

**Pineapple, Palm, and Peons:
Non-Traditional Agricultural Exports and Labour
in Self-Managed Agricultural Production
Cooperatives in Costa Rica**

by

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Abstract

A self-managed cooperative is conceptually defined as an organization owned and managed by workers. This mode of production assumes an urgent relevance in light of ongoing challenges posed by global neoliberal capitalism. This study endeavours to historicize the shift towards non-traditional agricultural exports (NTAEs) in the operations of self-managed agricultural production cooperatives in Costa Rica; explore the social relations of production apparent in two case studies; and situate the reorientation of cooperative agriculture and transformation of cooperative labour within the context of global neoliberal capitalism. Through an ethnographic investigation of two self-managed agricultural production cooperatives, this investigation seeks to link daily realities to prevailing socioeconomic structures. Findings suggest that self-managed agricultural production cooperatives in Costa Rica have assimilated the NTAE imperative of state and capital and have concurrently intensified the employment of hired workers from outside cooperative membership in apparent conflict with the tenet of worker self-management.

Keywords: cooperatives; worker self-management; NTAE; pineapple; oil palm; Costa Rica

Para mí mamá

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List of Acronyms

ACDI	Agricultural Cooperative Development International
ASOMUSI	Asociación de Mujeres de El Silencio
ASOPROAGROIN	Asociación de Productores Usuarios del Programa de Desarrollo Agroindustrial de la Zona Norte
CAFTA-DR	Dominican Republic-Central America-United States Free Trade Agreement
CANAPALMA	Cámara Nacional de Productores de Palma
CANAPEP	Cámara Nacional de Productores y Exportadores de Piña
CATS	Certificados de Abono Tributario
CEDARENA	Centro de Derecho Ambiental y de los Recursos Naturales
CENADA	Centro Nacional de Abastecimiento y Distribución de Alimentos
CENECOOP	Centro de Estudios y Capacitación Cooperativa R.L.
CEPAL	Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe
CINDE	Coalición Costarricense de Iniciativas de Desarrollo
CIPA	Consorcio Cooperativo Industrial de Palma
CNP	Consejo Nacional de Producción
CODESA	Corporación Costarricense de Desarrollo
CONACOOOP	Consejo Nacional de Cooperativas
COOCAFE R.L.	Consorcio de Cooperativas de Caficultores de Guanacaste y Montes de Oro R.L.
COOPENAPO R.L.	Cooperativa Nacional Autogestionaria de Abastecimiento Popular R.L.
CoopeSanJuanR.L.	Cooperativa de Autogestión Agropecuaria San Juan R.L.
CoopeSilencio R.L.	Cooperativa de Autogestión Agropecuaria de Servicios Múltiples El Silencio R.L.
COOPRENA R.L.	Consorcio Cooperativo Red Ecoturística Nacional
CPCA	Comisión Permanente de Cooperativas de Autogestión
DAISA	Desarrollo Agroindustrial S.A.
DINADECO	Dirección Nacional de Desarrollo de la Comunidad
ECM	Extended Case Method
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FAOSTAT	Food and Agriculture Organization Corporate Statistical Database

FENAC	Federación Nacional Campesina
FODESAF	Fondo de Desarrollo Social y Asignaciones Familiares
FRENESAPP	Frente Nacional de Sectores Afectados por la Producción Piñera
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
IADB	Inter-American Development Bank
IDA	Instituto de Desarrollo Rural
IICA	Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture
IMAS	Instituto Mixto de Ayuda Social
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INDER	Instituto de Desarrollo Rural
INEC	Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos
INFOCOOP	Instituto Nacional de Fomento Cooperativo
ITCO	Instituto de Tierras y Colonización
ITCR	Instituto Tecnológico de Costa Rica
MAG	Ministerio de Agricultura y Ganadería
MINAE	Ministerio de Ambiente, Energía y Mares
MINEX	Ministry of Exports
NTAE	non-traditional agricultural exports
PINDECO S.A.	The Pineapple Development Corporation
PLN	Partido de Liberación Nacional
PROAGROIN	Programa de Desarrollo Agroindustrial de la Zona Norte
PROCOMER	Promotora del Comercio Exterior de Costa Rica
PVP	Partido Vanguardia Popular
T-LAD	trade-led agricultural diversification
UCR	Universidad de Costa Rica
UFCo	United Fruit Company
UNA	Universidad Nacional de Costa Rica
URCOZON R.L.	Unión Nacional de Cooperativas del Norte R.L.
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Glossary

albergue	tourist lodge
asociado/a	cooperative associate. The term <i>socio/a</i> is often used interchangeably.
campesinado	socioeconomic class comprising small-landholders, (sub)tenant-farmers, or sharecroppers who depend on a mixture of subsistence and market agriculture as well as on off-farm or on-farm waged labour for survival. A <i>campesino/a</i> is categorized as an individual belonging to the <i>campesinado</i> .
colon, colones	Costa Rican unit of currency
coyol	used throughout Costa Rica to refer to the fruit of the African oil palm tree
coyolera/o	collector of the <i>coyol</i>
dueño/a	boss
finca	farm or plantation
fundador/a	settler, founder of the cooperative and/or cooperative community
jornalero, fornalero	day labourer. In this thesis, referring primarily to agricultural day labourer
nica	used in Costa Rica to refer to individuals of recent Nicaraguan ancestry, regardless of citizenship or self-identification
parcelero/a	one who advocates private land parcels
particular/es	hired non-member worker(s) of CoopeSilencio R.L. Although referring mainly to field workers, the term also applies to any non-member worker employed by the cooperative
peon, peones	farm or plantation labourer(s), particularly low-paid and exploited by a large landholder and/or agribusiness. Used in this thesis to refer to hired, non-member field workers of self-managed agricultural production cooperatives
piña	pineapple
precarismo	squatting
precarista	squatter
voluntourism	union of tourism and volunteering
voluntourist	tourists engaged in voluntourism
yuca	cassava; manioc

Chapter 1.

Cooperatives and Agrarian Transition in Costa Rica

1.1. Overview

In 1981, Costa Rica became the first country in Latin America to default on its foreign debt, quietly marking the advent of the “debt crisis” that was to plague the rest of the region for the greater part of the decade and leave an indelible imprint evident to date. Like much of the region, Costa Rica has since undergone a precipitous transformation of the agricultural economy and rural society. The displacement of the *campesinado* and of traditional peasant agriculture by neoliberal policies favouring non-traditional agricultural export (NTAE) activities has been one such change endorsed by global and regional financial institutions, transnational capital, and obliging Costa Rican state planners alike. To the extent that the Costa Rican countryside continues to constitute a major site of economic production within the context of neoliberal globalization, such agrarian change will continue to bear significant implications for the prevailing social relations of production and, consequently, on the reconfiguration of social class relations. Often framed as *campesino* or community enterprises, self-managed¹ agricultural production cooperatives in Costa Rica have been both pushed and pulled into the production of NTAEs, with some having even achieved a high degree of agro-industrialization. As a result, such agricultural cooperatives have been touted by enthusiastic global and state planning and development sectors as a paradigm for successful rural integration into the global capitalist economy. A mutable microcosm of larger rural society, self-managed agricultural production cooperatives in Costa Rica provide a penetrating glimpse into the complex web of social class relations playing out

¹ Self-management, as employed here, refers to the management of an organization by the workers of that organization.

between hired workers, cooperative organizations and their associates, domestic and transnational agribusiness, and enabling state bodies. Self-managed agricultural production cooperatives have nonetheless negotiated, contested, and accommodated political, economic, and social processes in ways that both highlight the shared experiences of these cooperatives while recognizing the heterogeneity among and within them. In this way, agricultural production cooperatives encapsulate a number of contradictions of neoliberal capitalism and of its attendant food and labour regimes. Indeed, the broader shift in Costa Rican agriculture towards the employment of hired and often migrant, contract labour and an increasing dependency on non-traditional export crops, whose sectors are increasingly dictated by transnational capital, is strikingly manifest at the cooperative level. Self-managed agricultural production cooperatives thus both reflect broader domestic and global processes of economic and social change and play a significant role in the accommodation and contestation of such changes. By highlighting relevant tendencies and distinctions between cooperative case studies, as they pertain to transforming social relations of production and agricultural activities, and situating these within the broader, politically-charged contexts of neoliberal capitalist globalization, this thesis aims to highlight salient and interconnected trends in cooperative agriculture and labour and posit cautious generalizations where they are due. This thesis consequently seeks to advance the current understanding of not simply the prevailing structure, tendency, and orientation of self-managed agricultural production cooperatives but of their political, social, economic, and historical contexts as well as of the labour that sustains them. One aim is that through a deeper understanding and more holistic analysis of self-managed agricultural production cooperatives and their contexts, popular and scholarly proponents of emancipatory alternative organizations of production can be better equipped for current and future popular struggles and movement building.

1.2. Cooperativism in the Literature

Cooperativism has been the subject of a wealth of scholarship, ranging from the blindingly promotional to the hopelessly cynical. Academics and self-proclaimed experts of cooperativism have tended to offer their mix of praise and mistrust of cooperatives

from many an ideological perspective. Some elements of the debate are summarized below.²

1.2.1. Cooperativism as a “Third Way”?

In his ode to the origins of cooperativism, Williams (2007) traces the cooperative movement to the utopian visions and efforts of 18th and 19th century European social reformers in the backdrop of the Industrial Revolution and burgeoning class conflict prevalent during the era. The cooperative movement is understood, here, as one of two reactions to the devastating social effects of the Industrial Revolution; the other being the labour movement, which, unlike cooperativism, was generally marked by acknowledged conflict between workers and capitalists. As such, while early cooperativism was novel in its quest for greater worker self-determination and autonomy, it was conceived as a harmonious development, free of direct political action, and one that could burgeon as socialist islands within the consolidating capitalist economic system and mitigate the undesirable yet inevitable effects of capitalism. According to Williams (2007), who advocates such a “cooperative approach to democratic capitalism” (p. 7), this breed of socialism was envisioned to coexist with Smithian capitalism and embody a balance of cooperation and competition in a free market characterized by quasi-socialist production and capitalist exchange. Here, cooperativism occupies a Third Way position between “unrestrained idealism” (referred to, questionably, by the author as state socialism) and “realism”, which the author problematically equates with capitalism (Williams, 2007, p. xvi).

1.2.2. Cooperativism under Capitalism

Although published well over a century ago, Rosa Luxemburg's *Reform or Revolution* critically assesses the context out of which cooperatives first arose and offers some resounding insight into the contradictions facing contemporary cooperatives.

² For comprehensive insight into worker-recuperated enterprises in Latin America and elsewhere, see Larrabure, Vieta, & Schugurensky (2011), Vieta (2010), Atzeni and Vieta (2014), and Atzeni (2012); for cooperativism in a contemporary socialistic context, see Piñeiro-Harneck (2012).

Luxemburg identifies production cooperatives as a hybrid form of labour organization operating in the midst of capitalism. They are thus, in their most basic sense, small units of socialized production operating within a sea of capitalist exchange; a problematic situation given the presumed primacy of capitalist exchange over production. The author, in fact, declares that

In capitalist economy, exchange dominates production. As a result of competition, the complete domination of the process of production by the interests of capital – that is, pitiless exploitation – becomes a condition of the survival of each enterprise. The domination of capital over the process of production expresses itself in the following ways. Labor is intensified. The work day is lengthened or shortened, according to the condition of the market. And, depending on the requirements of the market, labor is either employed or thrown back into the streets. In other words, use is made of all methods that enable an enterprise to stand up against its competitors in the market. The workers forming a cooperative in the field of production are thus faced with the contradictory necessity of governing themselves with the utmost absolutism. They are obliged to take towards themselves the role of capitalist entrepreneur – a contradiction that accounts for the usual failure of production cooperatives which either become pure capitalist enterprises or, if the workers' interests continue to dominate, end by dissolving. (Luxemburg, 1971, p. 35)

Although this analysis may at first appear cynical towards the concept of worker cooperatives, per se, Luxemburg's version of the so-called "degeneration thesis" attributes the social or economic decline of a cooperative to the "absolutist regime of capitalism which . . . the workers cannot successfully use against themselves" (Luxemburg, 1971, p. 36). Production cooperatives are, moreover, burdened by the contradictions between the mode of production and mode of capitalist exchange. This contradiction gives rise to the hybrid character of cooperatives, which Luxemburg emphasizes in order to discount production cooperatives as serious instruments of social transformation. I regard such a bleak assertion as reflective of a historically-rooted, yet surmountable obstacle and not as an inevitability. In the context of contemporary global capitalism, Luxemburg's proposal pronounces that although cooperatives may wage a struggle against capitalist redistribution, they will be "totally incapable of transforming the *capitalist mode of production* [original italics]" (Luxemburg, 1971, p. 37) if they eschew a struggle against the capitalist mode of production.

1.2.3. Cooperativism Rooted in Class Struggle

Moving beyond a cooperative degeneration thesis that condemns cooperativism to a grim fate, Egan (1990) espouses Marxist theory as a tool with which to evaluate cooperatives and advance a cooperativism rooted in sustained, working-class struggle. According to the author, a worker cooperative embodies a “fundamental restructuring of the firm in the interests of labor” (Egan, 1990, p. 68). Plaguing many a cooperative, nonetheless, is the proclivity for organizational and economic degeneration, to which the author refers as the “regressive process of organizational change”, whereby the

Values, structures, and procedures characteristic of a new organizational form approach those of a different, preexisting one; this can be intentional or unintentional, gradual or sudden. A labor-managed firm experiences degeneration to the extent that the values, structures and procedures which define the firm cease to be democratic and worker-centered and instead become based on the exercise of ultimate authority by capital or management. (Egan, 1990, p. 83)

Egan further contends that worker-run production cooperatives face a formidable adversary in the concentration of political, legal, financial, and military resources in the hands of capital, which further serves to guarantee the hegemony of capital over national and international markets. Therefore, while operating within the “logic of capitalism”, cooperatives are compelled to compete in order to survive, leading many to “reproduce the shortcomings of the prevailing system” (Egan, 1990, p. 72). Emergent from, and a challenge to, the logic of capitalism, cooperatives accordingly contain a number of capitalist features. For instance, in producing for capitalist exchange, cooperatives are driven to commodify use-values, compete with other cooperatives, suppress wages, pursue productivity and profit through self-exploitation (longer hours and greater intensity of work), and concentrate wealth within a singular cooperative. The author indicates that pressures to compete in the capitalist market breed a cooperative’s conformity to dominant corporate practices, whereby the managerial imperatives of the workers trump other productive and distributive considerations. The author, moreover, echoes Luxemburg’s identification of the dilemma facing cooperatives in search of increased productivity under capitalism: increase the rate of exploitation of members’ labour or exploit the labour of hired, non-member workers. Here, Egan identifies a degenerative impulse behind pressures on cooperatives to intensify the rate of

exploitation through the hiring of non-member labour. The author thus establishes non-member wage labour as an exploitative tendency exhibited in degenerating cooperatives. The author nonetheless reaffirms Marx's proposal of three institutional mechanisms by which to inhibit cooperative degeneration and promote a more conducive environment for cooperatives. First, all workers of the cooperative must share in the cooperative; hired labour is to be prohibited so as to "minimize the possibility of reproducing class distinctions within cooperatives" (Egan, 1990, p. 75). Second, cooperatives are to associate nationally—and, I might add, internationally—in order to counter the dominance of capital. And finally, a portion of cooperative surplus is to be allocated to the formation of future cooperatives, in a move divergent from capitalist-driven competition.

Situating Marxist criticisms of cooperativism within a critique of "historically specific cooperativism" (Egan, 1990, p. 74), the author depicts cooperatives of the utopian socialist breed as disconnected from class-conscious working class movements. By contrast, a cooperative sector "grounded in a context of radical working-class self-organization" (Egan, 1990, p. 82) is better positioned to meaningfully participate in a class-conscious labour movement. Such a connection to a radical labour movement would in turn provide cooperatives "with solidaristic traditions, consciousness, and resources to withstand the power of capitalist market forces" (Egan, 1990, p. 78). The author ultimately calls for working-class solidarity amongst cooperatives, class-conscious unions, and political and social movements, expressing that cooperatives do indeed bear the potential to expand workers' control over production even in the absence of a revolutionary context but cautions that cooperatives are not intrinsically transformative but simply reflective of "the structural possibilities for democratic social production found within capitalism" (Egan, 1990, p. 72).

1.2.4. Agricultural Cooperatives in Latin America

Perhaps among the most thorough and critical studies on the subject of rural Latin American agricultural production cooperatives associated with the "cooperative boom" of the 1960s has been undertaken by the late Colombian sociologist, Orlando Fals Borda. Although published well over forty years ago, his extensive 1971 study,

Cooperatives and Rural Development in Latin America: An Analytic Report, merits revisiting, particularly in light of the contemporary relevance of Latin American cooperativism. He draws his conclusions from his case studies of agricultural cooperatives in Colombia, Ecuador, and Venezuela, shedding light on the paradox that the promotion of cooperatives under capitalism continues to present.

One prominent feature of the cooperatives in Fals Borda's study is their founding and promotion as originating from outside their respective rural communities (Fals Borda, 1971, p. 58). The author observes the ways in which periods of large-scale cooperative promotion have coincided with economic crises, state anxiety over the spectre of communism, and the aftermath of the Cuban Revolution (Fals Borda, 1971, p. 6). He accordingly frames state-sponsored cooperativism as a means by which to "pacify an aroused peasantry, to soothe the adverse effects of depressions, to promote or promise a new life in unstable or backward areas, or to feed the appetites of political clientele" (Fals Borda, 1971, p. 6). Cooperative promotion, here, is an inherently political process, and cooperatives fundamentally political entities in their own right.

According to the author, cooperatives have been both "imposed from above as paternalistic and authoritarian act" (Fals Borda, 1971, p. 12), that is, elicited by the state, and accepted by their target groups, the latter facilitated by the at least partial redress of certain immediate, material needs or by the perception thereof. The author critically revisits the ever reverberating rhetoric of the day which casts cooperativism in Latin America as a neutral "'third way' between capitalism and socialism" (Fals Borda, 1971, p. 143). He grants that while cooperatives have successfully diffused modern technology into the surrounding communities, secured superior social and financial services, and raised rural production, living standards, income, and education of its members and their families, they have served little to broaden the autonomy of the cooperative or the political and civic consciousness of cooperative members (Fals Borda, 1971, p.143).

Fals Borda's research probes into the extent to which Latin American agricultural cooperatives have prompted "results leading to social changes which would liberate the peasants from their traditional poverty and destitution" (Fals Borda, 1971, p. 132). From the onset, the author makes certain to distinguish between significant (structural) change

and marginal change in society, concluding that the cooperatives in his study exemplify the promotion of marginal change, having achieved a degree of socioeconomic achievement both palpable but insufficient to threaten the macroeconomic structures that invade the cooperative. Marginal change may, however, carry a potential for further radical transformations, hence the need to control or mediate it on the part of the threatened political, economic, and social systems by way of limited, tolerated “reform” and “development” projects. Such marginal modifications are sanctioned until the political crisis that has impelled the cooperative subsides (Fals Borda, 1971, p. 8). In this way, rural cooperatives may serve as “safe symbols of social reform, adjusting themselves to the dominant milieu, promoting marginal changes, and helping to ‘develop’ the countries without tampering with the foundations of the prevailing socio-economic system” (Fals Borda, 1971, p. 145).

As a counterpoint to marginal change, Fals Borda measures significant change according to three criteria: the development of new productive forces; the democratization and public control of production, distribution, consumption, and income; and the self-determination and independence of previously subordinated and exploited classes (Fals Borda, 1971, p. 132). In assessing whether these three criteria for significant change are met by a cooperative, the author examines the following variables: (a) modernization, which encompasses the introduction of innovation, technological development, and industrialization; (b) increase in income, education, and professionalization among families of associates; (c) institutionalization of acceptable and limited social change; and (d) prevailing power structures and social relations.

Regarding the first variable, modernization, the author concludes that technological innovation has led, not to diversified local production, but to the “invigoration” of traditional mono-cultivation, which “tended to sustain the dependency and exploitation patterns which existed in the community” (Fals Borda, 1971, p. 134). In fact, modern machinery, agrochemicals, superior seeds, and labour rationalization tend to make mono-cultivation more lucrative than ever before and more attractive than the alternative (Fals Borda, 1971, p. 138). Technology and productivity likewise remained bound to dominant agribusiness (Fals Borda, 1971, p. 138).

His examination of the second variable of income, education, and professionalization among families of associates indicates that an increase in these areas did little in the way of wealth distribution but rather led to pronounced income inequality between the cooperatives and their neighbouring communities.

The third variable of institutionalization of marginal change refers to the ways in which a cooperative conforms to the capitalist milieu through its institutionalization and stabilization as a conventional business enterprise. Such cooperatives tended to restrict the number of members, establishing a membership ceiling and effectively excluding the greater population (Fals Borda, 1971, p. 137). The author further questions their authenticity as cooperatives, highlighting that the fundamental norms of cooperativism were shed or circumvented in favour of an “experimental capitalism” overseen by dominant socioeconomic groups (Fals Borda, 1971, p. 137).

