and they are not united in opposition to capital. This could be a reflection of the genuine and

tangible benefits that tourism has brought to the community. It could also be a reflection of the muddled composition of the global ruling class, as alluded to earlier, and the difficulty of identifying the oppressor. In other words, perhaps the weakened resistance is a consequence of misguided animosity towards the local government.

The other component of this transnational social dynamic is the enduring presence of local capital. Despite the influx of international capital, by the year 2000 still 40% of restaurants in the region were owned locally. This, according to William Robinson, is a trend in the region, and a defining characteristic of global capitalism. “These groups are not lackeys of imperial capital,” he wrote, “but agents of new economic opportunities opened up by the integration of Central America into the global economy and the elevated cross border flow of human beings it brings” (141). Though not necessarily subservient to international capital, local capital must still “de-localize and link to transnational capital if they are to survive” (30). The specifics of this process in the case of Manuel Antonio merit further research.

The other conclusion to be drawn from the invasion of global capital into Manuel Antonio concerns both the malleability and intrusiveness of global capital. Manuel Antonio was conceived as a space of resistance—an anti-capitalist, sovereign island in a sea of global capital. That it has been overrun by global capital and its clientele of tourists is a testament to the challenge of resistance in the 21st century, as well as the limitations of carving out a bastion of sovereignty in an otherwise globalized world. It also speaks to the capacity of global capital to infiltrate *every* space, even the ones reserved for resistance. This phenomenon is especially evident through “greenwashing,”

a form of capital cooptation with which many of Manuel Antonio's invaders are familiar.²

The imperial threat represented by Manuel Antonio's tourism industry is different in that sense. Transnational capital is using the national park—public, sovereign space borne out of resistance—as a new space to accumulate capital through the exploitation of land and workers. On a more fundamental level, though, big capital's invasion of Manuel Antonio is the same threat posed by William Walker, United Fruit Company, and Arthur Bergeron—outsider control of land and resources. The particularities are different. The Costa Rican state, a leader of resistance and protector of sovereignty during the Walker invasion, has become a facilitator in the tourism invasion. The people's resistance, too, is less unified and organized. This could be because this imperial incursion is simply not as bad, or perhaps not bad at all. Whether the influence of outsiders is good or bad for Costa Ricans is beyond the scope of this paper. The character of this influence—as well as the character of its resistance—is not.

² See Honey (1999) for a discussion of “greenwashing.”

CONCLUSION

The events described in this paper—spanning 150 years—compose a comprehensive narrative of Costa Rica’s post-Colombian history. That history begins with military conquest—with a powerful, imperialist nation attempting to seize Costa Rican land and extract resources and labor. Spain succeeded in its conquest, ruling Costa Rica for more than 300 years. William Walker and *los filibusteros* did not. Still, their project—occurring less than 40 years after Spain’s ended—was largely the same. Both represented the kind of classical imperialism that Lenin described, in which the rich nations dominated the poor.

William Walker’s failure to conquer Costa Rica, and Central America as a whole, was due in large part to the formidable resistance put forth by the Costa Ricans—notably the leadership of the Costa Rican state and the widespread support of the people. But their enemies were formidable, too. Walker had already seized control of Nicaragua and declared himself President. Moreover, Costa Rica’s own coffee elites opposed the war for its potential to threaten their economic standing. The fact that President Mora and the Costa Ricans spurned the interests of the economic elites and defeated *los filibusteros* is a historical reality with vast consequences. Most obviously, it preserved Costa Rica’s—and Central America’s—sovereignty and independence, sparing them from another potentially long-lasting period of brutal and oppressive colonial rule. Costa Rica’s victory also helped preserve the balance of power between the Union and the Confederacy in the

United States, preventing the slave-states from gaining the upper hand. Historical *what ifs* are always speculative and often misleading, to be sure, but one cannot help but imagine the repercussions of an emboldened Confederacy on the eve of the U.S. Civil War.