The analysis of the fourth variable attributes the preservation of dominant power structures and social relations to the cooptation of cooperative leaders, who promote the modernization yet conservation of the production process. Fals Borda affirms that in each case study the power of dominant groups was ultimately reinforced. He indicates that “cooperative leadership tended to detach itself from its original peasant class and to become co-opted by existing elites” and concludes that

Cooperatives often tended to reproduce in their midst social structures and group hierarchies found in the milieu. In these cases, hegemony fell inevitably to the existing elite groups. This development contradicted the illusion of cooperatives as being neutral with regard to class affiliation, or as a place for reconciliation among classes, on an equal basis. (Fals Borda, 1971, p. 141)

Conversely, “cooperatives that did turn themselves into instruments of a class struggle found themselves following the rules of the game of the non-cooperative milieu in their struggle for survival”(Fals Borda, 1971, p. 141). Once such rule is participation in dominant party politics. Fals Borda further attributes the reinforcement of the prevailing domination-exploitation patterns to the modernization of the production processes through reform measures implemented within the existing power structures, which serve to preserve and develop mono-cultivation. The first, third, and fourth variables explicitly

implicate the assimilation of capitalist principles and practices aimed at reproducing capitalist production and commercial structure.

In dialogue with the four aforementioned variables, Fals Borda further identifies four mechanisms by which cooperatives are dominated by the prevailing social, economic, and political systems in rural Latin America. These four mechanisms that collude in driving cooperatives to conform to their socioeconomic milieu include the fragmentation and isolation of cooperatives, cooptation of cooperative leadership, and modernization.

According to Fals Borda, fragmentation is a “divide-and-conquer” mechanism, whereby class conflict, class consciousness, and peasant unification are “displaced by localized . . . confrontation” (Fals Borda, 1971, p. 144), occasioning a cooperative’s ambivalence or aversion towards larger peasant mobilization. The author frames cooperativism as promoted by elites in rural Latin America as a means by which to reorganize the peasantry “in order to avoid the perils of an anarchic explosion of the rural underprivileged” (Fals Borda, 1971, p. 59). Absent or waning in these cooperatives, therefore, is the centrality of class conflict with a “common enemy”, to which the author refers as “beneficial conflict” (Fals Borda, 1971, p. 98). The more intense the class conflict is between the cooperative and “external economic, political, and social groups”, the more resilient the internal coherence and drive of the cooperative in realizing social transformation (Fals Borda, 1971, pp. 98-99). The author signals, nonetheless, that where class consciousness has been stirred and class conflict a likelihood, such conflict has been “aborted” through the annihilation or assimilation of leadership and threats to the population, thus “maintaining the peasant mass in its subordinate traditional position”(Fals Borda, 1971, p. 99).

The first mechanism of fragmentation extends itself to the second mechanism of isolation, or the “quarantine of cultural enclaves” within a dominant milieu (Fals Borda, 1971, p. 144). The isolationist orientation of traditional Latin American cooperatives vis-à-vis surrounding communities is reflected in the lack of an “action model” of cooperatives to “liberate the less fortunate farmers from their present oppressive conditions” (Fals Borda, 1971, p. 8). Fals Borda demonstrates that the cooperative

movement at the time of his research was “unable to form a network of self-supporting relations between enclaves” (Fals Borda, 1971, p. 144).

The third mechanism is the cooptation of cooperative leadership by traditional power structures, often achieved through the former’s absorption into dominant, formal party politics. It is in this regard that the cooperative principle of political neutrality is most significant, as any alleged political neutrality is undermined by political tensions in society and by party strife, which “overflowed into the cooperatives, turning them into new arenas of conflict”(Fals Borda, 1971, p. 14). In some communities in which cooperatives were initially welcomed, cooperative leaders were even labeled “communists” (Fals Borda, 1971, p. 42); however, during and following this phase of cooperative formation, cooperative leaders tended to become absorbed into the “establishment” (Fals Borda, 1971, p. 95). For instance, the author points to the development of a “new privileged socio-economic group outdistancing the rest of the peasant population” (Fals Borda, 1971, p. 49). He describes the pivotal cooperative leaders at the initial stages of cooperative formation as politicized outside of dominant party politics, sympathetic to socialistic-oriented struggles, industrious, and altruistic. Crucially, the author highlights structural factors that colluded in the reorientation of cooperative leadership, and concurrently of cooperates themselves, as the “conditions for success around them—for those born without wealth and privilege—were always tied to competition, profit, and a ‘good business sense’” (Fals Borda, 1971, p. 92). Oftentimes, cooperatives function as political springboards, making cooperative leaders and subsequent generations more easily subject to cooptation. The practice of cooptation “weakened the cooperatives in question, arresting their growth, so that they became hopelessly routine, being no longer agencies of significant social change but rather in fact adjustment mechanisms” (Fals Borda, 1971, p. 95).

The fourth mechanism by which rural cooperatives in Latin America are adjusted to the dominant socioeconomic milieu is the modernization of the prevailing patterns of domination, “whereby previous patron-client relationships were given the gloss of ‘rationality’” (Fals Borda, 1971, p. 144), without altering the foundation of such relations. In regards to rural agricultural production cooperatives, this modernization entails the preservation, expansion, and consolidation of monoculture. Yet, such innovation is

managed in a way that upholds prevailing socioeconomic and political systems. As a result, “cooperatives may become assimilated to traditional power structures, appearing as ‘modern’ but serving in fact interests rooted in established patterns of domination and exploitation” (Fals Borda, 1971, p. 96). In this way, elite interests “successfully make use of modern instruments like cooperatives without basically altering the system of socio-economic relations and the patterns of power and control of rural society” (Fals Borda, 1971, p. 113).

The extent to which cooperatives are capable of generating significant change vis-à-vis the dominant political, economic, and social contexts are in sum determined by the effectiveness of the antagonistic mechanisms of fragmentation, isolation, cooptation, and modernization. The efficacy of such mechanisms can be assessed in relation to such variables as the degrees and forms of modernization, income distribution and educational and professional levels, the institutionalization of accepted and limited change, and the preservation of prevailing power structures and social class relations. If the evaluation of such variables renders an affirmation of invasive and adverse structural limitations, the development of new public forces, democratic and public production, distribution and consumption, and self-determination and independence of exploited socioeconomic classes from state and capital will be effectively thwarted.

Amongst the most salient conclusions drawn by the author is the assimilation of entrepreneurial values among cooperative members. Fals Borda identified in his case studies “an aggressive entrepreneurial ideology that led to respect for and perpetuation of traditional (and often unscrupulous) managerial techniques” (Fals Borda, 1971, pp. 92-93), which drives many cooperatives to operate as conventional business enterprises “under the guise of cooperation”(Fals Borda, 1971, p. 13). The implicit distinction between a conventional business and a cooperative organization is the priority of surplus capital of the former and the collectivist orientation and social imperative of the latter. Nevertheless, the author notes that, ultimately, the “spirit and principles of capitalist entrepreneurship were introduced or reinforced by the cooperatives, which represented a collection of individual interests” (Fals Borda, 1971, p. 63). Fals Borda concedes that some cooperatives prospered through market integration and the assimilation of entrepreneurial values. Nevertheless, such cooperatives came to constitute “a monopoly

of a few privileged families” (Fals Borda, 1971, p. 75) and tended to “fail as a social instrument of transformation and improvement” (Fals Borda, 1971, p. 76). The author ultimately attributes cooperative degeneration and the paucity of cooperatives engaged in significant structural transformations to the cooperative’s internalization of its superstructure.

Fals Borda is explicit and critical in his proposal: self-proclaimed experts on cooperativism can either extol traditional cooperatives that flout cooperative principles or lend support to peasant movements—which I extend here to worker struggles—that present a formidable threat to the status quo. His assessment of the cooperative movement is not entirely disparaging, as the author further suggests that the cooperative movement may indeed carry seeds of basic or revolutionary transformation in the members’ experiences in self-organization; a prerequisite for significant transformation. The author contends that an emancipatory movement including cooperatives requires a defiance of the rules of neutrality of cooperative praxis

in order to engage the peasantry as a social class and in structural conflict and change on behalf of their legitimate interests. It also requires facing up to neo-colonialist practices on the international and national scale, which affect the capacity of rural cooperatives to control their economic destiny. (Fals Borda, 1971, p. 146)

1.3. Rural Costa Rica: Landlessness and Land Reform

The agricultural landscape of Costa Rica has undergone various identifiable periods of transformation over modern history; from the sweeping expansion of coffee plantations in the 19th century and the proliferation of additional dessert crops (sugar, cacao, tobacco, and bananas), to the ambitious agricultural modernization projects of the Post-WWII era and the contemporary backdrop of NTAEs such as pineapple and palm oil. Amidst a modifying landscape and society, the agricultural sector has, in its myriad forms, continued to constitute a pillar of the Costa Rican economy and rural employment. Home to two-thirds of a population of over 800,000 in 1950 (Costa Rica, 1953), in 2012 rural areas contained approximately 35% of the current Costa Rican population of over 4.8 million (World Bank, n.d.b). Over the course of the 20th century and into the dawn of neoliberalism in the early 1980s, many rural Costa Ricans could still

be found eking out a living through a mixture of subsistence and regional market agriculture and seasonal plantation work. Since the mid-1980s, however, rural-based labour and the *campesinado* have been turbulently redirected towards various non-traditional economic sectors, often under informal, casualized, and flexibilized arrangements. Over this period, NTAEs have joined traditional export crops, such as bananas, coffee, and sugar, in commanding a sizeable sum of the country's agricultural land area. NTAEs similarly present fresh challenges to agricultural workers in Costa Rica, who comprised 13% of all formally employed workers in the country in 2012 (World Bank, n.d.a).³ Figures on the *campesinado* as a distinct socioeconomic category cast an even starker picture,⁴ for by 2000 the *campesinado* as an economically active segment of the national population had contracted from 14% in 1980 to a mere 7% (Molina & Palmer, 2007, p. 152); a figure that has undoubtedly dwindled since the millennium. In the case of large-scale plantation agriculture, Nicaraguan migrant workers from across the Río San Juan, who are plentiful, typically accept work for lower wages, and are subject to a more precarious existence than their Costa Rican counterparts, constitute a growing share of the labour (Lee, 2010; Marquette, 2006; Sandoval García, 2004, 2011). With nearly 290,000 Nicaraguans residing and working within Costa Rica in 2011 (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos, n.d.),⁵ a number that precludes Costa Rican-born citizens of Nicaraguan descent as well as innumerable undocumented migrant workers, the pool of labour from which agricultural workers are drawn, and not simply the structure and forms of agricultural activities, has been dramatically altered. The labour practices of large producers and agro-industrial firms operating within Costa Rica, such as Chiquita, Del Monte, Dole, and Banacol, have been extensively documented elsewhere (Frundt, 2002, 2009; Robinson, 2008; Striffler & Moberg, 2003). What is less explored in scholarship, however, is the extent to which hired labour has

³ The figure for women is even lower, at 4%, as opposed to 19% for men (World Bank, n.d.a).

⁴ Here, I define the *campesinado* as a socioeconomic class comprising small-landholders, (sub)tenant-farmers, or sharecroppers who depend on a mixture of subsistence and market agriculture as well as on off-farm or on-farm waged labour for survival.

⁵ In Costa Rica, *nicaraguense* or *nica* is systematically employed to refer to individuals of recent Nicaraguan ancestry, regardless of their citizenship or self-identification. While I do not seek to reaffirm or legitimize this practice of "othering", I shall henceforth employ this term in so far as it reflects the complex relations between these individuals and the state, agro-industry, and broader Costa Rican society.

become an indispensable and conspicuous feature of a number of Costa Rican self-managed agricultural production cooperatives principally devoted to the cultivation of NTAE crops, in conformity with the industry and in dramatic departure from the cooperative model's initial vision and design.

The period spanning the late 19th century to the 1930s was marked by a vibrant and dynamic labour movement most active in the urban centres and along coastal banana plantations. By the 1930s, the labour movement, exemplified by the resilient banana workers' unions, was further emboldened by the then newly founded Costa Rican Communist Party (1931), which enjoyed widespread support throughout the decade and imparted a formidable legacy on the country. The worldwide depression of the 1930s, moreover, prompted the Costa Rican government to confront the limitations of capitalism and expand state intervention more extensively into the economic and public spheres. The growth of the "entrepreneurial state" accelerated following the coup d'état of 1948, which had been staged by the forces of "Pepe" Figueres against a curious alliance of reformists, communists, and the Catholic Church. Following the banning of the Communist Party, Figueres and the ruling party, the Partido de Liberación Nacional (PLN), ushered in the so-called *edad de oro* (Molina & Palmer, 2007). This "Golden Age" (1950s-1970s) was characterized by the expansion of state reach in the social and economic spheres: an extension and deepening of social reforms, improved living conditions in middle urban and suburban sectors, diversification and increase in exports, construction of a more sophisticated export infrastructure, and cooperative promotion. As a result, the PLN soon came to embed itself in the state apparatus and public consciousness. To this end, public revenue was generated through the channeling of traditional export earnings through the state bank, which helped to finance technological modernization and the diversification of agricultural production. Molina & Palmer (2007) nonetheless identify three main losers during the *edad de oro*: *campesinos*, workers, and the environment.

The dawn of the *edad de oro* further ushered in a renewed and systematic assault on organized labour and labour rights in an increasingly anti-communist atmosphere, which promptly forced into the underground the newly-banned Communist Party, which had in 1943 refashioned itself as the Partido Vanguardia Popular (PVP).

Land tenure inequality had meanwhile reached “crisis proportions” by the 1960s, as landless *campesinos* faced a mounting combination of hardships intensified by the closing off of frontier areas for settlement, the mechanization of their livelihoods, and the related acceleration of land concentration into private and state hands (Seligson, 1978, p. 3). The fear harboured by domestic elites and by the U.S. State department towards the prospect of *campesino* and worker mobilizations provided a level of impetus to the development and implementation of a national agrarian reform program in Costa Rica, which was itself spurred on by the Alliance for Progress (1961), a component of which mandated the creation of agrarian reforms in participating states (Edelman, 1999; Seligson, 1978). US assistance was channeled by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), newly reconstituted that same year, into agrarian reform initiatives and select development projects throughout Costa Rica. Only several weeks prior to the launching of USAID did large landowners in Costa Rica, unnerved by the increasing actions of land recuperation on the part of the swelling ranks of the landless *campesinado*, successfully lobby the Costa Rican State to formalize the Agrarian Reform Law (Land and Colonization Law) of 1961 (Seligson, 1978). This Law assured that, in the event of land recuperations, large landowners would be compensated for the loss of their land at a rate deemed fit by them. Agrarian reform was to be carried out by the newly founded Instituto de Tierras y Colonización (ITCO), which, between 1962 and 1982, settled 5,000 families on over 160,000 hectares of land and issued formal titles to 25,000 landholders (Seligson, 1982).

Between 1963 and 1973 the number of *precarista* families—that is, landless families living as squatters—rose from 14,000 to 17,421, while the years between 1963 and 1970 bore witness to 2,203 land conflicts, situated primarily in Guanacaste, the southern Pacific Coast, and Limón; all areas that were bearing the brunt of the expansion of cattle ranching and/or banana and oil palm operations (Molina & Palmer, 2007). By 1973, statistics on land tenure revealed a dismal reality for the country’s *campesinado*. While 36.9% of landholders collectively presided over a mere 1% percent of agricultural land, 56.7% of landowners jointly owned less than 4% of the land (Seligson, 1978). Conversely, 80 firms alone owned 4,637.54 km² of the 51,100 km² of land in Costa Rica. Such figures contributed to Costa Rica’s distinction of having the sixth most unequal society of the 54 nations featured in a study conducted during that

period (Seligson, 1978). Most glaring in a 1973 review of Costa Rican land tenure patterns is the figure on the active *campesinado*, of whom 78% were non-landholding (Seligson, 1978). By 1980, USAID initiated an active collaboration with ITCO, which had made it a practice to concentrate agrarian reform efforts in hotbeds of militancy and union activity (Seligson, 1982). Landless peasants were often targeted by state policy and generally receptive to cooperativism, signaling a correlation between higher inequality in land tenure and higher cooperativism “activism” (Seligson, 1982). In areas of high inequality in land distribution, the dominant agricultural producers prevailed over the landless to such an extent that the latter had come to “feel compelled to join together in cooperatives in order to form a united front against those powerful forces” (Seligson, 1982, p. 140).

One manifestation of *campesino* mobilization and militancy was the drastic escalation in land recuperation actions. Many of the more destitute *campesinos* further organized themselves into committees with left-leaning orientations, a number of which were associated with the PVP, then operating clandestinely. The 1960s and 1970s in Costa Rica, moreover, constituted a veritable golden age among the New Left, embodied by student movements and intellectual radicalization. In fact, by this time, elements of the Universidad Nacional de Costa Rica (UNA) had forged significant ties with a number of *campesino* organizations and emergent cooperatives, often with investigative and/or solidaristic aims. Alarmed by the perceived threat posed by *campesino* politicization, the state attempted to channel popular discontent and protest through institutional infrastructure, which encompassed a web of state agencies that facilitated in the implementation and deepening of social programs. Chief among these state bodies in the 1970s were the Consejo Nacional de Producción (CNP), which was tasked with farmer assistance and the price setting of foodstuffs; Instituto Mixto de Ayuda Social (IMAS), which was responsible for housing and food provisions; and ITCO, which carried out land reform through the granting of individual parcels and formation of cooperatives, in collaboration with the Instituto Nacional de Fomento Cooperativo (INFOCOOP).

1.4. Cooperativism in Costa Rica

Cooperatives have long come to constitute both a manifestation and pillar of Costa Rican capitalist democracy; one that has been consistent with the mechanisms and goals of the Costa Rican social democratic “beneficiary state” prior to the latter’s relative retreat from the public sphere dating from the 1980s. That said, the subject of cooperative promotion in Costa Rica must be appreciated in the historical context of exacerbating land inequality and endemic landlessness, mounting popular mobilization and radicalization, national and community development designs oriented towards increased capitalist integration, and the realization of state-corporate modernization schemes.

Although the two oldest agricultural cooperatives still operating within Costa Rica predate the coup d’état of 1948, cooperative promotion did not figure significantly into state plans for another two decades. Cooperativism as an articulated movement in Costa Rica came into being in the 1960s, particularly through the 1968 Ley General de Cooperativas (Fernández, 1996). The mid-1970s ushered in the most energetic phase of agrarian reform in which cooperative promotion featured centrally (Brockett, 1998). The Ley de Asociaciones Cooperativas of 1973, regional cooperative unions, such as the Unión Nacional de Cooperativas del Norte R.L. (URCOZON R.L.), and public cooperativist institutions,⁶ such as INFOCOOP and Consejo Nacional de Cooperativas (CONACCOOP), anticipated the flurry of cooperatives that were to surge by mid-decade. In 1973 alone, eighty “pre-cooperative” groups were endorsed and fifteen “associative enterprises” founded (Sobrado, 2002, p. 102). Among these are the oldest extant self-managed agricultural production cooperatives in the country: CoopeSilencio R.L. (1973), CoopeVaquita R.L. (1974), and CoopeSierracantillo R.L. (1977). Formed by ex-banana

⁶ These semi-autonomous cooperativist institutions constitute initiatives of the state tasked with, in the case of INFOCOOP, fomenting cooperative promotion, development, and financing, and, in the case of CONACCOOP, with representing, defending, regulating, and directing policies pertaining to the Costa Rican cooperative movement. The organization of INFOCOOP is hierarchical and headed by the *junta directive*, which is composed of four representatives of the cooperative movement and three state representatives drawn from the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock, Ministry of Work, and Banco Nacional de Costa Rica. CONACCOOP, on the other hand, is composed of a plenary of delegates of each sector of the cooperative movement, cooperative unions, and cooperative federations. The plenary, in turn, elects a directorate.

plantation workers in collaboration with ITCO and UNA, these early cooperatives burgeoned along the Pacific Coastal region of Puntarenas province (CENECOOP, 2010; Sobrado, 2002). The founding of the Federación Nacional de Cooperativas Agropecuarias y de Autogestión R.L. (FECOOPA R.L.), a domestic nongovernmental promoter of self-managed agricultural cooperatives, followed the formation of these incipient cooperatives. Edelman (1999) attributes this boom in cooperative formation during the 1970s to the “reformist impulse” of the Costa Rican State (p. 58), which in part aimed to absorb vast sectors of the population into the capitalist economy via the constitution of cooperatives.⁷ Fernández (1996) traces the emergence of self-managed cooperatives in Costa Rica to two interwoven currents. The first was as a state response through ITCO to the *campesino* movements and land recuperation actions of the 1970s, and, given pervasive agrarian conflict, early self-managed agricultural production cooperatives were thereby primarily dedicated to crop production and livestock. The second current constituted the influence of European experiments in cooperative self-management in Europe on Costa Rican state and cooperativist promoters.⁸

By the late 1970s, nearly one-third of all agricultural producers belonged to a cooperative of some form (Fernández, 1996). The number and membership of cooperatives soared until the mid-1980s, by which time nearly 30% of the economically active population belonged to a cooperative of any management type or sector (Edelman, 1999). Appended to the existing web of cooperativist institutions were the Centro de Estudios y Capacitación Cooperativa R.L. (CENECOOP R.L.), in 1982, and the Comisión Permanente de Cooperativas de Autogestión (CPCA), in 1983; the latter organization corresponding to the 1982 addition of a chapter on *autogestión* to the 1973 Ley de Asociaciones Cooperativas. During this period, agricultural cooperatives, in principle, enjoyed an assemblage of state benefits, such as the preferential extension of special credit programs and tax exemptions. Edelman (1999) outlines the indispensable web of state institutions that, until the early 1980s, provided small and medium

⁷ The cooperative sector came to assume a wide range of functions aside from agricultural production, including savings and credit, consumer, transportation, housing construction, and industrial processing services.

⁸ Cenecoop (2007), moreover, credits the “Yugoslav system” of cooperative self-management as influential on the Costa Rican-style cooperativism fomented throughout the 1970s.

producers with subsidized credit from the National Banking System for the renting of land, cultivation of crops, machinery, and other capital investments. Cooperatives could additionally secure low-cost fertilizer from the public fertilizer company and technological assistance from the Ministerio de Agricultura y Ganadería (MAG). Small and medium producers, including cooperatives, could moreover sell a portion of their crops at guaranteed prices at a local CNP retail outlet, as well as purchase maize for feed or for family consumption at relatively affordable prices at that same CNP outlet or at private grocery stores, where maximum prices for staple foods were also set by a government regulatory board. An outgrowth of the contestation between a mobilized *campesinado* and traditional elite elements insulated by the state, the *edad de oro* and the attendant social safety net contributed to an unprecedented level of legitimacy for the Costa Rican state and its dominant party, the PLN (Edelman, 1999).

The period following the inauguration of Costa Rica's first neoliberal administration was nevertheless marked by the transience of self-managed cooperatives. To illustrate, between 1982 and 1989, 135 self-managed cooperatives were inscribed into law, while 96 were dissolved, indicating a net-creation of 39 self-managed cooperatives over an eight year span (Fernández, 1996). The 1990s, moreover, presented a more critical set of problems facing agricultural cooperatives more generally. While service cooperatives proliferated, partly owing to their role in the privatization of state services, agricultural cooperatives diminished (Fernández, 1996). Fernández (1996) attributes the contraction of the agricultural sector and of self-managed production cooperatives, more specifically, to the shift in the policies of the Instituto de Desarrollo Rural (IDA), formerly known as ITCO, which ceased to distribute land and organize cooperatives in favour of granting land titles to individual beneficiaries.⁹ In this context, self-managed agricultural cooperatives became enlisted in USAID-funded projects, such as those that succeeded in “graduating farmers from a traditional subsistence economy to a production and/or marketing oriented economy” (United States Agency for International Development-Agricultural Cooperative Development International, 1992, p. 1), while intensifying and diversifying non-traditional

⁹ In 2012, the Costa Rican Legislative Assembly further approved the transformation of IDA, which had grown out of ITCO in 1982, into el Instituto de Desarrollo Rural (INDER).

agricultural production.¹⁰ The resounding goal of such strategies as those endorsed by USAID has been the promotion of a “more businesslike mentality” among cooperative members who were drawn from the *campesinado* and had abandoned the cultivation of subsistence crops and crops for the national market in favour of the production of NTAEs (USAID-ACDI, 1992, p. 3).

According to the 2012 *Censo Nacional Cooperativo*, of the 376 adult cooperatives¹¹ distributed throughout Costa Rica, 236 (63%) are traditional, 92 (35%) are self-managed, and 44 (12%) are co-managed. A traditional cooperative is one in which an associate purchases a share and, in exchange, receives any variety of services. Credit unions, utility cooperatives, and industrial processing cooperatives are the most common examples of such cooperatives in Costa Rica. Traditional cooperatives moreover consist of marketing cooperatives, such as agricultural cooperatives that market agricultural products grown by producers who are both independent growers and associates of the marketing cooperative. Such cooperatives are frequently referred to as cooperatives of producers (as opposed to production cooperatives) and are often organized under the Moshav model, whereby land is privately owned by individuals and production is correspondingly privatized. As independent producers, associates of traditional agricultural cooperatives are not bound by regulations on the amount of hired labour that associates are permitted to employ, as privatized production permits free reign over the hiring of contract labour.

A co-managed cooperative, by contrast, is one in which the property, management, and surplus of a cooperative are shared by either (a) workers and raw material producers (growers), (b) the state and workers, or (c) workers, raw good producers, and the state. Crucially, the distinction between worker and producer reinforces a division of labour. In fact, the chief difference between a co-managed cooperative and a self-managed cooperative is that associates of self-managed

¹⁰ Among such success stories of USAID is that of CopeChayote R.L., which by 1992 had boosted exports to the U.S., mirroring Costa Rica’s capturing of the lion’s share of the global chayote market.

¹¹ Infocoop refers to cooperatives composed of adults as “adult” cooperatives to distinguish such cooperatives from *cooperativas escolares y estudiantiles*, or cooperatives composed of school children.

cooperatives are mandated by law to contribute their direct labour to all the economic activities of the cooperative; hence, the associate-worker label applied to associates of self-managed organizations. In addition, property, management, and surplus are to be entirely collectivized amongst the associate-workers of self-managed cooperatives. A decisive distinction is expressed through Article 104 of the Ley de Asociaciones Cooperativas, outlining the legal prohibition of cooperatives from accepting waged workers who are not cooperative members (Costa Rica, 2007, 45).¹² This proscription, nonetheless, allows for self-managed cooperatives to hire out managers, specialized technical and administrative personnel, and temporary workers in periods of peak production, particularly when crops run the risk of loss. Elsewhere, Article 100 mandates the objectives of self-managed cooperatives to include, amongst others, “*fortalecer la democracia costarricense al promover un progresivo acceso de los trabajadores a los medios de producción, a los instrumentos de trabajo y a la riqueza socialmente producida*” (Costa Rica, 2007, p. 43).

Of the 376 adult cooperatives, 39 (10%), fall under agriculture, livestock, forestry, and fishery cooperatives, of which 17 are self-managed (INFOCOOP, 2012). The majority of self-managed agricultural production cooperatives are dedicated to the more lucrative production of coffee, oil palm, and sugar, while several are devoted to plantain, rice, and banana production (Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture, 2010). Six of the eight agricultural production cooperatives specializing in African oil palm in the country are self-managed and situated within the Pacific Coastal province of Puntarenas, where 40% of all self-managed cooperatives in the country are located (INFOCOOP, n.d.).

1.5. Site Description and Justification

Of the 17 self-managed agricultural production cooperatives in Costa Rica at the time of my fieldwork, I selected two cooperatives for the sites and subjects of my investigation, which took place over the second half of 2009. I selected CoopeSanJuan

¹² Article 104 reads in part, “Está prohibido a las cooperativas de autogestión: a) Aceptar trabajadores asalariados que no sean miembros de la cooperativa” (Costa Rica, 2007, 45).

R.L. and CoopeSilencio R.L. on several bases: historical significance, longevity, principal economic focus on nationally significant NTAEs, scope and scale of production, agro-industrial expansion, geographical variation, nationally-celebrated status, and prominence in rural community agro-ecotourism promotion, both nationally and internationally.

1.5.1. Cooperativa de autogestión agropecuaria San Juan R.L. (CoopeSanJuan R.L.)

Located in the heart of the nation's pineapple growing region, CoopeSanJuan R.L. is the only self-managed agricultural production cooperative in Costa Rica specializing in the cultivation and export of pineapple and is likewise a recognized feature of the eco-tourist trail. The area of land under pineapple cultivation, volume of pineapple produced and sold, and general scale and scope of pineapple operations make CoopeSanJuan R.L. a choice opportunity to study the understudied cooperative responses to pressures attending the country's burgeoning pineapple export sector. CoopeSanJuan R.L.'s experiences with hired non-member labour, furthermore, provide an incisive glimpse into a practice increasingly assimilated by self-managed agricultural production cooperatives. Subject to the whims of the international pineapple market and state policy and dependent on its largely Nicaraguan labour force, CoopeSanJuan R.L.'s experience corresponds to the general trend among self-managed agricultural production cooperatives with regard to export-orientation and hired non-member labour. Its rich history and connection to landless peasant struggles, longevity, and current relevance provide a germane context for a historically-rooted analysis of cooperative change.

1.5.2. Cooperativa de autogestión agropecuaria de servicios múltiples El Silencio R.L. (CoopeSilencio R.L.)

Analogous to pineapple-centric CoopeSanJuan R.L., CoopeSilencio R.L. is entrenched deep within the birthplace and heartland of the nation's African oil palm

industry,¹³ the site of historic recuperations of UFCo lands on the part of landless *campesinos* and ex-banana plantation workers. CoopeSilencio R.L. is one of only six self-managed agricultural production cooperatives in Costa Rica dedicated primarily to oil palm cultivation, and yet it is the most renowned and acclaimed oil palm-producing cooperative in the country. While its illustrious history and organizational resilience have made it a model enterprise amongst oil palm producers throughout the Central American isthmus and Colombia (Escalera Reyes & Ruiz Ballesteros, 2011; IICA, 2010), its decades-long commercial dependency on the country's leading oil palm conglomerate, Palma Tica, highlights salient contradictions in the role that rural production cooperatives play in global capitalist food production and exchange. The same is apparent with regards to the prevailing social class relations being negotiated in cooperative communities. Most glaring, in fact, is the extent to which the bulk of the labour underpinning the cooperative's chief economic pursuits is drawn from non-member wage labour, calling into question the notions of labour self-determination and open cooperative membership.

In sum, this thesis aims to (a) historicize the shift towards NTAE crops in the operations of agricultural production cooperatives in Costa Rica, (b) evaluate the social relations of production and class dimensions apparent within the two cooperatives under investigation, and (c) situate the reorientation of cooperative agriculture and changing social class relations in these cooperatives within the context of global capitalist restructuring. Chapter 1 of this study attempted to provide a rudimentary introduction to only a sampling of the literature on cooperativism that is of immediate bearing on my research; cursorily acquaint the reader with a historically-rooted perspective on rural Costa Rica, landlessness, and land reform; trace the emergence of agrarian cooperativism in Costa Rica to land reform programmes; and demonstrate the significance of my two cooperative case studies. Chapter 2 lays out my methodological approach, in large part inspired by Burawoy's Extended Case Method. Chapter 3 endeavours to track the emergence and consolidation of NTAEs in Costa Rica, with particular attention to the industry's catalysts and state facilitation and in reference to

¹³ The other centre of contemporary oil palm operations is in the southern Pacific region of Costa Rica, or the Brunca region.

pineapple and oil palm crops. Chapter 4 summarizes my findings, along with a number of critical highlights, derived from my field investigations of CoopeSanJuan R.L and CoopeSilencio R.L. Finally, Chapter 5 seeks to establish a dialogue between Fals-Borda's 1971 enquiry and my analysis of self-managed agricultural production cooperatives in Costa Rica in the 21st century.

Chapter 2. Research Methodology

The conception, investigation, and analysis of the chief questions of this thesis have been significantly informed and guided by social conflict theory. Social conflict theory, rooted in broader Marxist theory, is a sociological framework through which to explore agricultural change and class reconfigurations in relation to self-managed agricultural production cooperatives born and operating under capitalism. Indeed, the centrality of pervasive social conflict, which lies at the core of social conflict theory, enables one to expound social transformation as emerging from conflictual relationships between multiple social actors and institutions as well as from conflict-laden processes. By examining the conflict between dominant and subordinate groups within society, one might better grasp the means by which relationships of control are established and perpetuated. The examination of class, hierarchy, inequality, dispossession, and exploitation yields a recognition that conflict is prevalent throughout many facets of social life and that this constant conflict results in varying degrees and manifestations of social change. Conflict, in effect, constitutes a means by which social roles and power dynamics are contested and negotiated. Tracing the history of a cooperative and the transformation of the economic conditions of production can shed light onto the conflict existing between the forces of production (ie. human labour, land, resources, infrastructure, knowledge) and the relations of production (ie. degrees of exploitation, cooperation, and dependence). Providing a concrete analysis of global capitalism, social conflict theory can accordingly direct attention to questions of ownership and control over the forces of production as they pertain to self-managed agricultural cooperatives and constructively critique the broader social, political, and economic systems in ways that can advance the role of production cooperatives within the struggle for socioeconomic justice in the cooperative, community, and beyond.

It is in this vein that I espouse critical theory as both a perspective and tool for understanding and critiquing social, economic, and political structures. In addition to

striving to understand, explain, and analyse such structures and societal processes, a holistic gamut of knowledge and methods for acquiring and interpreting such knowledge wields the capacity for one to participate in the project to transform such oppressive socioeconomic structures as well as the relations within. This political position mirrors other “ideologically oriented standpoints” in “seeking the elimination of false consciousness and the facilitation of a transformed world” (Guba, 1990, as cited in Hollinshead, 2004, p. 76). Critical Theory is particularly constructive in that ideological influences and concepts of hegemony and imperialism are factored into research and analysis as potent and pervasive issues (Tribe, 2004). In face of overlapping systems of domination, exploitation, oppression, and dependency, scholarly investigations can in this way apply their analyses to support broader emancipatory goals (Hollinshead, 2004).

Here, I explicitly acknowledge and reassert my subjectivity in order for me to achieve as much clarity of perspective and analysis as possible as well as with the aim of enabling the reader to take into account my own bias when evaluating the parts and sum of my thesis. I am the daughter of parents who were born into the peasantry of Costa Rica and Italy and unequivocally support the struggles of the landless, *campesinos*, and workers. My Costa Rican mother was born and raised on the Nicoya peninsula, a region historically marked by extreme land inequality, and, as explored in Chapter 6, loosely connected to the history of CoopeSanJuan R.L. The graphic life histories recounted to me by my mother and by my *abuelitos* have been formative in the development of my consciousness and early socioeconomic analyses. My *abuelito*, lifelong *campesino* and *jornalero*, or “*fornalero*” as is commonly used in Costa Rica, spent much of his life as a *peón* on sugar and cotton plantations in Guanacaste and along the Atlantic and Pacific coastal banana plantations. Their stories are only a few of the multitudes that are obfuscated by figures and statistics presented throughout my thesis. My endeavour to shed light on central issues through this thesis has, nonetheless, participated to some degree in the mediation and silencing of the innumerable voices and experiences to be found on the ground. As an interpreter and mediator of responses and data, I am privileged in my capacity to select and process the histories and realities of the subjects of my study. It is my hope that by including some viewpoints and stories that are too often excluded from much of the scholarly and

promotional literature on cooperatives and on their principal economic activities, this thesis can encourage the further evaluation of experiences and perspectives that counter some of the dominant narratives pertaining to labour and agriculture in self-managed agricultural production cooperatives.

2.1. Primary and Secondary Document Analysis

Striving to provide a historically-rooted social, economic, and political context for my fieldwork, prior, during, and following it, I conducted a considerable amount of secondary research. I derived portions of quantitative and qualitative data from key documents that I had collected both on the field and from readily available official literature and databases. Sources among the latter two include documents and figures issued by USAID and global and regional agencies, institutes, and financial institutions such as Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), and Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), amongst others. Publications and documents issued by Costa Rican state bodies and cooperativist institutions, such as MAG, CNP, INFOCOOP, CENECOOP, and FECOOPA R.L., have likewise been instructive. I have also drawn portions of data from domestic news publications and industry reports as well as from unpublished documents prepared by cooperative associates. Finally, my investigation has been significantly inspired, informed, and facilitated by the invaluable research and analyses of several key scholars referenced throughout my thesis.

2.2. Extended Case Method: The Micro-Macro Connection

Grounding and guiding my investigation of agricultural change and labour in self-managed agricultural cooperatives in Costa Rica is the Extended Case Method (ECM). Developed by sociologist Michael Burawoy, ECM is a comparative strategy from an “integrative or vertical approach” (Burawoy, 1998, p. 19) as well as an ethnographic research method that links empirical case studies to broader, structural considerations in order to scrutinize, enrich, or reconstruct existing theory. According to Burawoy (1998), ECM “applies reflexive science to ethnography in order to extract the general from the

unique, to move from the 'micro' to the 'macro', to connect the present to the past in anticipation of the future, all by building on pre-existing theory”(p. 5). This mode of data analysis and theory reconstruction lends itself to the investigation of the ways in which “power and resistance play themselves out in social situations that are invaded by economic and political systems” (Burawoy, 1991, p. 1), facilitating “the exploration of broad historical patterns and macrostructures without relinquishing either ethnography or science” (Burawoy, 1998, p. 21). In this way, “personal troubles of the milieu [are] tied to public issues of social structure” (Burawoy, 1991, p. 5) rather than cast aside as inconvenient or superficially treated and divorced from context. Ethnography is, in fact, fundamental to ECM’s forging of “micro-macro connections through the reconstruction of social theory” (Burawoy, 2009, p. xii). In advocating public sociology, Burawoy (2009) maintains that by “engaging with suffering and domination, hierarchy and inequality, ethnography calls attention to our accountability to a world beyond” (p. xviii). Through the technique of participant observation, a “study of others in their space and time” (Burawoy, 2009, p. 62), ECM tasks a researcher in the field to “locate everyday life in its extra local and historical context” (Burawoy, 1998, p. 4), thereby “delineat[ing] the social forces that impress themselves on the ethnographic locale” (Burawoy, 1998, p. 15). Central to ECM, participant observation goes beyond direct observation in challenging researchers to understand, experience, and participate in observed acts, events, phenomena, and processes transpiring in the world in which they study (Burawoy, 1991, 2009). This mode of inquiry, however, “can introduce values and worldviews that may obstruct (or distort) a researcher’s’ perceptions” (Burawoy, 1991, p. 5), which is why a researcher must constantly revisit, question, and reinterpret assumptions, conclusions, and theory.

In addition to ECM’s aim of advancing theory is the associated goal of generalizability. By “tracing the source of small differences [between cases] to external forces” (Burawoy, 2009, p. 49), ECM seeks to causally connect those cases and produce generalizable explanations (Burawoy, 1998, 2009). “Instead of reducing cases to instances of a general law,” researchers employing ECM can make “each case work through its connection to other cases” (Burawoy, 2009, p. 49-50). The scope of research therefore transcends the study of specific social situations in ways that can yield causal claims and demonstrate validity beyond a case (Burawoy, 1991). Ultimately, constructive

generalizations open to scrutiny and adjustment can bear a capacity to promote and advance popular initiatives and emancipatory projects.

2.3. Critical Ethnography: Participant-Observation

Ultimately a qualitative endeavour, my fieldwork relied heavily on qualitative methods, encompassing field notes, participant observation, semi-structured and informal in-depth interviews, casual conversations, and oral histories. These modes of knowledge acquisition enabled me to appreciate the myriad perceptions of, and attitudes towards, cooperative history, structure, praxis and change, global capitalist restructuring, and relationships between and among cooperative associates, hired non-member workers, state bodies, and agribusiness.

In the summer of 2008, the year prior to my fieldwork, I came into contact, by chance, with a promoter of the Consorcio Cooperativo Red Ecoturística Nacional (COOPRENA R.L.) in Costa Rica, feeding my interest to further investigate its member cooperatives. Through COOPRENA R.L., I was able to readily access the two cooperatives that I had selected for my investigation. From the outset, I was greatly hesitant to pursue this route of entry into the cooperatives. For one, I did not want to endorse or appear to endorse COOPRENA R.L., as my perspective on tourism promotion is intensely critical. Secondly, I did not want my interactions with the community members to be forever coloured by a “tourist-native” distinction. While my outsider status was an inevitability, the added dimension of tourism consumption weighed heavily over me. Researchers have been known to enter these cooperative communities independently, yet most outsiders gain entry into the communities as volunteer-tourists, or “volutourists”, through COOPRENA R.L. or, more commonly, through other European or Costa Rican nongovernmental organizations. As voluntourists, visitors can lodge with homestay families and are required to perform designated tasks for the stated benefit of the community. Ultimately, seeking to at once minimize abrupt community intrusion and suspicion, as well as gain insight into the relationship between the cooperatives and COOPRENA R.L., I arranged for COOPRENA R.L. to contact the tourism coordinators in both cooperatives, who in turn placed me in the homes of some of the more influential families in those respective

communities.¹⁴ From the onset, I was explicit in my public self-identification as a researcher and Master's candidate. The extent to which I was able or permitted to meaningfully participate in cooperative and community affairs, moreover, was ultimately limited by several considerations which are explored below.

During my first period of fieldwork conducted in San Juan and El Silencio between June and August of 2009, I engaged in a range of activities that fell within the sphere of voluntourism. During my first visit to San Juan, I worked as a translator, volunteer in public education and recycling programs, and assistant to the tourism project coordinator. I assisted in translating and devising agro-ecotourism promotional brochures, helped launch a household recycling program, and coordinated educational workshops on the recycling program as well as children's workshops on the construction of signs displaying environmental messages.¹⁵ In El Silencio, where a more sophisticated voluntourism programme exists, I assumed the more manual roles of dairy farmhand, poultry farm worker, agricultural labourer, and wildlife refuge volunteer. Such activities placed me in close proximity to workers at the heart of some of the community's smaller projects. Through these experiences, I was able to observe the interactions between voluntourists and workers and among workers, as well as communicate regularly with community members in sites from which I might have otherwise been excluded.

The volunteer component of my field experience in both cooperative communities figured during the first half of my field research, during which period I dedicated much time to familiarize myself with the cooperatives and communities. August likewise marked the end of my association with COOPRENA R.L., as the links that had been forged between the community and myself had supplanted those that had initially been helpful in introducing me to the communities. My fieldwork in August was disrupted by my contraction of dengue fever, which required me to resume fieldwork in October following my convalescence. During this second phase of research conducted between October and December 2009, it had become apparent that the volunteer component had

¹⁴ For their services, Cooprena R.L. was compensated at a rate of up to forty percent of my total daily lodging costs.

¹⁵ I was incidentally the sole voluntourist during the entirety of my two-part stay in San Juan.

exhausted its contributions and would hamper a more meaningful query if it were to have continued. Additionally, I sought to further minimize the barrier between the community members and myself and to participate more profoundly in various facets of community life. During this phase of research, the scope and depth of interviews and informal conversations increased significantly, and my participation in community life became more meaningful and enriching to my experience. In San Juan, for instance, I was able to work alongside *asociadas* in the *albergue*, mopping and sweeping the grounds as well as making beds and tending rooms. Activities such as these, aside from being functionally necessary for the upkeep of the tourism project, provided opportunities for observing exclusionary tendencies and for witnessing and participating in camaraderie building.