The Battle of Santa Rosa had important consequences for Costa Rican national identity, too. Scholars have credited the event with instilling “the values of liberty, autonomy, and solidarity that unite the Costa Rican people” (Quesada Camacho, 2006:126). This, of course, was not a given in Costa Rica in the 1850s. Costa Rica, as a nation-state, had existed for less than 20 years. Its northern neighbor, Nicaragua, had fallen victim to internal dissent—paving the way for William Walker’s ascendancy. The sense of unity and autonomy that helped Costa Rica defeat Walker was only strengthened after the nation’s victory. So too was Costa Rica’s cultural anti-imperialism. The filibuster, in fact, became a durable symbol in Costa Rican discourse—an ever-present reminder of the imperial threats facing the nation and the unified resistance that was required to defeat them.

Those threats would reappear during the next phase of Costa Rican history, albeit in a different form. Starting in the second half of the 19th century, the nation began the process of economic liberalization. As regional and global trade began to proliferate, the market for Costa Rica’s prime agricultural products—coffee, fruit, livestock—expanded outward. International capital, meanwhile, rushed in to provide the extractive infrastructure for the products. The most notable of this new wave of invaders was United Fruit Company—a mammoth U.S. neocolonial enterprise that extracted resources and exploited labor in Costa Rica for decades, while also wielding considerable economic and

political power. Other foreign capitalists came, too—among them, tourism developers who sought to capitalize on Costa Rica’s tropical forests and beaches.

The influx of international capital consumed Manuel Antonio in the early-to-mid 20th century, as it did throughout the country. Ownership of the beach-front property traded hands several times between United Fruit Company and a series of international developers. As international capital tightened its grip on one of the nation’s most coveted patches of land, the local community resisted. After repeatedly destroying barricades restricting their access to the beach, the community came up with a plan: to expropriate the privately-owned land and create a sovereign space for the Costa Rican people in the form of a national park. The state—though passive and apprehensive—eventually obliged. *Los filibusteros* were defeated, just as they had been 100 years earlier.

When Manuel Antonio National Park was established in 1972, it was the third national park in Costa Rica. The second was Santa Rosa—created a year earlier to commemorate William Walker’s defeat and celebrate Costa Rican sovereignty. Manuel Antonio’s creation was a more direct expression of autonomy and anti-imperialism—a forceful assertion that Costa Rican land and resources belonged to the Costa Rican people. Together, Manuel Antonio and Santa Rosa laid the foundations for a now world-renowned system of land conservation, encompassing 28% of the country’s landmass, and constituting an integral “part of the Costa Rican soul.”

The resistance put forth by Costa Ricans in Santa Rosa and Manuel Antonio—and the way that resistance manifested itself through land conservation—directly paved the way for the “third cultural invasion”: the tourism invasion. On the backs of the newly-established system of national parks, and facilitated by Costa Rica’s response to the debt

crisis, international tourism exploded in Costa Rica in the 1980s and 90s. Manuel Antonio quickly became one of the chief tourist destinations. The private capital that the local community had worked so hard to expel came rushing back into the region in the form of hotels, restaurants and tour agencies. The government, meanwhile, welcomed big capital with open arms. The people put forth some resistance in Manuel Antonio, but without the type of success they had had in Santa Rosa or pre-national park Manuel Antonio.

This account of post-Colombian Costa Rican history is told through three specific historical events. Though simplified and incomplete, this account emphasizes the imperial threats that have influenced Costa Rica's historical development. More importantly, it focuses on the nature of the resistance put forth by the Costa Rican people and their government in defending the nation's sovereignty. Finally, it brings to light the ways in which these confrontations interact with land conservation.

By analyzing these events, we can observe several trends. Just as these events can be extrapolated to tell a story about Costa Rican history, the trends contained within them can be extrapolated, too—albeit with caution. The role of the state in negotiating these conflicts, in particular, has constantly evolved. In defending Costa Rican sovereignty against the Walker invasion, the state's leadership was paramount. It was President Mora who called for and led the campaign to defeat Walker, repeatedly urging the other Central American states to do the same. The Costa Rican people, too—peasants, women, indigenous groups—were united in their fight against the imperialists. And they did so in the face of considerable opposition from the country's business elites—the same group of elites that would eventually overthrow President Mora. The state's role in negotiating the