2.4. Semi-structured and Informal Interviews, Conversations, and Oral Histories

Given the critical contrasts between San Juan and El Silencio, in population and in spatial design, I was compelled to modify my methods of population sampling accordingly. Thus, a more systematic sampling of residents and cooperative associates was attainable in the more compact San Juan, while strategic selection and snowball sampling were more suited to the more populous and expansive community of El Silencio, as explained below. Semi-structured interviews comprised a fluid set of predominantly open-ended questions pertaining to personal and family history and employment; general questions relating to the cooperative, its labour composition, and agricultural experience; and questions regarding personal concerns, perceptions, and opinions. Although often initiating as semi-structured interviews, most interview proceedings progressed with varying degrees of dynamism and fluidity, largely contingent upon the inclination of the participants as well as upon the variable contexts in which the interviews were conducted.

CoopeSanJuan R.L. consists of a rather tightly-knit community of some 13 households and over 60 inhabitants, of whom 33 are cooperative associates. These associates are drawn from the majority of the adult population and include several members as young as 16 years old. Of the 33 associates, 17 are women. Twenty-five

extensive, in-depth interviews were conducted with adult participants. Sixteen of the participants were women, and nine were men. All but one household were interviewed, due to the inaccessibility of the latter resident. All the female heads of household, including sole or co-heads of household, were interviewed extensively, with the exclusion of one elder who had recently married into the community and preferred to participate by way of casual conversation. Five of the 12 interviewed households were headed by single women. Of the 25 interviewees, 18 were associates, comprising 55% of cooperative membership. The non-members included the cooperative's manager, an elder female relation of a founding member, the spouse of a female associate and off-field hired worker, the sister of the latter (a nanny), the daughter of a cooperative member, a hired migrant worker (man) residing outside the community, and a Costa Rican hired field labourer (woman) residing in San Juan. In addition to interviews, daily informal conversations with residents and commuting workers provided much insight into cooperative and community affairs.

Obtaining access to each individual household was in part facilitated by San Juan's small population and by the proximity of households. More importantly, however, was the prevalence of female-headed households; the often direct familial relations linking most households with one another; and the significant extent to which daily life was oriented outdoors and in the public sphere, furnishing a propitious opportunity for one to integrate into the greater community. As a female researcher, the prospect and reality of requesting and obtaining direct interview access to male participants presented several problems, in part due to *machismo* and prevailing social norms, but more significantly, in light of numerous past and recent episodes that have placed interactions between female voluntourists and male community members under the lens of suspicion. This required me to approach data collection and community integration with great discretion and delicacy. Additionally, a number of associates in both cooperatives who had expressed interest in being interviewed were unable to participate on account of conflicting work schedules.

CoopeSilencio R.L.'s population of 480 includes 41 associates, of whom four are women. Forty-one in depth-interviews were conducted: 14 interviews with associates, including three of the four female associates, and 27 interviews with non-associates. In

total, slightly over half the interviewees were women. Additionally, of the 27 non-associates, two were former associates (male) and key founders who had renounced their membership; five were *fundadoras* (female founders in their own right and spouses of founding *asociados*); two were the spouses of current non-founding male cooperative members; eleven were the adult daughters or sons of current members; one was a hired field labourer (female); one was a hired dairy worker (female); and five were *asociadas* of Coopetrasi R.L., the largely women's poultry cooperative operating within El Silencio. Conversations with representatives of Palma Tica, CNP, FECOOPA R.L., COOPRENA R.L., and other bodies likewise supplied a wealth of data to the investigation.

Interviews with the hired non-member labourers of CoopeSanJuan R.L. and CoopeSilencio R.L. were complicated by the fact that these workers tend to be assigned longer hours of field work than associates, by their subsequently restricted family and leisure time, and by the fact that, in CoopeSanJuan R.L.'s case, only one hired non-member worker (a Costa Rican woman) dwelled within the community, while the remaining—23 Nicaraguan men and one Nicaraguan woman—reside at a considerable distance from the community, many having to trek several hours to and from their homes for their daily work commutes. In El Silencio, many of the up to 80 contracted labourers, overwhelmingly Costa Rican nationals, reside outside of the main neighbourhood, in one of the two remaining neighbourhoods and beyond. The contracted workers with whom I had the opportunity to speak and interview contributed immensely to my understanding of just some of the realities of hired non-member workers.

Unlike the case in CoopeSanJuan R.L., a systematic house-to-house sampling strategy was neither a practical nor desirable option in El Silencio. Given the greater population of El Silencio, greater mobility of its inhabitants, spatial division of the community into three neighbourhoods, greater prominence of the private sphere, more obscure public role of women, and schedule and scale of production activities, obtaining interview access with associates of CoopeSilencio R.L. proved more difficult and less of an imperative than the corresponding task at San Juan. Many of the male associates were often out of town or posted in distant areas of the oil palm plantations. In light of my time constraints and priorities, snowball sampling, strategic selection, and flux of daily community life weighed into interview proceedings. While my lodging in the household of

a distinguished *fundadora* and president of the board of directors of CoopeSilencio R.L. was anything but random, my sanctioned presence, achieved through official channels as previously mentioned, granted me firm footing for my initial foray into the realm of formal cooperative proceedings. While one-third of the cooperative associates were interviewed, including the manager (*asociado*), several founders, and president of the board of directors, it was important for me to allow the remaining in-depth interviews to reflect a broader spectrum of community members who lay beyond the scope of official cooperative membership. I therefore relied heavily on existing kinship networks to develop further connections. By gradually expanding my social network, I came to encounter individuals otherwise obscured by an exclusive preference for official cooperative insiders. In addition to the broadened scope of interaction, the depth and quality of exchange was enhanced as a result. This fluid sampling method, moreover, lent itself well to the illuminating of life stories and of the relations between participants. My own bias and several considerations outlined above ultimately contributed to my association with a greater ratio of women to men and with families and individuals more directly connected to the cooperative's founding. My findings therefore reflect my own partiality, which adds yet a further filter to the responses of the sampled community members.

Prior to each in depth semi-structured interview, I presented each prospective participant with a Spanish-language consent form outlining my research objectives, possible risks to participants, and declaration of confidentiality. Following a discussion of the contents of the consent form, I verified the participant's comprehension of their rights and of the process, in which case the participant would provide me with either informed written or oral consent, the former of which was more commonly produced. In instances in which the participant was unable to read or write (due to vision impairment or, less frequently, illiteracy), I would recite an oral consent script and subsequently obtain oral consent. All names of interviewees in Chapter 4 are fictitious.

Chapter 3. The Rise of NTAEs

3.1. The Costa Rican *Edad de Oro*

For much of modern history, Costa Rican agriculture had comprised of a handful of cash crops cultivated alongside the mainstay of peasant agriculture.¹⁶ This arrangement was to find a definitive impulse of change during the *edad de oro*, or golden age of Costa Rican state-capitalist development that characterized the post-WWII period leading up to the neoliberal age. This period witnessed economic growth proceed in tandem with a sizeable measure of social development owing to beneficiary state policies and mechanisms of wealth redistribution. The ruling party at the inception of this era, the PLN, built upon significant antecedents in state policies, embarking upon an ambitious project to construct an entrepreneurial state, or *estado empresarial*. As prime economic facilitator, the state was refashioned for purposes of national-level planning and the accommodation of private capital (Edelman, 1999). Although one often overlooked state objective was to raise the productivity of the basic grains sector, another was to furnish artificially low interest rates to the burgeoning export activities of the era, such as cotton and cattle. The “golden” period thus witnessed the expansion of traditional export agriculture (coffee, bananas, beef, and sugar)¹⁷ and the establishment of preferential state policies favouring select crop production such as rice, primarily carried out by large domestic producers, over that of other basic grains (Stewart, 1985). As was the case throughout much of Latin America, the era was also defined by an economic model heavily dictated by foreign capital and technology, as well as by

¹⁶ At the heart of peasant agriculture and upon which rural populations had long depended for survival are those traditional crops, such as maize, beans, rice, and tubers, dubbed “sensitive crops” by policy architects.

¹⁷ According to Lehoucq (2006), banana and coffee amounted to three-quarters of Costa Rican exports by the 1960s, while beef and sugar production expanded in the 1960s following agricultural modernization initiatives.

rampant urbanization driven by, amongst other factors, land-consuming export activities and large-scale, mechanized agriculture (Molina & Palmer, 2007). With export crops of this era enjoying preferential credit extensions to that of other crop sectors and with land concentration becoming ever more acute, small-producers were faced with intensifying pressures. For many rural Costa Ricans, these pressures amounted to widespread displacement and landlessness, contributing to swelling cities and *precarismo*. Although faced with livelihoods that could be described as tenuous at best, by the 1980s rural producers could, at least in principle, address a measure of their social and material needs by summoning a web of semi-autonomous state institutions that had proliferated during the *edad de oro*.

3.2. The Politics of Policy

Long within the U.S. geopolitical sphere, Costa Rica's agricultural sector has customarily complied with Washington's directives, supplying low-cost raw materials, land, and labour for domestic and transnational exporters when summoned. It was in the aftermath of the Cuban Revolution, however, that the U.S. State Department reprioritized Latin American affairs with the launch of the seminal Alliance for Progress program in 1961. Alliance for Progress initiatives worked in conjunction with USAID projects to advance a particular form of economic development, partly in efforts to mitigate widespread discontent and quell popular mobilizations surging in direct or indirect opposition to U.S. intervention and economic ascendancy in the region (Honey, 1994). In that same year and in similar spirit, U.S. Public Law 480, the Agricultural Trade Development and Assistance Act of 1954, was paradoxically reconstituted as the "Food for Peace" law. Originally professed by its drivers as a means by which to bolster the US export sector, the program would assume an unprecedented role in the larger economic neoliberalization of the Third World during the 1980s and beyond. Food for Peace would provide, as manifest in the Costa Rican case, a channel through which to fund projects targeted towards perceived obstacles or threats to U.S. geopolitical interests and to interests of transnational capital more broadly: *campesino* agriculture and modest strides towards alimentary self-sufficiency, labour and *campesino* movements, and state accountability to national populations. As elsewhere in Latin America, the "Lost Decade"

of the 1980s provided a pretext for the compulsion of a sweeping transformation of state policies and of a radical redefinition of state functions and structure. This initial phase of the neoliberal revolution was greatly facilitated by structural adjustment programs pressed upon Costa Rican society by international and domestic elites via an interconnected web of International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, IADB, and USAID agreements, each steeped in interlocking conditionalities. USAID was a decisive force behind Costa Rica's economic restructuring, even constituting, with its affiliate institutions, a de facto parallel state (Honey, 1998; Molina & Palmer, 2007).¹⁸

3.2.1. Assault on the *Campesinado* and the CNP

The Food for Peace law took on a revived significance in the midst of the violence visited upon much of Central America in the 1980s. Throughout the decade, Washington utilized Costa Rica not simply as a de facto military base in the service of the *contras*, but as a Central American archetype for capitalist democracy (Molina & Palmer, 2007). As a near client-state, distinguished less in its legitimizing function than to its optimal geographical proximity to defiant states and populations, Costa Rica was throughout the 1980s second only to Israel in per capita receipt of U.S. economic aid, receiving approximately \$1.2 billion dollars in food, economic, and military aid (despite the absence of a standing army) between 1982 and 1989 (Honey, 1994). Food aid featured prominently in Costa Rica-U.S. exchanges, as \$600 million of such aid was dispensed during the 1980s (Honey, 1994, p. 62); a stark contrast from the \$10 million of U.S. food aid supplied to Central American countries between 1956 and 1979 (Honey, 1994, p. 188). Much of the aid, moreover, was channelled into private organs, such as the Coalición Costarricense de Iniciativas de Desarrollo (CINDE), which was a major impulse behind NTAE promotion and the privatization of state enterprises (Molina & Palmer, 2007).

¹⁸ Molina & Palmer (2007) quote USAID's 1984 assessment of the political and economic contexts in Costa Rica: "*Recientes dificultades económicas han puesto en cuestión, por primera vez en cuarenta años, la capacidad del Sistema democrático para responder a las legítimas aspiraciones del pueblo costarricense. La política de Estados Unidos debería, por tanto, tratar de conseguir una recuperación económica a fin de anticiparse a desafíos marxistas-leninistas*" (p. 148).

Following the 1982 entry of a Costa Rican administration more accommodating to neoliberal prescriptions, the country became a repository for cheap basic grains emanating from the US under the Food for Peace law (Edelman, 1999). By the mid-1980s, successive shifts in state policy helped to remove many of the protections afforded to “sensitive crop” producers by reconfiguring the role of Costa Rican state bodies, such as the CNP, which had been established in 1956 to foster basic grains self-sufficiency, warehouse the surpluses of basic foodstuffs, handle imports in the event of a deficiency in domestic production, and, crucially, to stimulate food production for the domestic market by purchasing grain from farmers at guaranteed prices, subsidizing consumer prices, and managing retail outlets providing low-cost basic foodstuffs (Edelman, 1999; Honey, 1994). In prior times, the CNP and Ministry of the Economy, through a price-setting board, acted as a buffer between producers and consumers, on the one hand, and the “market” on the other, regulating the profit ceiling for the private sector at each stage of production, processing, and marketing. Nevertheless, by the mid-1980s the effects of the influx of Food for Peace grains and of World Bank-sponsored structural adjustment program (SAP) conditions barring the CNP from purchasing yellow corn from domestic producers and obliging it to slash purchasing prices were already manifest (Honey, 1994). Reflective of such an overhaul of function was the contraction of the CNP budget by one-third between 1985 and 1988 (Honey, 1994, p. 186). By mid-decade, even the domestic rice sector, in prior times privileged, faced an ascending flood of US-grown rice (Stewart, 1985). In only three years, such policy implementations helped to purge the ranks of domestic rice growers from 2,400 to 350, concentrating remaining rice production and processing (Honey, 1994, p. 187). A 1986 Food for Peace deal, along with a second World Bank-sponsored SAP package, further paved the way for the elimination of subsidized consumer prices for staples such as beans, rice, and corn, while food imports escalated to unprecedented levels. Further aggravating conditions for small and medium producers was a sharp plunge in state-extended credit between 1984 and 1987. Costa Rican *campesinos* responded to the agricultural assault through historic public demonstrations against the elimination of CNP subsidies and against the targeted obliteration of yellow corn production, the latter executed by state decree the following year (Honey, 1994).¹⁹ By 1987, wheat imports accounted for half

¹⁹ By the late 1980s, consumer protection had eroded to such a point that 1987 retail prices for

the CNP debt, surpassing even those of rice and corn (Honey, 1994, p. 191). This milestone preceded the definitive strip-down of the CNP a year later to its primary function of import handling. While the hollowing out of the CNP corresponded to a government pledge to “rationalize” agricultural sector institutions, such as the CNP, IDA, and MAG, following the privatization of CNP retail outlets and the handover of its previous functions to private hands throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the CNP emerged in the decade to follow as a mere shadow of its former self (Edelman, 1999). As Edelman (1999, p.183) remarks, within less than a decade,

State institutions simply ceased carrying out their traditional functions: the agrarian reform agency no longer distributed land, the commodities board no longer purchased crops, the public-sector insurance company no longer insured peasant food production, the agricultural ministry no longer offered technical assistance, and what was left of the national banking system provided little or no credit for anything other than non-traditional export crops. (Edelman, 1999, p. 183)

By the end of the Lost Decade, Costa Rica had effectively converted itself into an importer of wheat, yellow corn, beans, and husked rice (Honey, 1994). In the decade’s concluding years, the country imported 57,000 tonnes of rice, 267,000 tonnes of corn, and 8,000 tonnes of beans, the former two largely originating from the U.S. (Honey, 1994). The century came to a close with the elimination of most of the remaining import taxes on sensitive crops, while Costa Rica’s entry into the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in 1990 and new IMF, World Bank, USAID, and PL-480 directives further sealed the fate of *campesino* production. A 1988 World Bank country study underscores the gutted state of the basic grains sector at the close of that decade. While 70,000 basic grains farmers were accounted for in 1984, their ranks were reduced to 27,000 within a mere four-year span (Honey, 1994). The “disappearance” of at least 60% of the country’s basic grains producers was anything but quiet, for many of these farmers, if able to withstand the pressures to migrate to urban centres in an attempt to carve out a niche in the informal and casualized economy, were trumpeted into a new age as fledgling “entrepreneurs” or as agro-industrial labourers within NTAE sectors.

cornmeal, rice, and beans were 130, 100, and 164 percent higher than their 1984 equivalents (Honey, 1994, p. 186).

3.2.2. The Agriculture of Change

The assault on small-scale domestic grains production has constituted only one facet of the larger economic project playing out in the Costa Rican countryside since the mid-1980s; another being the zealous promotion of non-traditional agricultural export production. In conjunction with Food for Peace-led import promotion and the scaling back of traditional crop production, the “Agriculture of Change” program, inaugurated in 1986 by the Arias administration, set out to further radically transform the agricultural economy, landscape, and labour force in accordance with the imperatives of domestic and transnational capital. Newly-established state departments, Ministry of Exports (MINEX), founded in 1982, as well as the Promotora del Comercio Exterior de Costa Rica (PROCOMER) in 1996, reflected the newfound imperatives of the state and facilitated the implementation of new agricultural policies. Agriculture of Change programs paved the way for the elimination of farmer assistance and price subsidies in favour of an escalation in NTAE sector activities glowingly endorsed by “a transnational coalition of exporters, state officials, and USAID” (Lehoucq, 2006, p. 4).²⁰ As Honey (1994) observes, the Agriculture of Change had at once “the goal and effect of wiping out the small farmer” (p. 195), as peasants were brusquely squeezed out of the basic grains sector and, if remaining in the countryside and engaged in agriculture, were steered into the various NTAE sectors, such as pineapples and oil palm.

NTAEs have increased in importance with the shift in the external financing of the Costa Rican economy. While the current NTAE sector was founded under conditions of plentiful USAID disbursements, such funding virtually ceased following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the U.S.-backed *contra* war, prompting the Costa Rican state to increasingly depend upon vacillating foreign direct investment, or FDI (Molina & Palmer, 2007). Nevertheless, private capital has been a prime beneficiary of state-FDI arrangements in the realm of agriculture, as the corporate-dominated NTAE sector has been a recipient of generous state subsidies and tax exemptions. In fact, while global financial bodies and aid agencies have decried state assistance for *campesinos*, or “subsidies”, as a flagrant violation of market principles, state assistance for non-

²⁰ In 1989 the NTAE sector received a boost in the form of \$10 million in USAID loans; a move reflective of the prolificacy of USAID-sanctioned NTAE initiatives (Honey, 1994).

traditional agro-export firms with ties to transnational capital continues to be hailed by such bodies as market “incentives” (Edelman, 1999; Honey, 1994). Such state subsidies for the private sector have been anything but slight, for state subsidies for NTAE exporters in 1990 accounted for 8% of the national budget (Vagneron, Faure & Loeillet, 2009).

The 1984 Law 6955 ushered in a plethora of tax incentives for non-traditional exports, including a 10-year income tax exemption, import tax exemption on raw goods, machinery, inputs, containers and packaging, subsidies of up to 20% of the value of exports, and preferential interest rates on bank loans (USAID, 2008b). As McMichael (2009) underscores, states are “enlisted in the neoliberal project” by further subsidizing capital through the provision of infrastructure and through the state’s absorption of the “responsibility for rising food costs” (p. 286). State backing of private capital has consequently facilitated the concentration of half the NTAE sector in the hands of foreign capital, a process which has engendered the “pronounced ‘multinationalization’ of Costa Rica’s NTAE sector” (Gereffi & Hempel, 1996, as cited in Vagneron et al., 2009, p. 442). The transnational capital behind the NTAE impetus in the Third World has contributed to a cross-industry monopolization that has placed finance capital, agricultural inputs (seeds, fertilizer, agrochemicals, fuel, and farm machinery), technological capacity, and marketing, distribution, and retail linkages beyond the reach of small and medium producers; thereby ensuring that NTAE sectors operate within the rule of capital. As McMichael (2009) illustrates,

The monopoly structure of the (heavily subsidized) agribusiness food system not only means producers receive low prices for their products, but also suppliers, traders, processors and retailers are in a position to raise food prices . . . Part of the consolidation of corporate power involves the conglomeration process, combining integration of supply chains with versatile acquisitions in related industries. (McMichael, 2009, p. 290)

While economic policies of the 1980s were designed to wean *campesinos* off of their livelihoods, those enacted in the 1990s meted out an intensifying shock therapy upon the bulk of the population. The 1990s were marked by extremely unpopular administrations that all too vigorously implemented SAPs targeting the economic and social foundations of the country, prompting frequent mass student, *campesino*, and

public protests across the country during the greater part of the 1990s. Yet another motor for NTAE expansion that emerged during this period was the CNP's Programa de Reconversión Productiva del Sector Agropecuario, more commonly referred to as *Reconversión Productiva*. Launched in 1998 in order to “*transformar integralmente los procesos productivos del sector agropecuario, para insertarlos en el mercado internacional*” (Procuraduría General de la República de Costa Rica, 1998), the program has figured centrally in nationwide schemes entailing the supplanting of traditional *campesino* crops with those of export orientation. The intensified promotion of NTAEs in the 1990s preceded the consolidation phase that defined the 2000s and laid the groundwork for early free-trade negotiations between the U.S. and Central American countries in 2003.

3.2.3. Neoliberalism as the Norm: CAFTA-DR and Beyond

Over time, the narrowing of livelihood options has afforded greater economic importance to the NTAE sector in Costa Rica. It is standard practice in the fields of policy and development to point towards NTAEs as a means by which to address rural poverty and unemployment (World Bank, 2006), despite the problematic legacy of neoliberal policies. In fact, the deleterious effects of one-sided economic liberalization on *campesino* agriculture tend to be regarded in policy literature as an outcome from which “a new strategy” must emerge “to help these sectors adjust and shift to new products that offer comparative and competitive advantages” (IADB, 2003, p. 16). A common proposal seeks to promote “business capacity development in sectors with competitive potential—agriculture and tourism being prime targets given their impact on rural development” (IABD, 2003, pp. 26-27). Partially to this end, U.S.-based policymakers pressed for the ratification of the Dominican Republic-Central America-United States Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA-DR) accord, which Costa Rican legislators implemented in 2009, following a contentious referendum campaign and amidst vast and vociferous opposition.

CAFTA-DR serves in no small measure to formalize the terms of trade between the U.S. and its signatories. One principal feature of the accord is the erasure of existing agricultural protections for Central American producers. Although Costa Rican import

duties plummeted from 53 to 3.3% between 1985 and 1999, amounting to the lowest average tariff amongst all Central American countries (World Bank, 2006), a measure of safeguards have to date persisted with regards to several *bienes agrícolas sensibles* (sensitive agricultural commodities), such as maize, beans, dairy, rice, sugar, and meats, despite belligerent efforts to dismantle remaining producer and consumer safety nets.²¹ Owing to a downward trend in tariffs, the World Bank forecasts diminishing fiscal revenues for CAFTA-DR signatories, with Costa Rica distinguished for its share of tax revenues as derived from import duties constituting the lowest on the isthmus (World Bank, 2006). Despite the ruinous implications of tariff reductions for the public coffers and *campesino* production, USAID weighs positively on the benefits that the current scenario might present to *campesinos*:

While a number of studies have shown that small-scale producers of basic grains and other sensitive products will find it increasingly difficult to compete as applied tariffs on imports of those products from the United States decline or disappear under the treaty, these effects on particular producers are likely to be outweighed by the anticipated positive benefits generated by trade liberalization—including lower prices for food and other products consumed by the poor. However, those small farmers who face new challenges resulting from the Agreement will need help in making the adjustment to more productive economic activities, within or outside the agricultural sector. (USAID 2008a, p. 10)

One such mechanism of adjustment for rural Costa Ricans has been NTAEs. A conduit of the neoliberal project, CAFTA-DR contains within its framework a crucial subset of measures for the advancement of “trade-led agricultural diversification”, or T-LAD. T-LAD is described by USAID agency as made ever more “pressing, complicated, and challenging by the recent global rise in food and energy prices”, the former of which “are projected to stay high for several years, providing an unanticipated windfall for those basic grains producers positioned to take advantage of the increased demand for their crops” (USAID, 2008b, p. 1). The reference to “producers” advantageously positioned under the neoliberal food regime refers not, however, to small-producers, or “net

²¹ USAID (2008b) defines sensitive food crops as “basic food grain crops that traditionally have provided subsistence if not also a source of cash income in local markets” (p. 58). According to the World Bank (2006), by the mid-2000s, tariffs on “sensitive” plant crops in Costa Rica ranged from 1% for yellow corn to 50% for sugar.

producers”, who are now enlisted in “poverty reduction” and entrepreneurial initiatives so that they may “afford to buy the food that they need” (USAID, 2008b, p. 1) but had at one time grown or inexpensively acquired. Ultimately, the agency relates that “small producers of basic grains [are to] shift enterprises to NTAEs if they are to gain from the opportunities provided by CAFTA-DR” (USAID, 2008a, p. 43). Although much of the task to adapt to NTAEs has been assigned to the individual farmer, the agency makes clear the vision in the making for neoliberal Costa Rica, wherein the state is to be charged with providing “an appropriate support framework and program structure to better enable rural households and agribusinesses to transform land and labor endowments into more competitive, market-linked activities tied to agro-processing and agro-industrial activities” (USAID, 2008a, p. 54).

The case of Costa Rica illustrates the processes at the core of the growing concentration of global agribusiness capital, which has placed 60% of global food supplies into corporate hands (McMichael, 2009). Agricultural production in Costa Rica has increasingly become manifestly geared towards export. Maize and beans are notably absent from amongst the primary agricultural commodities produced in Costa Rica, for, as to be expected from decades of rural flushing, maize, wheat, and beans figured amongst the top agricultural imports into Costa Rica in 2011 (FAOSTAT, n.d.). Figures on agricultural land area similarly reveal the position afforded to crops of ascending and descending significance, for the total area under maize, dry bean, and rice cultivation collectively amount to far less than the joint area of pineapple and oil palm plantations. The combined land coverage assumed by these relatively late bloomers has even surpassed the collective area of land under banana and sugar cultivation—traditional bastions of the agricultural export sector. As Aguilar Sánchez (2009) maintains,

Costa Rica, the country with the highest levels of exports at the regional level, experienced a 52% reduction of lands cultivated with rice, beans, corn and sorghum between 1990 and 2005, alongside the doubling of areas dedicated to fruits, vegetables, legumes and oleaginous products designated for the external market (in particular the USA and EU). (Aguilar Sánchez, 2009, p. 110)

Nonetheless, according to the Costa Rican government’s 2007 “State of the Nation” report, the country would need to plant approximately 283,000 hectares of basic grains in order to secure an adequate supply for the national population (Cuadrada Quesada & Castro Vargas, 2009, p. 195).

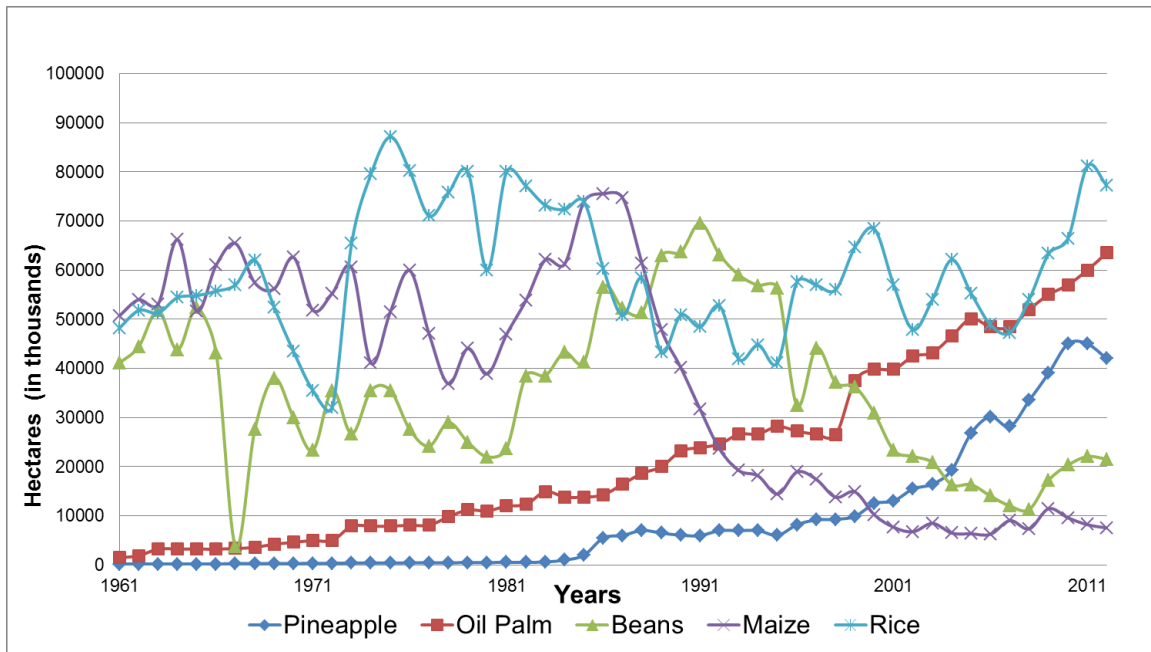


Figure 3.1. Area of Cultivation per Crop in Costa Rica between 1961 and 2012
Note. Data retrieved from FAOSTAT (n.d.)

3.3. *La Fruta Nacional*

3.3.1. Pineapple on the Global Platter

The crowning achievement of almost three decades of NTAE investments by US-based multinationals, such as Del Monte and Dole, and of aggressive, global commercialization, the pineapple is a compelling symbol of a neoliberalizing Costa Rica. Widely regarded in both approving and critical scholarship as an outgrowth of the worldwide banana trade, the global pineapple industry exhibits significant continuities and divergences vis-à-vis the banana industry, assuming a particular set of implications under a consolidating neoliberal context. The miserable company towns and plantations evoked in critical Latin American literature may at first seem to provide a stark contrast to the profuse and vibrant promotional photo-imagery of smiling locals farming the spiny

crop. Yet, as in the early years of banana commercialization over a century before, U.S.-based multinationals have been at the fore spearheading the campaign to establish the pineapple as yet another tropical fixture of the Western palate. Between 1960 and 2005, global pineapple production quadrupled, with yields soaring from 4 to 16 million tonnes; a higher rate than that for any other fruit (Vagneron et al., 2009). And while it is unlikely that the pineapple's commercial success will soon surmount that of the banana export sector—or its culturally hegemonic grip on North American consciousness—indices reflect a burgeoning industry in which transnational capital continues to extend its reach into far corners of the globe. If the banana exemplifies an enduring Latin American export crop of old, the pineapple is one embodiment of the neoliberal tropics of new.

Given the warm, humid climate indispensable for optimal cultivation, the pineapple remains a specialty of the tropics. According to 2012 FAOSTAT figures, in addition to distinguishing itself as the second largest global producer in terms of value and metric tonne yield, Costa Rica also lays claim to being chief pineapple producer in the hemisphere (FAOSTAT, n.d.). In exports, Costa Rica is the unrivalled global leader by a vast margin, exporting eight times more pineapple than the runner-up in 2011 (FAOSTAT, n.d.). By 2012, pineapple yields in Costa Rica verged on the 2.5 million metric tonne mark, generating nearly \$719 million in export revenue; an 83% jump from 2000 figures (FAOSTAT, n.d.).

In 2011, the U.S. was the principal importer of pineapple in the world, followed by Belgium, Germany, and the Netherlands (FAOSTAT, n.d.). Although the U.S. supplies the largest consumer market for global pineapple, the UK and EU members likewise constitute major importers, as both doubled their imports between 1999 and 2007 (Vagneron et al., 2009). Meanwhile, Costa Rica remains choice source of fruit for the Western markets (Vagneron et al., 2009), supplying the US and UK markets with 84% and 75% of their pineapple imports, respectively (CNP, 2010; Lawrence, 2010). Currently, nearly half of Costa Rican pineapple exports are bound for the US consumer market, while Europe and the UK collectively capture the larger share (Barquero, 2011; Cámara Nacional de Productores y Exportadores de Piña, n.d.; Consejo Nacional de Producción, 2011).

3.3.2. Pineapple by Numbers

With just under one million hectares of pineapple plantations worldwide in 2012, the pineapple export industry continues to consolidate its presence in tropical and subtropical areas around the globe, with substantial pineapple yields registered in at least 79 countries (FAOSTAT, n.d.; Paull & Duarte, 2011). In 2012, over one-fifth of the pineapple plantations in the Western Hemisphere could be found within the borders of Costa Rica (FAOSTAT, n.d.), a country smaller than either Nova Scotia or West Virginia. Official estimates on the land area under pineapple cultivation span FAOSTAT's conservative 2012 figure of 42, 000 hectares, to regular MAG and Cámara Nacional de Productores y Exportadores de Piña (CANAPEP) estimates of 45,000, to IICA's valuation of 50, 000, and to additional MAG estimations of 50,000 and even 54,000 hectares (CANAPEP, n.d.; FAOSTAT, n.d.; IICA, 2009; MAG, 2009). The proliferation of pineapple plantations in Costa Rica is indicative of the dramatic shift in the national agricultural economy, as witnessed through the development of the pineapple sector, for which two steps have been identified. The first step, a more moderate production phase, typified cultivation in the mid-1980s, during the earlier years of NTAE promotion (Chacón, 2010). This development was advanced by Del Monte's Costa Rican subsidiary, the Pineapple Development Corporation (PINDECO S.A.), and marked a significant contrast from the period between 1961 and 1983, during which the area devoted to pineapple cultivation crawled slowly from 200 to 625 hectares. After several years of dramatically heightened activity in pineapple operations, which witnessed 625 hectares recorded in 1983 convert into 7,040 hectares by 1988, pineapple cultivation largely oscillated between 1988 and 1995, until a ground-breaking hybrid and technological package, pioneered by the Hawaiian-based Del Monte Fresh Produce Inc. laboratories, propelled the industry into a terrain of unprecedented growth that has yet to subside. By 1996, the area of pineapple plantations had already comprised 8,195 hectares, continuing along an upward trend that has seemingly followed the sector's growth levels.

Of MAG's 19 national sectoral programs, the Programa Nacional Sectoral de Piña, located in in the canton of San Carlos in the Huetar Norte, is one of the few to be situated outside the nation's capital. Over half of the country's pineapple is produced in

the Huetar Norte, the northern landlocked zone of the country, with the bulk of operations primarily concentrated in the canton of San Carlos, where it has in many instances displaced dairy farming and other crops. The epicentre of pineapple operations in the Huetar Norte is the district of Pital, where over half of agricultural land is dominated by pineapple (Piñeiro & Díaz Ríos, 2007). While 75% of pineapple growers are small producers, cultivating less than 10 hectares of land, 77% of pineapple production is controlled by operations commanding more than 100 hectares of plantation (Piñeiro & Díaz Ríos, 2007). This is to be anticipated given the estimated \$9,900 per hectare investment required to break into pineapple production (Piñeiro & Díaz Ríos, 2007).²² Outside of the Huetar Norte, the remainder of pineapple production occurs along the Atlantic and, to a lesser extent, Pacific Coast (Alfaro, 2010). By 2010, it had become apparent that land for pineapple cultivation was in short supply, for the traditional zones of pineapple cultivation have become so saturated with pineapple producers that further production has spilled over onto the climatically more vulnerable Pacific Coast and into agricultural frontier lands (Barquero, 2011).

The impact of domestically-based pineapple operations on local employment has been disparately expressed depending on sources. Figures on workers directly engaged in the pineapple sector frequently fall between MAG's 2010 figure of 23,000 and CANAPEP's 2011 figure of 27,500 (CANAPEP, n.d.; MAG, 2010), while the number of workers indirectly employed approximates 92,000 (Boeglin, 2009; Chacón, 2010). Of workers directly engaged in the sector, 15% are reportedly women (Castro, 2010). Cultivation further rests in the hands of some 1,200 to 1,300 producers, 92% of whom are small producers, while 72 packing plants and 170 exporters manage the higher tiers of the value-chain (CANAPEP, n.d.; Castro, 2010; Chacón 2010).²³ Despite the relatively significant number of small-producers at the base of the pineapple sector, transnationals dominate the processing and export operations, thus determining the terms of production. Amongst the most prominent agro-industrial firms engaged in the commercialization of pineapple in Costa Rica are Del Monte (through its subsidiary

²² Piñeiro & Díaz Ríos (2007) estimate the cost of producing 1 kg of pineapple for a small producer to be roughly 8 cents, compared to one-third of a cent paid by a large producer.

²³ The current figure of up to 1,300 pineapple producers is only marginally higher than the 1988 figure of 865 presented by den Daas (1993).

PINDECO S.A.), Dole, and Banacol. Del Monte is widely credited for having modernized the pineapple industry in Costa Rica and has continued to command the bulk of Costa Rican pineapple export operations since the 1978 founding of PINDECO S.A. Although its near monopoly of the pineapple export sector has somewhat diminished since the 1980s, Del Monte still stands as arguably the most significant agribusiness in Costa Rica, currently exporting half of Costa Rica's pineapple crop and retaining 7,000 and 11,000 hectares of pineapple and banana plantation holdings, respectively (Camacho Sandoval, 2010; Lawrence 2010).

3.3.3. A Golden History

The pineapple is not a novel crop to Costa Rica. The cultivar indigenous to present-day Costa Rica, and still under discernible cultivation, is the white-fleshed *Monte Lirio*. Known simply as *piña criolla* to Costa Ricans, it had been, until previous decades, the most widely grown pineapple for the domestic market. Contemporaneous to the installment of its banana operations, the United Fruit Company (UFCo) began experimentations with pineapple cultivation along the Central American coasts. In the 1930s, the UFCo introduced into the country a new pineapple cultivar, which gradually began to overtake native varieties in many areas of the country, even setting roots in the Monte Lirio stronghold of San Carlos by 1959 (Cortés Enríquez, 1994). Having developed extensive banana operations along the Costa Rican coastlines, transnationals were in prime position to take advantage of pre-existing investments, combining their banana and pineapple shipments and thus establishing such economies of scale capable of consistently delivering uniform shipments to overseas markets (Vagneron et al., 2009). Due to lower land costs, early agro-industrial firms selected southern Puntarenas province, referred to as the Brunca region, as their centre of export-oriented pineapple production and processing operations. Other agro-industrial fruit-processing multinationals, such as Gerber, similarly sought access to Costa Rican-grown pineapple in the 1960s (Cortés Enríquez, 1994). By 1965, 70% of pineapple produced in the region was for export, geared almost exclusively to the US market (Cortés Enríquez, 1994). Based in Buenos Aires de Puntarenas, Southern Pineapple Company began experimentations on the cultivar, *Champaka Smooth Cayenne* in 1962, while American Pineapple Company followed suit later that decade. While the area

under pineapple cultivation increased by 67% between 1963 and 1970, it merely amounted to an additional 100 hectares over the initial area of 200 hectares (FAOSTAT, n.d.). A significant portion of resultant crop harvests, moreover, remained confined to the local market due to issues of product quality (Vagneron et al., 2009). By 1973, 93% of pineapple producers carried out pineapple cultivation on less than 2 hectares of land, while large producers, 0.3% of total producers, presided over 40% of the land under pineapple cultivation (Cortés Enríquez, 1994). By 1979, Southern Pineapple Company's operations were absorbed by PINDECO S.A., which launched an intensive plantation operation and research and development pineapple export program, eventually carrying out substantial exports by 1981. Southern Costa Rica soon became a de facto Champaka production zone marked by mammoth estates controlled by and for PINDECO S.A., the burgeoning export operations of which soon propelled Costa Rica to distinction as the second most important supplier of fresh pineapple to the U.S. by the 1980s (den Daas, 1993). While company plantations had long been a staple of operations, contract farming featured heavily early on as a less risky and more cost effective mode of production for the multinational. Such was the preference that by 1988 over half of PINDECO S.A.-acquired pineapple grown on over 3,500 hectares of land was cultivated by contract farmers (Honey, 1994). Between 1988 and 1989, PINDECO S.A. was one of the primary beneficiaries of state subsidies, receiving 10% of the 72 million in *Certificados de Abono Tributario* (CATS) lavished upon to the NTAE sector by the Costa Rican state (Clark, 2001). Such state subsidies were indispensable to the firm's increased share of pineapple exports, which, by the 1990s, amounted to 95% of Costa Rican pineapple production (Robinson, 2008).

In the Huetar Norte, Desarrollo Agroindustrial S.A. (DAISA), a publicly-owned agro-industrial subsidiary of the state-run Corporación Costarricense de Desarrollo (CODESA), initiated the production and export of pineapple for the US market in 1980. Based in Pital, DAISA's pineapple operations maintained the domestically-consumed *Monte Lirio* as choice cultivar for export. Nevertheless, the Washington Consensus weighed heavily on the Costa Rican government's 1984 decision to privatize a number of formerly-owned state enterprises, culminating in a series of sell-offs of CODESA's branches, including DAISA. By 1985, pineapple production and export firms multiplied, while a number of *campesinos* were also drawn into the sector, by then comprising 93%

of producers. With the private sector fully in command of pineapple export operations, there were fewer institutional barriers to the accumulation of adjacent farmlands and forests. While Puntarenas remained central to the pineapple export sector, the pineapple plantations there remained the domain of a few grand estates, whereas 642 of the 865 pineapple farmers in Costa Rica in 1988 were based in Huetar Norte (den Daas, 1993). It was during the end of this first phase of pineapple sector development that the Champaka, then the unrivaled standard on the international market, was adopted across the Huetar Norte, effectively displacing the native Monte Lirio. Nonetheless, export-led growth had cooled by 1987 owing to lack of operational organization, technological capacity, and product uniformity and quality.