Manuel Antonio ownership struggle is less clear. The state served as something of a mediator between powerful international interests and local communities, but seemed more beholden to the former than the latter. Still, after organized and sustained resistance from the community, the state agreed to their demands. And finally, in Costa Rica's tourism boom, the state has been a trusted ally of big capital, welcoming its invasion with tax exemptions, deregulation, and investment in tourism infrastructure. In Manuel Antonio, at least according to the local people, the government has been corrupt and inept in regulating the industry. The point, of course, is not to suggest that the state—in its own free will—was once a defender of the Costa Rican people and now is not. The point is rather that the political and economic circumstances largely dictate the state's actions. When the imperial threat was military conquest from the north, the state was better positioned—though not obliged—to defend its sovereignty. This could simply be because the imperial threat was more serious or more tangible, or because the political leaders' own careers were at stake. When the imperial threats were more economic in nature, and when they came at the urging of the U.S. government and all its political and economic might, the state was better positioned to defend the interests of outsiders. Perhaps the state subscribes to the all-too-common “what's good for big business is good for the people” trope. Regardless, the state's apparent malleability brings to mind something Marx said about the capitalist state: “in investigating a situation concerning the state one is all too easily tempted to overlook the objective nature of the circumstances and to explain everything by the will of those empowered to act” (Miliband, 1983:5).

As these case studies illustrate, one factor that can compromise the will of the state is the role of local elites. There is considerable debate within Marxist circles about

the local elites' loyalty or disloyalty to the state and the degree to which they are integrated into the global dominant class. In the imperial conflicts at Santa Rosa and Manuel Antonio, the local elites' disloyalty seems relatively constant. The coffee bourgeoisie in the 1850s, for instance, was willing to sacrifice the nation's independence in order to preserve their stranglehold on the production of coffee. In the mid-20th century struggle over Manuel Antonio, the loyalty of the elites is less clear, but there is evidence of "bad Costa Ricans," who both facilitated the foreign ownership of the region, and—at times—were the owners, themselves. An analysis of the tourism boom in Manuel Antonio, meanwhile, suggests that though the line between local and global capital has become blurred, local capital still occupies a significant place in Manuel Antonio's development. To survive, though, according to William Robinson, "they must de-localize and link to transnational capital" (29-30). Jose Antonio Zuñiga—once an advocate for the national park and later a deliberate violator of laws limiting development—represents one example of the disloyalty of these elites. The particularities of this process in Manuel Antonio require further research.

The three case studies also indicate that the people's resistance has constantly evolved. By all accounts, the people's resistance in the Walker invasion—though led by the state—was relatively unified. Resistance to the private ownership of Manuel Antonio was less unified, but equally militant. In both cases, there was an identifiable enemy. Manuel Antonio's tourism boom, by contrast, provoked resistance in a different form. It was less pervasive, less effectual, and largely directed at the local government. That the state was targeted provides further evidence for William Robinson's conception of transnational power dynamics—dominated by a muddled landscape of local and

international capital, transnational states, and international organizations. Again, weakened resistance could be an indication that the imperial threat of tourism was not much of a threat at all. Still, it was essentially the same threat as the one that provoked greater resistance in Manuel Antonio 30 years prior—a discrepancy that requires further explanation.

We can also draw conclusions about the role of land conservation in this resistance. The creation of Santa Rosa National Park illustrates the capacity of land conservation to symbolically express sovereignty. Just as William Walker's defeat was a state-based campaign, the establishment of Santa Rosa National Park was a state initiative as well. The state's interest, it seems, was in the celebration of Costa Rica's proudest chapter—a commemoration of a long-since-passed military triumph and the country's preserved independence. The expansion of Santa Rosa to include Santa Elena, on the other hand, was less symbolic and more ambitious. It was a direct challenge to the United States' military and economic interests in the region, and it came with considerable risk. Unlike the park's creation, it was not widely celebrated, and its symbolism was deliberately downplayed—or even masked—by the state. Still, the state's audacity in seizing Santa Elena from the U.S. and adding it to the park is worthy of further research.