After years of oscillating export activity, a ground-breaking hybrid injected renewed vigor into the pineapple export sector. The hybrid 73-114, referred to in the industry as MD-2 and marketed as the Del Monte Gold® Extra Sweet Pineapple, had been developed in the early 1970s in a Hawaiian-based breeding laboratory by the now defunct Pineapple Research Institute of Hawaii, formerly shared by Del Monte Fresh Produce Hawaii Inc. and Dole (Vagneron et al., 2009). The now ubiquitous cultivar is commonly claimed to yield more uniform, less acidic, hardier, yellower, rounder, and sweeter fruit, faster, earlier, and in greater abundance than the previously grown varieties (Vagneron et al., 2009). With soil and climatic conditions conducive to year-round cultivation, Costa Rica was a prime testing site for the new breed. In 1996, the backers of MD-2 spearheaded a renewed campaign to position the pineapple alongside the banana in First World supermarkets, as PINDECO S.A. launched the large-scale production of MD-2, claiming restricted property rights on its creation. By 2003, with Del Monte unable to patent MD-2, Dole, Chiquita, and other agro-export firms developed their own branded versions of the cultivar. The heart of the reinvigorated pineapple export operations quickly advanced to the Huetar Norte thereafter, where it remains to date. Following its launch, the MD-2 feverishly spread across the northern lowlands and slopes, overtaking the Champaka in 2000 as the most commonly consumed pineapple in the U.S. and E.U., eventually thrusting Costa Rica into distinction as premier global supplier of fresh pineapple. This second phase of pineapple sector development (1996-present) owes not simply to the hybrid's rapid adoption into the industry but to a technological package that, according to critics, has constituted "*la base de la expansión*

agresiva, prolongada y sistemática” of agro-industrial pineapple operations (Chacón, 2010, para. 6). The stout record of profitability and enthusiastic forecasts emanating from the industry’s drivers have induced medium and large producers to expand and scale-up productive operations by way of land acquisitions and value-adding operations. The current promotion of pineapple cultivation has been an undertaking of a variety of corporate, state, and nongovernmental entities. On the one hand are the agro-industrial firms that forge vertical linkages with small, medium, or large producers. These relationships can entail technological transfers or may merely comprise wholesale purchasing arrangements. State entities, namely MAG and CNP, largely provide technological support (MAG) and even funding in the form of loans and/or grants (CNP). Institutions of higher education have also provided technological transfers and support. Concurrent with a surging global pineapple trade, importing countries began to demand a more rigorous set of production standards and quality controls in 2004 (CNP, 2011). E.U.-bound fruit thus became subject to the European Retailers’ Protocol for Good Agricultural Practice (EurepGAP), later renamed Global Good Agricultural Practice (GlobalGAP), which grants International Organization for Standardization certification in exchange for industry compliance in labour, environmental, management, and consumer areas. According to Vagneron et al. (2009), “the pineapple sector is increasingly driven by large downstream actors who derive their power from the ability to impose their definition of quality to the whole chain, and from economies of scale and scope” (p. 437). Exercising standards as a “strategic tool”, these industry drivers further “shape the world pineapple market by determining, in producer countries, who will be able to supply and who will not” (Vagneron et al., 2009, p. 437).

Initially described by project pushers as less volatile and more profitable than previous agricultural crops, pineapple from elsewhere in Costa Rica and around the globe had by 2006 inundated the world market. For smaller producers, intensifying competition was compounded by the soaring international consumption and price of inputs, such as fertilizers and agrochemicals. The global economic crisis of 2008, whose effects continue to reverberate in 2014, presided over the collapse in sale prices for pineapple producers. The scale and intensity of production has, furthermore, required a formidable amount of cultivation space, degree of technological investment and application, and readily available and flexible supply of labour.

3.3.4. The Shadow and Substance of Pineapple

The cultivation of pineapple is a protracted process featuring multiple labour-intensive stages. In year-round production, the MD-2 pineapple requires the application of an elaborate concoction of fertilizers and chemical products (herbicides, pesticides, insecticides, fungicides, nematicides, etc.). Pineapple is, in fact, among the three crops responsible for raising demand for fertilizers and agrochemicals in Costa Rica, which has distinguished itself as the world's foremost per capita consumer of agrochemicals (Andréu, 2011; Chacón, 2010; FAOSTAT, n.d.; IADB, 2007). Prior to sowing, workers must clear and plough the fields, and following the planting, the crop must then be regularly weeded, cleaned, and sprayed with an agrochemical cocktail. Once the first round of fruit is manually collected and counted, the *hujotes* (suckers) are left to grow for a second collection. Following the second harvest are the cutting of stalks, selection of plants, and the burning of organic waste so as to permit the subsequent re-sowing of the fields. Each step of production is performed by field workers, many of whom originate from across the Río San Juan. In the Atlantic zone and in the Huetar Norte, two of the most significant agricultural zones in the country, they have largely replaced Costa Rican agricultural workers out on the field and in processing and packing plant facilities (Piñeiro & Díaz Ríos, 2007).

The global pineapple industry has been the subject of scathing critiques on the part of domestic and international social justice, labour, and environmental groups since the late 1990s and has come under increased scrutiny in recent years, with notable European publications investigating the contentious labour and environmental practices of the industry's largest fruit powers operating on Costa Rican soil (Barquero, 2010; Lawrence, 2010). Domestic resistance to the pineapple incursion and to its impact on workers, communities, and the environment has been mounting over the recent period of massive growth in productive operations. In 2007, community groups based in pineapple producing regions organized to form the Frente Nacional de Sectores Afectados por la Producción Piñera (FRENESAPP). Amongst the grievances voiced by *peones* of pineapple plantations and by affected communities are systematic and flagrant labour abuses, such as excessively long work days and low wages (Barquero, 2010). Others range from job instability and repression of labour organizing, through intimidation and

firings, to exposure of workers to perilous working conditions, notably, their recurrent exposure to harsh industrial agrochemicals (Andréu, 2011;White, 2009).

Pineapple cultivation has moreover become strongly associated with such environmentally ruinous effects as the razing of primary and secondary growth forests, pest plagues, soil erosion, river sedimentation, and water contamination. The Centro de Derecho Ambiental y de los Recursos Naturales (CEDARENA) cites environmental degradation and labour exploitation as the chief products of pineapple monoculture (Cuadrada Quesada & Castro Vargas, 2009). FRENESAPP has been vociferous, along with the nation's leading public universities, la Universidad de Costa Rica (UCR) and la UNA, in calling on a moratorium on pineapple production expansion (Alfaro, 2010; Barquero, 2011).

3.4. *La Palma Aceitera*

3.4.1. The Ubiquity and Invisibility of Palm Oil

Native to West Africa, the African oil palm tree thrives in alluvial soils in the warm, humid tropics. In the 19th century, the palm oil industry, then dominated by British capital and based in West Africa, supplied Europe with key ingredient used in the manufacturing of railway and industrial machinery lubricant, soaps, and detergents (Jones, 2000). Dutch and British capital thereafter introduced commercial oil palm plantation and refining systems to Indonesia and Malaysia during the colonial era (Martin, 2003). The UFCo soon followed suit with oil palm plantations in Latin America in the 1920s. Owing to the soaring palm oil prices during WWII and to the post-war emergence of synthetic detergents, soap and detergent manufacturers turned elsewhere. As a result, palm oil industry giants, such as Unilever, sought further uses for palm oil, establishing a firm foothold in the new convenience foods and food processing industries based in Post-WWII U.S. and Europe.

Currently, palm oil represents almost half of the global edible oil trade (Janick & Paull, 2008), trailing only soybeans and wheat as the most widely exported agricultural commodity worldwide and topping the list as the single greatest edible oil produced and

traded in 2011(FAOSTAT, n.d.). Over 17 million hectares of oil palm plantations span the globe, a figure four times greater than that half a century prior and far exceeding the worldwide area of mangrove forest (FAO, 2007). Although valued as cooking oil among segments of Third World populations, palm and palm kernel oils are a largely “invisible” ingredient at the base of the convenience foods and food processing industries and are, as such, heavily employed in the production of salad oils, margarine, shortening, confections, spreads, fried and baked-goods, and ice-cream (Martin, 2005). Palm oil is likewise commonly used in the manufacture of industrial lubricants, plastics, cosmetics, fragrances, and pharmaceuticals, while secondary oil palm materials and by-products of oil palm processing are found in food dyes, vitamin supplements, animal feed, and fertilizer.

Along with other sources for agrofuels, such as soybeans, maize, and sugarcane, palm oil has increasingly come to embody the global food-fuel industrial complex (McMichael, 2009). Linked to global energy markets, the price of palm oil has generally moved in tandem with crude oil prices (McMichael, 2009). Furthermore, the associated rise of palm oil prices has further inflated prices of cooking oil and of a broad range of foodstuffs. Indeed, the oil palm plantation-based industry has prompted ample scholarly and popular debate on such issues as the displacement and dispossession of Third World populations, loss of agricultural lands and smallholdings, food security, and exploitation and problematic labour practices, amongst other concerns. It is amidst this backdrop that McMichael (2009) declares that “few crops illustrate the emerging problems in the global food chain as well as palm oil” (p. 286).

The palm oil industry is a largely concentrated one, both in terms of geography and capital. Dominating palm oil production and export for over forty years, Malaysia and Indonesia, currently command 90% of the global palm oil trade (McMichael, 2009). Other leading palm oil producers can be found over a rapidly expanding terrain elsewhere in Asia/Oceania, Africa, and Latin America. In 2012 and 2011, Costa Rica was ranked thirteenth in global palm oil production and export, respectively (FAOSTAT, n.d.), and was moreover among the four chief Latin American exporters of palm oil in 2011 (FAOSTAT, n.d.). Prior to WWII, the U.S. was the predominant consumer of global supplies of palm oil. Currently, India, China, and the E.U. currently capture half of all

palm oil imports, while India, China, and Indonesia collectively consume over 40% of global palm oil (CNP, 2011). Although a marginal percentage of palm oil is still geared towards industrial usage, 73% of palm oil is directed towards direct human consumption (CNP, 2012).

3.4.2. A Verdant Industry in Costa Rica

In 2011, the domestic production of African oil palm fruit, the source of palm oil, surpassed the one million metric tonne mark, while domestic export earnings exceeded \$200 million (FAOSTAT, n.d.). As the Costa Rica's fifth most valuable agricultural export commodity, the economic importance of palm oil in Costa Rica has increased markedly since 2001 (Escobar & Peralta, 2007). Despite a dramatic plunge in palm oil prices in 2008, the price of palm oil has since recovered, and, barring major recessions, exhibits a tendency for stability (CNP, 2012). Of the crude palm oil produced in Costa Rica, 72% is exported, while the remainder is absorbed by the domestic food industry and converted into cooking oil, shortening, and margarine (Escobar & Peralta, 2007). Mexico is Costa Rica's largest importer of crude palm oil, capturing 72% of Costa Rican exports (CNP, 2012).

In 2012, one-third of oil palm plantations in Latin America spanned the Central American isthmus, namely Honduras, while almost of quarter of Central American oil palm plantations were found within Costa Rican borders (FAOSTAT, n.d.). Second amongst its neighbours in oil palm coverage, Costa Rica currently boasts approximately 63,500 hectares in oil palm crop (FAOSTAT, n.d.). Palma Tica, the palm oil industry's domestic driver further proposes an additional 89,400 hectares of potential oil palm forests to be achieved through the use of grassland and "low-profit crop substitution" (Escobar & Peralta, 2007). In area, oil palm was the fourth most widely grown crop in Costa Rica in 2012, trailing coffee and rice, approaching sugar, and exceeding both pineapple and banana (FAOSTAT, n.d.). Oil palm is primarily cultivated along the plains and terraces of the central and southern Pacific Coastal regions, referred to as the Quepos and Brunca regions respectively. Oil palm plantations in the Quepos region, named after the area's chief city and the historic hub of the Costa Rican oil palm industry, are situated over the alluvial terraces of key rivers and account for 31% of

national oil palm cover (CNP, 2011; Escobar & Peralta, 2007). The southern Brunca region, which contains 64% of Costa Rican oil palm plantations, is currently the favoured site for oil palm expansion, however, given its characteristics as an agricultural frontier zone, the consolidation of CIPA, and the impulse of key drivers of the industry (CNP, 2011). According to industry reports, over half of the land devoted to oil palm production is in the hands of cooperatives and smallholders, while roughly 4,000 families are directly tied to oil palm-related employment (Escobar & Peralta, 2007). Nevertheless, involvement in production does not necessarily translate into clout in the domestic and global palm oil industry. Of the six palm oil extraction mills nationwide, three are located in the Brunca region, two in the Quepos region, and one in the Atlantic coastal region (Escobar & Peralta, 2007). Half of the mills are operated by Palma Tica, while another private firm, a cooperative, and a cooperative consortium manage the remaining mills. Despite the presence of some 1,766 oil palm producers (CNP, 2011), the agro-industrial conglomerate, Grupo Numar, commands the national oil palm industry at virtually all levels and wields considerable influence within the Cámara Nacional de Productores de Palma (CANAPALMA). Incorporated as Grupo Agroindustrial CB, Grupo Numar consists of four companies: Agricultural Services and Development (ASD), Palma Tica, Numar, and Unimar. Grupo Numar is therefore linked to research and development, to the production of palm seeds and seedlings in Costa Rica, and to their export to oil palm producing regions around the globe (ASD); to the production of the oil palm fruit and to its processing into crude palm oil (Palma Tica); to the San José-based processing of crude palm oil and marketing of the chain's brand of cooking oil, margarine, shortenings, and salad oils (Numar); and, finally, to the international marketing and distribution of palm seeds, saplings, crude palm oil, and finished products across the globe (Unimar). CANAPALMA has since its inception been overwhelmingly dominated by Palma Tica representatives, perhaps not surprisingly, given that Palma Tica still holds a recognized near-monopoly in palm oil development, production, processing, commercialization, marketing, and distribution.

3.4.3. An Industry in Refinement in Costa Rica: Beyond the UFCo?

From its turn of the century origins as architect of the banana republic, the UFCo in Costa Rica underwent several transformative episodes leading up to its present-day

inheritors. In 1970, the UFCo renamed itself the United Brands Company and was eventually restructured over the second half of the 1980s, re-emerging as Chiquita Brands International. The Costa Rican oil palm division remained under Chiquita until its 1995 acquisition by a group of Costa Rican and foreign investors, during which time it was rebranded as Palma Tica and reorganized into Grupo Numar.²⁴ That year, Grupo Numar initiated an aggressive plan for oil palm cultivation and palm oil marketing, export, and distribution across Central America and beyond (Grupo Numar, n.d.).

Having established banana operations on the Atlantic Coast of Costa Rica at the start of the 20th century, the UFCo shuffled banana production to the Pacific Coast in the 1930s due to banana blight and labour militancy flourishing along the plantations and ports.²⁵ From the onset, the UFCo enjoyed a continuous flow of impoverished workers to its plantations along the Pacific Coast. An estimated 30,000 settlers from Guanacaste and the Central Valley made the journey between 1930 and 1959 (Jimeno et al., 1983). In the 1920s, the UFCo conducted the first plantings of African oil palm in the Americas along the Central American coasts. The first commercial plantations, featuring a newly favoured oil palm variety, were established in Honduras and Pacific coastal Costa Rica in 1943 and 1944, respectively (Escobar & Peralta, 2007; Richardson, 1995). In 1951, Costa Rica's first palm oil extraction mill, an English import, began operations in the Quepos region, originating Costa Rican palm oil exports to Europe, by which time the oil palm industry had emerged in robust form (Richardson, 1995). The shift from banana to oil palm production in Quepos during the 1950s and 1960s stemmed from an amalgam of factors: increased competition in the banana trade; frequent flooding and subsequent destruction of banana transport infrastructure; banana blight; and, crucially, a lengthy history of struggle waged by organized workers whose striking and myriad tactics against the UFCo posed a constant challenge to company rule (Molina & Palmer, 2007). As a result, such factors collectively influenced the UFCo's strategy to replace banana with the less labour-intensive oil palm. The issue of unruly labour was likewise a

²⁴ In 1951, American, Richard Johnson, launched the San José-based Numar American Brand Company, named after the firm's first product, Nutritive Margarine. Numar was acquired by the UFCo as a subsidiary in 1965.

²⁵ For more background on the UFCo in Costa Rica, see Bourgois (1989), Chomsky (1994, 1996), Molina and Palmer (2007), and Fallas's 1940's *Mamita Yunai*, the object of a nationwide ban between 1950 and 1970.

consideration in the shift from company plantations to contract farming in the banana and palm oil industries (Striffler, 2002). In 1955, the UFCo's banana operations formally ceased in the Aguirre-Parrita subregion of Quepos. Thereinafter, the UFCo expanded its cattle ranching activities, oil palm operations, and, through its subsidiary, Numar, the manufacture of edible oils and margarine for domestic consumption (Molina & Palmer, 2007). For the UFCo, oil palm cultivation surged during this period as an attractive prospect for the abandoned expanses formerly dedicated to banana crops (Escobar & Peralta, 2007). For a segment of the thousands of landless and now unemployed banana workers, oil palm presented both a recourse and perpetuation of the status quo, as the next several decades witnessed a gradual escalation of oil palm operations throughout Costa Rica. As the industry increasingly resorted to contracting out production in order to offset costs and risks, the role of smallholders and cooperatives in disseminating industry practices and consolidating the reach of capital grew in prominence.

3.4.4. The Introduction of Oil Palm into the Costa Rican Cooperative

The introduction of oil palm into agricultural production cooperatives in Costa Rica has been a collaborative endeavor on the part of the Costa Rican state, the UFCo (in any one of its configurations), and USAID. Concomitant to Standard Fruit-USAID activities in Guanchías, Honduras²⁶ was an early United Brands-USAID project in Costa Rica. Distinguished alongside CoopeSilencio R.L. as among the earliest agricultural production cooperatives in Costa Rica to adopt oil palm monoculture is CoopeCalifornia R.L., a marketing cooperative composed of individual producers. Founded in 1985 by families of ex-United Brands plantation workers on land purchased by former workers of United Brands, and located some 55 km from CoopeSilencio R.L., CoopeCalifornia R.L. was the beneficiary of \$10 million in funds expended by USAID and the private sector (USAID-ACDI, 1995). An initiative of United Brands and USAID, one of the project's purported objectives was "to help Costa Rican farmers to become producers of oil palm in an orderly transition from the previous production system owned by United Brands,

²⁶ Refer to USAID (1985, March).

which [was] gradually reducing its production role” (USAID-ACDI, 1985, p. 1). Noteworthy were the management role of United Brands/Chiquita over CoopeCalifornia R.L. at its inception, the authority of USAID over cooperative member wages, and the influence of both bodies on the cooperative’s advisory panel. The collaboration between USAID and United Brands/Chiquita is made even more explicit by USAID’s declaration of political clout vis-à-vis the Costa Rican government, which yielded to USAID’s “influence” in the setting of palm fruit prices favourable to Chiquita—a “prerequisite” for the cooperative project (USAID-ACDI 1995, p. 5). Yet, even ideology and market logic came to diverge over such matters as cooperative organization. Whereas USAID backed the Moshav model of a agricultural community structured as a collection of individual private farms, United Brands/Chiquita advisors favoured, and ensured, a workers’ production cooperative, at least initially, due to the off-putting legal costs of creating subdivisions as well as due to the stringent exigencies of the oil palm plantation system (USAID-ACDI, 1985, 1995). Given such a foundational context, it is perhaps of note that CoopeCalifornia R.L. had by 2009 shed its self-managed cooperative status, currently operating with private parcels and hired workers.

Contemporaneous with CoopeCalifornia R.L.’s implementation of its oil palm project was that of an initially reluctant CoopeSilencio R.L. Soon thereafter, numerous cooperatives of various organizational forms followed suit. The widespread appeal of the perennial oil palm along coastal Costa Rica has since crystalized amongst many smallholders and cooperatives alike. Lending itself to predictable, year-round yields, oil palm cultivation enjoys a seemingly steady global demand at relatively high prices (Beggs & Moore, 2013). While public and private funding for *campesino* crops has all but dissipated, state bodies such as MAG and CNP, semi-autonomous cooperativist entities such as INFOCOOP and CENECOOP, public and private banks and universities, CANAPALMA, and Palma Tica have all extended varying levels of critical support for the oil palm operations of cooperative organizations.²⁷ In light of the reconfiguration of state priorities and industry pressures, and in the absence of comparably well-funded

²⁷ MAG (2007) cites, among the impetus behind agrofuel-led oil palm promotion, the Costa Rican government, universities, private sector, British banks, and Spanish investors.

alternatives, oil palm cultivation has emerged along the central and southern Pacific Coast as among the few economic routes open to cooperatives and smallholders.

3.4.5. The Work behind the Palm Oil

Incompatible with intercropping and requiring vast sums of capital, the African oil palm is an archetypal monoculture. Bearing fruit within two years of planting, the oil palm tree achieves its productive capacity between three to five years from the initial planting and yields its first commercial crop harvests within five to six years (GrupoNumar, n.d.). Weighing anywhere between 3 and 25 kg, each palm fruit cluster, known as *racimo* in the industry and *coyol* by most Costa Ricans, is composed of individual palm fruits, or fruitlets, each harbouring a single palm kernel, or *coquito*. Crude palm oil, derived from the fatty pulp surrounding the kernels, and palm kernel oil, extracted from the kernel itself, are the two main commercial products derived from the oil palm. The harvesting of oil palm fruit is perhaps the most delicate, crucial, and costly of all steps in the production process. Despite requiring only a fraction of workers vis-à-vis the banana industry, the oil palm sector nonetheless exacts a laborious series of tasks from field workers, as year-round harvests hinge upon year-round human labour. The area surrounding the base of the tree necessitates ongoing manual weeding and application of herbicides and fertilizers, while pest control, application of potent agrochemicals, and frond pruning are routine. Arguably the most labour intensive process, however, involves the cutting of the *coyoles* and their immediate harvesting. Careful to avoid a collision below, workers assigned the daily task of severing between 100 and 300 *coyoles* employ a long sickle, or *gancho*, to detach the weighty *coyoles* that hang an average of 12 m above them. The collectors of the *coyol*, or *coyoleras/os*, are commonly woman charged with carefully gathering the *coyoles* and loading them onto carts for transport.

Chapter 4. Into the Cooperatives

4.1. Cooperativa de autogestión agropecuaria San Juan R.L. (CoopeSanJuan R.L.)

Table 4.1. Land Use Designation of San Juan in 2009

CoopeSanJuan R.L.	
Hectares	Designation
270	Mainly primary forest; smaller areas of secondary forest as part of reforestations
117/120 ²⁸	Pineapple plantations in San Juan proper and in El Finca de los Tres Amigos located in La Gloria
10	<i>Yuca</i> plantations
5.3	<i>Albergue</i> and surrounding grounds
13.7	Town proper
N/A	Private farm plots assigned to associates
416	Total land area of San Juan

Note. Data adapted from Elizondo Solis (2009) unless otherwise stated.

In the humid northern interior of Costa Rica, amidst vast expanses of pineapple plantations sporadically interrupted by pasture and *yuca* fields, lies San Juan, a rural cooperative community of just over sixty inhabitants. Founded in 1985, San Juan is located approximately 100 km north of the nation's capital, in the district of Aguas Zarcas, and is the last of a string of communities laid out along a 17 km stretch of gravel and dirt road branching off the area's main thoroughfare.²⁹ Although technically a

²⁸ Ministerio de la Producción (2007); Salazar (1993)

²⁹ The administrative district of Aguas Zarcas is located within the canton of San Carlos, the historic dairy hub of the country, which is in turn situated within the province of Alajuela. The Huetar Norte region, which comprises much of the plains of northern Alajuela, is the official denomination for this landlocked area. This region is the country's largest supplier of *yuca* as well as the region most vigorously engaged in forestry; dairy and pineapple, however, are its chief economic activities. Almost 17 km away, near the start of the road, lies Santa Fe, a community home to a large population of Nicaraguan agricultural workers.

caserío, or hamlet, of La Gloria, the preceding community, San Juan is chiefly administered and conceived as a town apart. Of the largely familial inhabitants, 33 are cooperative associates, of whom 17 are women. Most of the town's 13 homes are arranged around a soccer field that serves as a *zócalo*. The town's handful of *yuca* plots are distributed in the town's centre, unlike the more chemically-intensive pineapple plantations situated outside the town. Pineapple production and export are the cooperative's chief economic activities, generating greater revenue than the *yuca*, agroecotourism, and forestry projects combined. The town further encompasses a cooperative office, pineapple packing plant, *bodega* (equipment and agrochemical storage facility), and communal *comedor* (dining and congregation hall),³⁰ as well as an elementary school, *telesecundaría*, and high school, which service not only the children of San Juan, but those of two neighboring communities.³¹ Most of the nearly 120 hectares of pineapple plantation, the economic lifeblood of the community, hug both the rolling slopes that extend outwards from the town as well as low clearings interspersed between tracts of forest. The bulk of pineapple plantations are most broadly visible from the cooperative's *albergue*, which rests perched atop a hill of walking distance from the town centre. Despite its relatively small population, the town enjoys daily bus service to and from the district capital.

4.1.1. In Search of a Beginning

The majority of San Juan residents descend from a set of families that journeyed generations earlier through various parts of the country in search of land and economic security. Faced with exacerbating land inequality in the canton of Orotina,³² located some 56 km west of the nation's capital, some 20 families migrated to the southern tip of

³⁰ Initiated by voluntourists, the *comedor* was left uncompleted for months until hired Nicaraguan labour resumed its construction.

³¹ The elementary school, *telesecundaría*, and high school opened in 1992, 2003-4, and 2006-7, respectively. According to Acuña Sanchez (2007), prior to the construction of the elementary school, children were required to travel 5 km in order to attend classes in La Gloria, making their way on horseback, wagon, or, more commonly, by foot. In 1992, after applying much pressure on the state, the community finally obtained its first school, in addition to electricity, potable water, and a soccer field.

³² The canton of Orotina likewise provided an ancestral departure point for several other founding families of CoopeSilencio R.L., including that of the manager.

the Nicoya Peninsula in northwestern Costa Rica, settling in Jicaral de Lepanto. The expansion of cattle ranching in the country's beef-producing region, however, helped to thwart the settlement efforts of the Jicaral settlers. Another contingent subsequently set forth from Jicaral for north central Costa Rica, settling in San Jorge de los Chiles. There, many of the families endured landlessness, induced to work land both unsuited and insufficient for subsistence. As a result, a number of *campesinos* from San Jorge de los Chiles mobilized, organizing a land recuperation action and petitioning IDA for land, which IDA eventually granted in the form of parcels. Over time, however, the parcels were absorbed by large landholdings, prompting the *campesinos* to once more solicit the state to intervene. Meanwhile, 12 families from la Palmera and San Juan de Ciudad Quesada submitted to IDA similar requests for parcels. Yet this time, prior to redistributing any land, INFOCOOP intervened by organizing into a cooperative the petitioning families from la Palmera and San Juan de Ciudad Quesada. On the advice of an INFOCOOP official, who would by 2009 become CoopeSanJuan R.L.'s cooperative manager, IDA selected for the site of the new cooperative the property of Juan Vargas, a large landowner then in search of a buyer. With IDA's approval, a party of men from la Palmera and San Juan de Ciudad Quesada arrived to the Vargas estate in January 1985 to initiate a *precarista* settlement. During this period, women dwelled offsite, visiting the camp to deliver supplies and ultimately joining the group once permanent footing had been established. IDA soon purchased the property, complete with dairy cattle, for 12.5 million colones, and, in August 1985, the cooperative was formally constituted and christened CoopeSanJuan R.L. In the two months following the cooperative's constitution, state agencies recognized a need to augment the size of the cooperative and community and thus encouraged 16 of the previously petitioning families from San Jorge de los Chiles to join CoopeSanJuan R.L., prompting Cordero Ulate (2002) to refer to the Jicaral-San Jorge wave of arrivals as the "*principal grupo componente de COOPESANJUAN en sus primeros momentos*" (p. 39). Most of the current residents in fact hail from the Jicaral-San Jorge constituent, claiming kin to the Salazar clan in one way or another, while many of the founding families originating from la Palmera and San Juan de Ciudad Quesada parted ways with the cooperative in subsequent years. At first, multiple family units were housed in *ranchitos*, modest dirt-floored, thatched-roofed dwellings constructed from rudimentary materials and lacking in electricity and potable water. These were replaced in the late 1980s and early 1990s by

constructions financed by the state institution, IMAS, which additionally supplied the cooperative with supplementary foodstuffs in the immediate years following its founding.³³ Despite difficult living conditions and ten hour work days in San Juan, a number of those who had left the cooperative did so only to later return.³⁴ Women were nonetheless excluded from membership until the late 1980s, when spouses of *asociados* became the first women to gain member status.³⁵ In the 1990s, membership received a further boost from the growing youth segment of the population.

Once formed, the cooperative faced several challenges to its course of development. In 1988, an external threat to the cooperative appeared in IDA's pressure on the cooperative to divide cooperative lands into private parcels. Since IDA's policies by that time had come to mandate that parcel recipients cultivate all lands granted under redistributive programs, the parcelization of cooperative lands would have effectively marked the forests of San Juan for clearing (Acuña Sánchez, 2007). In response, associates appealed to INFOCOOP, CPCA, and the Instituto Tecnológico de Costa Rica (ITCR) for assistance and succeeded in conserving the cooperative model and protected forests. A second critical juncture faced by the cooperative was the 1992 internal split between *cooperativistas* and *parceleros*, the former advocating the cooperative model and the latter encouraging the parcelization of cooperative lands. The *parceleros* hired lawyers and solicited IDA and the judiciary to intervene in their favour, while the *cooperativistas* received support from INFOCOOP, CPCA, and other cooperativist

³³ Forty-six year old *asociada*, Daisy, the tourism project coordinator, recalls that one had to “*tocar puertas*” in order to secure such crucial state support for the community (Interview, June 27, 2009).

³⁴ In the early 1990s, an *asociado* received 1,000 colones a week and one sack of rice. A family of five would receive three packages of rice, while a family of three would receive two packages. Milk sales were used to purchase sugar, salt, and soap in bulk, which would be distributed accordingly; nevertheless, the cooperative was prohibited from buying with cooperative funds “non-essentials”, such as shoes, clothing, and medicine. While the cooperative purchased a number of goods for community members, many residents had to ultimately rely on extended credit from grocers in neighbouring towns in order to secure additional foodstuffs.

³⁵ As the grace period following the purchase of the cooperative lands loomed near, CoopeSanJuan R.L. found itself unable to commence debt repayment to IDA. The women of CoopeSanJuan R.L. assumed a central role in repayment negotiations, travelling to cantonal and national capitals for meetings with state officials. These meetings ultimately resulted in the assumption of the debt on the part of the Fondo de Desarrollo Social y Asignaciones Familiares, or FODESAF (Acuña Sánchez, 2007).

organizations.³⁶ According to Sonia, a forty-four year old *asociada* involved in the tourism project,

The first *CoopeSanJuanenses* wanted to divide CoopeSanJuan into parcels. They came from a class less poor than us. There were some who wanted to leave, but not without money. They wanted the parcels to sell. But to be in the cooperative one had to be poor. Poor is one who has no land elsewhere. (Sonia, Interview, July 6, 2009)

There remain few advocates for parcelization from that period, as the *parceleros*, judged in violation of the cooperative statute, ultimately parted ways with the cooperative in the following two years, some voluntarily and most forcibly expelled, “without rights or anything” (Sonia, Interview, July 6, 2009).

4.1.2. Subsistence and Early Market Agriculture: *la Lechería* (1985-2003)

For well over a century, dairy farming has been a celebrated keystone of the economy of the Huetar Norte. In San Juan, as in surrounding communities, dairy farming was for many years contemporaneous with subsistence and local and national market agriculture. For most of the cooperative’s history, dairy farming generated the bulk of its revenue and, along with basic grains, served a significant measure of household needs. The CNP could notionally be counted on to purchase from the cooperative any surplus maize. The domestic crop staples of maize, beans, and rice, which together occupied six hectares of cooperative lands in 1993, similarly constituted a key agricultural fixture in the cooperative’s early years (Salazar, 1993). Most residents, nonetheless, cite blight, severe climatic phenomena, deficient productivity, and inconsistent state support as challenges to early cooperative agriculture.

Large-scale, market-oriented agriculture emerged in San Juan soon after its founding, originating with a disastrous, state-imposed experiment with cacao cultivation. Endorsed by bilateral and multilateral aid and lending agencies as part of the export-oriented Agriculture of Change (Barry, 1991; Brohman, 1996), the cacao project had

³⁶ In addition to the partition and sale of cooperative lands, the *parceleros* are alleged to have pushed for deforestation and poaching.

imploded by 1990, as it had elsewhere in the country, with the cooperative's 25 ha project succumbing to monilia plague, scant state support, soaring production costs, and a freefall in international prices. With the backing of the Centro Nacional de Abastecimiento y Distribución de Alimentos (CENADA), the cooperative next embarked on plantain cultivation, which spanned 13 hectares in 1993 (Salazar, 1993). Grown for household and national consumption, the plantains were marketed through the Cooperativa Nacional Autogestionaria de Abastecimiento Popular R.L. (COOPENAPO R.L.) and sold in farmers' markets as far as the nation's capital.³⁷ Until its dissolution in the mid-1990s, COOPENAPO R.L. also commercialized a portion of CoopeSanJuan's early pineapple crop, while the remainder was absorbed by an intermediary. By that time, however, the pineapple project, which had been encouraged by MAG, was but a minor one, comprising only three hectares of Monte Lirio and Champaka varieties.³⁸

During its course, the cooperative's dairy farm supplied community residents with most of their dairy needs as well as a surplus that could be sold to Dos Pinos R.L., the nation's largest dairy cooperative. Launched with cattle that had accompanied the Vargas estate, the *lechería* project soon expanded through the acquisition of additional heads of cattle purchased with INFOCOOP-issued loans. By 1993, pasture covered 179 hectares, or 43% of cooperative lands (Salazar, 1993). Until its displacement by MD-2 pineapple, the dairy farm purportedly yielded between seven to twelve large pails of milk per day; sufficient for daily family rations of two bottles and a sizeable surplus for sales to Dos Pinos (Acuña Sánchez, 2007). The circumstances surrounding the conclusion of the *lechería* project have been subject to speculation on the part of a number of San Juan residents, as there appears to have been a lack of clarity and consensus around the decision to end operations. There, moreover, linger allegations of executive decision-making and below-cost sales of cows and dairy equipment.³⁹ The vast majority of associates, particularly the younger associates, nonetheless express little regret over the *lechería*'s termination, while at least three associates expressed their confusion and/or

³⁷ According to Salazar (1993), the plantain crops boasted a monthly output of 15,000 plantain "fingers" and occupied 10 hectares of land previously under cacao cultivation.

³⁸ Salazar (1993) reports that during this time the pineapple project yielded 4,000 units monthly.

³⁹ The cooperative reportedly sold its set of 68 cows and accompanying equipment for 11.5 million colones prior to the first plantings of MD-2 pineapple.

disapproval over its sale. The two most vociferous critics stand in marked contrast to even their immediate family members residing in the same households. Born in Guadalupe de Jicaral de Lepanto, one elder, 55, affectionately referred to by residents as *Tía*, remains avid in her condemnation of the pineapple monoculture. Perhaps in spite or in light of her experience with *campesino* agriculture, *Tía* made explicit her disagreement:

The land is weak, tired, spent. Now, we throw things at the earth, and it gives less than before. Insecticides and the rest are killing and sterilizing the earth . . . It was beautiful with the *lechería*. But we had to clear the guava trees and pasture for the *piña*, since the *piña* cannot abide the shade. The *piña* need sun. *Bendita piña*. (*Tía*, Interview, July 3, 2009)

Forty-four year old *asociada*, Mira, asserts that the *lechería* had not been judged by the community as an economic failure but had simply been phased out in favour of increased *yuca* and MD-2 cultivation (Interview, June 26, 2009). One *fundador*, who chose for himself the pseudonym Cantinflas, regards the transition with more regret than I observed in any one resident. Born in Jicaral de Lepanto, Cantinflas entered the waged labour market at a young age. From the age of eight onwards, Cantinflas worked as a *boyero* (oxcart driver) and *peón* on corn and bean plots and on cotton and sugar plantations. His oral history was among the most candidly and powerfully rendered accounts that I had the opportunity to hear. Priding himself as the only associate engaged in manual field labour and grounds-keeping, Cantinflas emphatically lamented the removal of the dairy farm:

Milk generated resources to generate food for people . . . Others agreed [with its elimination] because of their ignorance. With the *lechería*, they bought their daily provisions . . . When I saw the cows leave, tears fell from my eyes. (Cantinflas, Interview, July 8, 2009)

4.1.3. The Pineapple Express (2003-present)

Following the domestic launch of MD-2, pineapple plantations came to rapidly absorb vast swathes of San Juan's home district of Aguas Zarcas, which in 2007 counted 2,000 hectares of pineapple monoculture (MAG, n.d.). It was amidst the MD-2 pineapple "boom" of the early 2000s that the San Carlos seat of the ITCR's School of Agronomic Engineering introduced MD-2 to San Juan, selling 3,000 young pineapple

shoots to the cooperative and supplying its members with technical support and a three-pronged “strategic plan” for economic development: MD-2 pineapple, *yuca*, and agroecotourism (Acuña Sánchez, 2007).⁴⁰ MD-2 shoots in hand, the cooperative soon established a pineapple plant nursery and, by 2003, could already boast 20 hectares of land under MD-2 pineapple cultivation. By this point, CoopeSanJuan R.L had already negotiated a fair-trade export arrangement with European importers, primarily English and German. This fair-trade agreement was spawned as an initiative of the Asociación de Productores Usuarios del Programa de Desarrollo Agroindustrial de la Zona Norte (ASOPROAGROIN), an association of small and medium producers sponsored by the Programa de Desarrollo Agroindustrial de la Zona Norte (PROAGROIN), a private foundation that had emerged in 1997 from a debt-conversion agreement between the governments of Costa Rica and the Netherlands.

By 2004, the cooperative’s newly-constructed packing plant was packing pineapple grown by the cooperative as well as by neighbouring growers. Funded by the CNP and CPCA, the plant was conceived by its sponsors as a means by which to bypass the intermediary, secure a position in the value-adding agroindustrial sector, and forge direct, fair trade linkages between CoopeSanJuan R.L. and European markets. The plant was prematurely closed by EurepGAP (currently GlobalGAP), however, for allegedly failing to comply with international regulations (Acuña Sánchez, 2007). As a result of the packing plant closure, relations between cooperative and ASOPROAGROIN were interrupted, prompting the cooperative to seek out another buyer with access to a packing facility. From the time of the San Juan plant closure until its 2010 re-opening, the cooperative had sold its fruit to Del Huerto S.A., an intermediary and Costa Rican

⁴⁰ By the late-1990s, *yuca* emerged nationwide as a robust export crop, and San Juan followed suit in its extensive production. Although most national *yuca* exports are bound primarily for the U.S. market, San Juan-grown *yuca* is largely destined for European markets through a fair-trade arrangement with OXFAM-BELGIUM. Since 1998, CoopeSanJuan has supplied *yuca* to the Consorcio de Cooperativas de Caficultores de Guanacaste y Montes de Oro R.L (COOCAFE R.L.), a secondary-level service cooperative in Costa Rica. COOCAFE R.L. in turn arranges for the transnational subsidiary, Pozuelo S.A., to manufacture *yuca* chips, which COOCAFE R.L. then exports to OXFAM-Belgium. Representatives of OXFAM-BELGIUM have reportedly made numerous trips to the cooperative. While the price of *yuca* under the previous arrangements has largely remained above market, the dramatic plunge in prices in the years leading up to my fieldwork had been sharply felt among small and medium producers in the region.

export company specializing in the packing, commercialization, and export of pineapple and other produce bound for European, North American, and Caribbean markets. During this time, CoopeSanJuan R.L.-grown pineapple could even be found in U.S. supermarkets on account of cooperative sales to Chiquita Fresh North America L.L.C. In addition to the reportedly meagre purchasing prices offered by Del Huerto S.A., damages sustained by fruit during the rough and lengthy trips to the Pital-based Del Huerto packing plant further undercut product value. In such cases, rejected fruit would be sold to Tropical Paradise Fruits Co. for its conversion into juices and jams. Having largely overcome challenges relating to financial management, funding procurement, and compliance with global industry parameters, the CoopeSanJuan R.L. packing plant was finally scheduled to reopen in early 2010, following a visit from E.U. officials.⁴¹ At the time of my fieldwork, the cooperative was planning a renewal of commercial ties with ASOPROAGROIN to coincide with the reopening of the packing facility, which was expected to employ between two- to three-dozen workers, primarily women, from and beyond San Juan. At the time of my interviews, a Costa Rican field worker and non-associate community resident, both women, placed high hopes in the plant's reopening as a source of employment.

The aggressive launching of CoopeSanJuan R.L.'s pineapple operations during the 2000s was made possible by approximately \$2.3 million in low-interest loans and grants issued by CNP under its now infamous *Reconversión productiva* programme (Mata, 2009). Upon the urging of the CNP, CoopeSanJuan R.L. contracted professionals to assist in the planning and implementation of the project. Cooperative debt quickly accumulated, however, in face of low pineapple prices and escalating production costs. The looming threat of insolvency ultimately led to the state's mortgaging of cooperative lands. Cantinflas points out that the debt repayment scheme was unrealistic at best:

The CNP project was sold to the cooperative, and the associates believed it . . . At the beginning, the idea seemed beautiful. One of the problems was that the *piña* project would not pay . . . The price was *el espíritu de la lucha*. (Cantinflas, Interview, July 8, 2009)

⁴¹ One contractor reportedly made off to Panama with US\$10,000 of cooperative funds that had been allocated for the plant's ongoing construction.

Faced with mounting pressures to expand production, the cooperative purchased the 40 hectare Finca de los Tres Amigos in neighboring La Gloria in 2005.⁴² Although the cooperative was initially set to begin loan repayment in February 2010, the cooperative had initiated an appeal process two years earlier, presenting to the Costa Rican Legislative Assembly a document arguing faulty management and judgment on the part of CNP project advisers. In 2009, CoopeSanJuan's dealings with the CNP were in the process of being transferred to Costa Rica's main state bank.⁴³ During my fieldwork in San Juan, the CNP, state bank officials, cooperative manager, and administrative council convened in the cooperative office to negotiate debt repayment and the possible exoneration of the debt, the latter achieved later that year.⁴⁴

San Juan residents appear unanimous in attributing to the pineapple project an increased standard of living in their community, citing its being the first economic activity to qualify for extensive credit and to ensure regularly paid salaries. The cooperative's field coordinator attributes the cooperative's financial success to pineapple's broader market reach and greater external demand. Most residents accordingly commend the socioeconomic changes that have coincided with the consolidation of the project. Originally from the town of Santa Fe, located some 17 km away, 28 year old Randi gained entry into the community, though not membership, through marriage to an *asociada*. As the current manager of the *bodega*, Randi insists that "agriculture has always been the daily bread. When *piña* arrived here, there was massive growth . . . Now, it's better because it sustains us. That's where we're going. It gives us a better life" (Interview, July 2, 2009). A few others contend that the allure of *piña* has waned, owing to low prices, high production costs, dominance of agribusiness, and predatory intermediaries. Some, such as Vanesa, 24 year old *asociada* and cooperative secretary of production, have also bitterly likened the project to the task of "feeding Europe" rather than their own community (Interview, June 26, 2009). During my two periods of field

⁴² To the cooperative community, a more palatable alternative to the razing of cooperative rainforest

⁴³ Amongst other functions of the BN Desarrollo del Banco Nacional, a department of the Banco Nacional de Costa Rica, is the provision of credit and additional assistance to small and medium businesses.