The movement of the people to do the same at Manuel Antonio was also ambitious. Again, it challenged powerful economic interests—interests that the state seemed hesitant to undermine. Perhaps more ambitious, though, was the people's inclination to *create a national park* to preserve public access to the land. The history of Costa Rica's national parks is cluttered with examples of the parks limiting or

undermining the local people's rights to the land. Many of the parks arguably do more to threaten the sovereignty of the local populations than they do to bolster it. Insofar as the local community wanted a national park, the Manuel Antonio case seems to be an outlier. The current state of Manuel Antonio suggests either a miscalculation on the part of the people, or just poor management on the part of the local government. Local communities did technically preserve access to the beaches by advocating for a park, but they have to pay an entrance fee and contend with swaths of international tourists.

At the risk of generalizing and simplifying, we can cautiously draw the following conclusions about the evolving dynamics in Costa Rica's defense of its sovereignty. The state, with the exception of the Santa Elena case, has become increasingly aligned with bourgeoisie interests. In the process, it has distanced itself from the will of the popular sectors. Much of this realignment has been caused by the well-organized and all-encompassing nature of global capital, and the unique pressures that it exerts on the state to represent its interests. It has also been aided by a consistently disloyal group of local elites. Meanwhile, as global capital becomes better coordinated, its resistance has become more fragmented, disorganized, and misguided. Methods of resistance—like land conservation—have been subsumed by the capitalist machine. A globalized economy, in other words, makes the project of identifying and confronting the imperial threat more difficult. In the process, a country that forged its identity around sovereignty and autonomy—and later expressed that identity through land conservation—has seen all three compromised by the unrelenting spread of global capital.

These generalizations paint an admittedly bleak picture of global power dynamics and the prospect of altering them. They also seem to suggest the futility of land

conservation as a method of resistance, at least in the case of Manuel Antonio. This futility was due, in large part, to the fact that, while the decision to establish a national park in Manuel Antonio was a sovereign act of the popular sectors, the park's management and development were not. They were controlled by the local and federal governments—which were negotiating complex dynamics between international capital, local capital, and the popular sectors. The Manuel Antonio case, more than anything else, suggests the need for community-managed conservation projects.

The three case studies bring to mind several questions about the role of land conservation in a capitalist society. Under what conditions can formal land conservation projects serve as organically-developing, anti-capitalist spaces? Is it even possible to carve out an anti-capitalist space in an otherwise rampantly capitalist world? By setting aside such spaces, do we imply that all other spaces are fair game for capitalist accumulation?¹ In other words, is designating “public space” an inherently capitalist project? If national parks are not the answer, how do we preserve a community's sovereign rights to its land in a way that is socially, economically, and ecologically sustainable? These are big questions, to be sure. This paper contributes to that discussion in a very specific context.

When Santa Rosa National Park was inaugurated on March 20, 1971, First Lady Karen Olsen de Figueres described the park as “the past, the present, and the future.” The past, of course, was the William Walker invasion and Costa Rica's successful defense of its sovereignty. The present, then, was perhaps the most stable and peaceful country in

¹ For a good collection of essays on the “othering” of nature, as well as its commodification, see Cronon (1996).

the region—a nation that had forged an identity around sovereignty and autonomy, and was expressing that identity through the creation of a sovereign, protected space for the Costa Rican people. The future, as always, was uncertain. That same day president of the Legislative Assembly Daniel Oduber warned the children in the audience about “contemporary filibusters” and urged them to “defend this sacred land, tree for tree and palm for palm” (Evans, 1999:80). Whether he was talking about the park, itself, or Costa Rican sovereignty, more generally, was deliberately unclear. The threat of the filibuster, as Oduber was well aware, was ever-present. It comes in many different forms. And it necessitates resistance. The filibuster’s most recent appearance, by many accounts, comes in the form of an international tourist. That tourist has capitalized on Costa Rica’s widely-celebrated network of national parks—the same parks that were borne out of resistance to imperialism. Whether that tourist is, or can be, good or bad for Costa Rica depends on who you ask. What is clear, though, is that he or she occupies spaces previously reserved for resistance, and threatens Costa Rica’s sovereign control of its land and resources. How the Costa Rican state and the Costa Rican people negotiate this potential threat will be central to the next chapter of the country’s history.

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Biography

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