⁴⁴ At this point, 100 million colones (roughly \$200,000) had been scheduled for repayment.

research in San Juan, not once did I witness a resident consume the pineapple that surrounds the landscape, nor could I spot a trace of pineapple in any one of the residences. In fact, my first and last taste of San Juan-grown pineapple in San Juan occurred during my first day out on the plantation, when the field coordinator cut a fruit for sampling. My parting gift, by contrast, consisted of four pineapples that I was to carry with me to CoopeSilencio R.L. While her counterparts are overwhelmingly welcoming of pineapple cultivation, 50 year old *asociada* and cooperative office custodian, Chela, insists that

Piña indeed generates a greater income, but there are more costs to produce it. More *peones*. Before, only associates worked. Now, no associates will do it because they all want to go on the tractor. It was better before. There have been more *nicas* since *piña* arrived . . . Now, it is a desert, a desert of *piña*. Before, there were fruit trees. This is not good for the environment. It contaminates water and air. Before *piña* was produced, it was better. When it was natural, it was delicious. What a loss of nature. (Chela, Interview, July 4, 2009)

While nowhere near as vociferous in condemnation, several residents did note the danger of “putting all one’s eggs in one’s basket” as well as the importance of producing what one consumes. Yésica, 23 year old *asociada* and receptionist and Human Resources manager for CoopeSanJuan R.L., expressed her wish for the cooperative to abandon the pineapple project in light of the cooperative’s debt burden (Interview, July 1, 2009). Osvaldo, moreover, declared, “We cannot stop producing what we eat. Give maize seeds and fertilizer so that the people can produce” (Interview, June 28, 2009). Osvaldo’s 72 year old father, Mario, had, due to injury, retired from work only ten months prior to our interview. He remarked,

Farmers have the problem of disappearing. The purchasing system of the CNP helped much . . . There has always been more support for cattle, not for *granos básicos* . . . The changes in the 1990s did not favour the farmer. Agroexporting has helped much. That’s why we’ve had to change. *Piña* and *yuca* have better prices. This is the work of the state. (Mario, Interview, July 6, 2009)

Twenty year old *asociada*, Zuli, is the cooperative’s assistant to the secretary of production tasked with overseeing the pineapple project in an administrative capacity. Zuli appeared proud as well as hopeful of the cooperative’s continual organizational and

economic success. She contrasted the rice, beans, and tuna of the pre-MD-2 era with the chicken, DVDs, and electric fans of the present-day, echoing a common view held among many residents in her forthright comments: “Before what we cultivated was what we ate. Now, we cultivate to send . . . Before, we worked to live. Now, we work to live *well*” (Interview, July 2, 2009).

4.1.4. “With the *piña* came the *nicas*”⁴⁵

While all associates of CoopeSanJuan R.L. are workers of the cooperative in some capacity, not all of the cooperative’s workers are cooperative members, for a significant proportion of the cooperative’s labour force is composed of contracted migrant labourers, to whom the residents of CoopeSanJuan R.L. simply refer as *peones*. Hired non-member workers currently outnumber the half-dozen associates engaged in pineapple field operations. Although it was common for the women and men of San Juan to work side-by-side in the fields during the early years of large-scale pineapple farming, contracted migrant labour largely supplanted family labour on cooperative plantations and on individual plots as pineapple operations expanded. Currently, all but two of the twenty-four contracted field workers are Nicaraguan men, while the women workers consist of a Nicaraguan and a Costa Rican national, whose previous spouse had been an *asociado* of the cooperative and whose children are more or less integrated into the community. The Nicaraguan workers reside outside the community of San Juan, many in cramped accommodations with other migrant workers; others reside with their own families. Many have ample experience working for a number of pineapple firms in the district, and most tend to stay employed by CoopeSanJuan R.L. from anywhere between several months to several years. It is unclear whether turnover stems from cooperative practice or from the workers’ own migratory patterns. An undisclosed number of migrant workers are alleged to be undocumented, but given the delicate nature of the issue, figures could not be confirmed.

⁴⁵ Chela, Interview, July 4, 2009. The gender-invariable term, *nica*, when used by Costa Ricans to refer to Nicaraguans, is a loaded expression that may oftentimes hint of ridicule and contempt towards the latter group. In San Juan, residents commonly refer to Nicaraguans as *chinos*, a reference to the latter’s perceived difference in phenotype.

Most of the (all-male) associates engaged in outdoor pineapple operations are assigned to the positions of field coordinator, tractor driver, fruit transporter, and other tasks less directly linked to applied pineapple preparation and harvesting. Sowings, applications of agrochemicals and fertilizers, plant cleaning, weeding, fruit marking, harvesting, plant selection, and other manual tasks immediate to the pineapple production cycle are undertaken by contract workers.⁴⁶ Hired non-member workers, such as Balbino, may also be privately employed by an individual cooperative associate on any number of the private lots reserved exclusively for associates.

In 2009, hourly wages paid by the cooperative were above minimum wage, ranging from 850 to 1200 colones per hour (\$1.65-\$2.40 per hour), with office workers, primarily women, earning, on average, slightly more than field workers.⁴⁷ There is relatively little wage differentiation between hired non-member workers and *asociados* engaged in field work. Nevertheless, while associates and contracted workers alike are entitled to vacation time/pay and *aguinaldos* (Christmas bonuses), amongst other basic rights stipulated by law, *peones* are not eligible for the comprehensive insurance policies and share of the *excedente* (annual surplus) afforded to associates. Associates are also less strictly supervised and enjoy exclusive rights to housing within San Juan. More fundamentally, *peones* are denied the voice and vote of a cooperative member, exerting little control over their own labour and in cooperative-level decision-making.

Despite an initial period of distrust, the community has grown accustomed to its dependence on the migrant workers, with the vast majority of residents holding a generally favourable regard for the Nicaraguan workers. In fact, several times a week, the migrant workers and youth of San Juan converge to play baseball, a Nicaraguan import to the community. *Tía* praises the contributions of migrant workers to the Costa Rican agricultural sector: “*Ticos* don’t pick *piña*, coffee, and cut sugarcane anymore. Thanks to [Nicaraguan migrant workers], we eat” (Interview, July 3, 2009). Nevertheless,

⁴⁶ Aside from pineapple production, Nicaraguan labourers have also been contracted to renovate the *albergue*, construct tourist cabins, and complete the town’s *comedor*, which had been left unfinished by a group of voluntourists.

⁴⁷ In 2009, most field workers earned between 850 and 1150 colones; 1000-1200 colones for office workers.

tensions have emerged in cases in which migrant workers have been publically accused of hunting forest animals or disparaged for allegedly poor job performance.⁴⁸ Andrés, 19 year old *asociado* employed as a cooperative security guard and field worker, argues that associates tend to regard themselves as bosses and thus no longer feel obliged to labour as *peones*: “Some [of the workers] are not [associates] because some are contracted [*Laughs*]. It’s the truth. *Piña* work is really hard. Few [of the associates] like heavy work. [The Nicaraguans] are contracted because they are *valiente*” (Interview, July 3, 2009). Ashley, a 19 year old *asociada*, was pursuing her studies in agricultural and agro-industrial administration during the time of my research. She initially framed the employment of Nicaraguan workers as stemming from the insufficient labour provided by cooperative membership and proceeded in asserting that “no *asociado* does the job of a *peón*: harvests. Most *asociados* are on the *chapulines* or in the office. I remember when we all worked in the field, seven, ten years ago. Even women were in the field” (Interview, July 9, 2009).

With regards to working conditions for *peones*, safety procedures generally entail an informational printout and related equipment; although there is little follow-up, and many of the *peones* are either illiterate or semi-literate. Aside from the intensive, risk-filled tasks of plantation work, hired non-member workers must often cross treacherously swollen rivers to reach far flung corners of the plantations, prompting several of them, including Luz, to cite safety concerns as a constant source of worry. Born in Jicaral de Lepanto to a *campesino*-banana plantation worker and *ama de casa*, Luz was the only Costa Rican national amongst the hired non-member plantation workers in 2009. After settling in San Juan in 2000, Luz soon started a family, found employment for a time in the tourism project, later managed a *pulpería* from her own home, and, at the time of my research, was working on the pineapple plantation, cleaning and selecting plants, amongst other tasks. Luz was graphic in her description of her daily workday, declaring that although the sun “bothers” her, “it takes away hunger” (Interview, July 12, 2009). Luz had applied for cooperative membership but expressed her frustration of having had

⁴⁸At the annual general assembly in October 31, 2009, a technician, one of three contracted Costa Rican professionals, pronounced that “foreign workers don’t care about quality. The *peones* do a low quality job. They don’t operate the machinery or apply materials correctly. This brings us down” (personal communication, October 31, 2009).

already completed her *periodo de prueba*, or trial period, to no fruition.⁴⁹ In anticipation of her impending membership and reassignment to the pineapple packing plant, Luz claimed to have been informed that she would be the final adult associate to be accepted into the cooperative; future associates would henceforth be drawn from the current youth. Mario was among the few associates who expressed an interest in an increase in cooperative membership, particularly given the expansion of cooperative operations (Interview, July 6, 2009). Yésica explains that the membership of CoopeSanJuan R.L. does not wish for “others to enjoy what they [the cooperative members] have worked so hard for” (Interview, July 1, 2009). Andrés adds, “You have to pay to become an associate. That’s the idea. The cooperative wanted to make a payment so that there would be no more associates” (Interview, July 3, 2009).

All hired workers but Luz must endure the lengthy trek to and from San Juan; an hour trip each way for some. This latter point garnered the attention of the cooperative manager at the time of my research. His tentative proposal consisted of a future “urbanization project” to occupy over several hectares of land on which to build apartments to serve as worker housing. Regarding the prospect of labour organizing and representation amongst the hired workers, cooperative members largely regarded the notion of a union in the midst of their community as redundant, if not inconceivable, since the cooperative is defined and constituted as a worker-managed organization. Amongst community residents, one type of worker (associate) is understood to be a permanent member of the cooperative, while the other (*peón*) is regarded as transient, though fundamental to the cooperative’s existence. Few associates expressed reservations regarding the *dueño-peón* distinction amongst workers of the cooperative, citing a scarce labour pool in San Juan and sheer necessity as the driving forces behind the contracting out of labour. One event that encapsulated the complex relationship between CoopeSanJuan R.L. and Nicaraguan migrant labour was the cooperative’s *Día del Trabajador* (International Workers’ Day) celebrations, from which the Nicaraguan workers of the cooperative were excluded. The cooperative’s field coordinator, 36 year

⁴⁹ In addition to the one year trial period, a prospective associate must contribute *capital social* through the purchase of a share of the cooperative, which was priced at US \$5, 000 in 2009. Shares are most commonly purchased through monthly installments negotiated between the cooperative and the prospective member.

old Osvaldo, insists that the cooperative ought to take care of the associates and *peones* in the same manner, lamenting that the *peones* do not receive the attention that the cooperative should afford them, which he suggests is “because the cooperative is preoccupied with production, not the social” (Interview, June 28, 2009).

4.1.5. Women in Waged Work

The management and realization of pineapple production operations are largely designated as the domain of male membership, despite women comprising over half of cooperative membership. By contrast, in 2009, the tourism project, which enjoys a greater involvement of female membership, received the least amount of cooperative investment of the three primary projects (pineapple, *yuca*, and tourism). While male associates, for the most part, manage pineapple and *yuca* projects, *asociadas* run the *albergue*, tend to homestay voluntourists, staff the co-op office, and carry out pineapple packing operations; although hired non-member workers dominate the packing line. The women most intimately involved in the day-to-day administrative operations of the cooperative are employed in the cooperative office: secretary to the cooperative manager, secretary to the production manager,⁵⁰ and an assistant to the latter post. These three women, all associates in their twenties, are esteemed professionals within their community and hold varying degrees of certification and post-secondary education. Two additional office workers, an accountant (male) and secretary to the accountant (a granddaughter of Juan Vargas) are contracted from outside the community.⁵¹

Almost all of the adult *asociadas* had been actively involved in most areas of cooperative agriculture until the mid-2000s, with a considerable number of adult women holding ample experience in pineapple operations, namely in fertilizer and agrochemical application, pest control, fruit marking, harvesting, and packing. As a central component in the cooperative’s increasingly industrializing agro-operations, the San Juan pineapple packing plant is also the largest generator of employment outside of plantation work,

⁵⁰ The assistant to the production manager oversees global and national regulatory frameworks and certification standards.

⁵¹ Other fixed posts occupied by associates and non-associates alike include that of driver (male), chemical storage facility manager (male), night watchman (male), and office custodian (female).

particularly for younger associates (women and men) and non-associate women lacking a secondary household income. The plant has attracted predominantly female applicants, nationals and migrants, from beyond San Juan, most with abundant experience in the industry. The plant is headed by a manager (female associate),⁵² who in turn directs a supervisor (associate) charged with overseeing anywhere from between 24 and 36 workers. Women comprise well over half the plant workers, which include packers and a handful of fruit selectors.

4.2. Cooperativa de autogestión agropecuaria de servicios múltiples El Silencio R.L. (CoopeSilencio R.L.)

Table 4.2. Land Use Designation of El Silencio in 2009

CoopeSilencio R.L.	
Hectares	Land Use
530	African oil palm plantations
300/350 ⁵³	Forestry project (teakwood and melina)
150	Primary forest conservation
N/A	Dairy farm and pastures, organic garden, and town proper
980/985 ⁵⁴	Total land area of El Silencio

Note. Data adapted from FECOOPA R.L. (2009) unless otherwise stated. If added together, the individual figures on land area evidently surpass the total area of El Silencio. This discrepancy could not be adequately accounted for through research and inquiry.

A modern highway lined with real-estate and tourism billboards extends from the nation's capital to the bustling tourist hub of Quepos, located on the central Pacific Coast, some 129 km southwest of San José. The surrounding sub-region of Aguirre-Parrita (commonly referred to as *la Zona*) is characterized by recurrent rows of African oil palm trees in various stages of lifecycle: from saplings, to imposing giants, to decaying posts. These oil palm forests are sporadically punctuated by rice fields,

⁵² The daughter of the then-president of the *consejo de administración* was, at the time of research, slated to become the plant manager.

⁵³ CEPAL (1999)

⁵⁴ Barrantes Calderón (1998)

another crop of historic significance to the region. A 35 km bus ride southeast from Quepos leaves one in the heart of El Silencio, a cooperative community situated in the district of Savegre, named after the infamous flood-prone river that intersects cooperative lands. From its famed origins as a hotbed of *campesino*-communist activity in contested UFCo territory, El Silencio has since its 1973 founding grown from 597 to 985 hectares (IICA, 2010). Within its boundaries abound numerous rivers, waterfalls, pastures, and hundreds of hectares of African oil palm plantations and forests. The community of El Silencio numbers 480 hundred residents and 85 families, 41 of whom are associates of the cooperative, of whom a further four are women.⁵⁵ While the town is composed of three spatially distinct neighbourhoods, the majority of associates dwell in the town centre, with influential associates inhabiting near or along the *calle principal*. The town boasts two churches, one Catholic and one Protestant, a small central park dedicated to the *fundadores*, a soccer field, a *comisariato* (“*comis*”),⁵⁶ two private businesses (*bazar* and *soda*), a state-administered nutrition centre,⁵⁷ an elementary school, a high school,⁵⁸ a cooperative office situated atop a hill, and an *albergue*-restaurant complex located atop a much larger hill that commands an unparalleled view of the cooperative’s plantations below and of the coastal shoreline in the near distance.

4.2.1. “*El grito del Silencio*”⁵⁹

Until the arrival of the UFCo, the canton of Aguirre had long been the domain of the Lutz family, a prominent cattle ranching clan that later branched into banana exporting, eventually establishing commercial ties with the UFCo (Jimeno et al., 1983). Confronted with banana blight and labour militancy on the Atlantic Coast, the UFCo shifted its principle banana operations to the Pacific Coast in the 1930s, leasing from the

⁵⁵ In stark contrast with CoopeSanJuan R.L., the membership of CoopeSilencio R.L. is largely an aging one, with most associates falling well beyond the age of forty.

⁵⁶ A cooperative-run grocery store and legacy of the UFCo.

⁵⁷ Since the 1980s, the state-run nutrition centre has administered a food program that provides free meals to expectant mothers and to children of under two years of age.

⁵⁸ Constructed with the assistance of the Spanish government, as its commemorative sign reads.

⁵⁹ The story of the founding of CoopeSilencio, popularly referred to as *El grito del Silencio*, enjoyed such epic status following the cooperative’s founding that it was performed nationwide by a travelling theatre troupe comprised of El Silencio residents.

Costa Rican state vast tracts of some of the most fertile land in *La Zona*. Due to banana blights and disastrous flooding in 1955, amidst other considerations, the UFCo abandoned its banana plantations in *la finca El Silencio*, named so for its purported reputation as the company's most serene plantation. Although much of the surrounding region came under oil palm cover in subsequent years, El Silencio remained yet another near-abandoned holding of the UFCo. In order to retain legal rights to the deserted estate, however, the UFCo placed cattle on the property and rented El Silencio to the Lutz family for an annual fee of one colón per hectare; a largely symbolic arrangement.⁶⁰

In 1966, as much of El Silencio lay overrun by secondary growth forest, *campesinos* and *ex-peones* of the UFCo from nearby El Pasito carried out a series of mobilizations in neighbouring El Paso and Portalón. Three of these *campesino* leaders would later become the *dirigentes* of the El Silencio recuperation. In the absence of adequate state support, credit, and infrastructure, the parcels won in the struggles in El Paso and Portalón had once more been absorbed by expanding landholdings, prompting *campesinos* and *ex-peones* to converge once more to stage yet another action against the UFCo. Several of the families that initiated and joined the latest struggle had lived and worked as *fornaleros* on Lutz lands, while many more had been *peones* for the UFCo; fumigating, cutting, packing, and loading bananas during the banana years and providing the backbone for the subsequent oil palm operations of the UFCo/United Brands. Most founding families originated from the communities across the districts of Savegre and Quepos, both in the canton of Aguirre.⁶¹ Other families arrived from the cantons of Orotina and Turubares and from as far as Guanacaste province and areas outside the nation's capital. In 1971, the *campesinos* formed the Comité de Lucha por la Tierra, receiving support from the Federación Nacional Campesina (FENAC), local

⁶⁰ According to several elders, this fee was incidentally the same amount that the UFCo owed in arrears to the Costa Rican State, despite the land's 1973 estimated per hectare worth of at least one thousand colones.

⁶¹ The primary communities were Matapalo, Santo Domingo, Portalón, El Paso, El Pasito, and San Cristobal.

campesino unions, and the then-outlawed PVP.⁶² From the outset, PVP deputies and members served as consultants to the *campesinos* and even supplied the latter with lawyers. Throughout the land recuperation campaign, the *campesinos*, in turn, expressed their gratitude to the PVP and Manuel Mora, its leader, through gifts of plantains. Through the PVP and FENAC, the *campesinos* came into contact with future UNA faculty member, Miguel Sobrado, who would come to play a strong supporting role in the cooperative's consolidation and development.⁶³ The initial *campesino* organizers spent months travelling the area, communicating with other landless *campesinos* and unemployed workers, and planning their strategy. At first, the *Comité* proposed purchasing El Silencio, but the UFCo refused to negotiate any payment scheme barring an immediate lump sum cash payment. The *Comité* and ITCO held lengthy, ongoing negotiations, during which time ITCO cited a lack of agency funds as the barrier to the property's purchase. ITCO's head official, Teodoro Quirós, nevertheless assured that the agency would support the *campesinos'* recuperation of El Silencio lands. ITCO would later appoint one of the *dirigentes* an ITCO official so as to abide by a local court

⁶² The supporting *campesino* unions were el Sindicato de Pequeños Productores de Quepos y Parrita and el Sindicato de Pequeños Campesinos sin Tierra de Aguirre, of which many of the *campesinos* were also a part. Many of the *campesinas* who were excluded from leadership positions were themselves members of the Alianza de Mujeres de Costa Rica, a women's organization with ties to the PVP.

⁶³ Sobrado had been simultaneously charged by IMAS with the creation of the Plan Nacional de Asentamientos Campesinos, an inter-institutional plan, with ITCO and the Dirección Nacional de Desarrollo de la Comunidad (DINADECO) as the main participants (Sobrado, 1998). Sobrado took as a point of departure Clodomir Santos de Morais's "Experimental Laboratory", a method of mass capacitating of *campesinos*, which has been employed with the goal of fomenting organizational, technical, and entrepreneurial development among rural populations. With ITCO's termination of the Plan, UNA filled the void in technical and capacitating support through the Proyecto de Extension Universitaria a las Empresas Comunitarias Campesinas de Costa Rica, administered through the School of Planning and Social Promotion of UNA. As a result of UNA's newfound role and of the left-leaning sympathies of several key faculty members, the UNA was viewed with mistrust by ITCO during the cooperative's initial years. Over the next decade, UNA cultivated its relationship with the cooperative through "social laboratories" conducted by university students, faculty, and El Silencio residents. Large groups of university students carried out their practicums on site, wielding machetes in the field and sleeping in the public assembly room. Marta lamented the decline in university involvement over the past thirty years: "Before 300 students came to do laboratories in the field. Now, students have to do exams in high school to permit them into a university" (personal communication, November 27, 2009). Eighty year old Teodoro is one of the three original *dirigentes* of the El Silencio recuperation and *fundador* of the subsequent cooperative. Squeezed out of the cooperative during the de facto coup d'état of the 1980's, Teodoro framed the UNA's "social laboratories" as designed "so that when a *campesino* would go to a bank, they [the bank workers] would understand his life" (Interview, July 18, 2009).

injunction that granted extra-proprietor access to El Silencio to only ITCO officials (Sobrado, 1998).

In August 1972, 72 families delved into the secondary growth forest of El Silencio, in what was only one of the many actions simultaneously taking place on UFCo-held lands (Sobrado, 1998).⁶⁴ On several occasions the Guardia Civil's rural police force was summoned by United Brands to suppress the *precaristas* and demolish the El Silencio camp. In a frenetic climax, the make-shift community erected by the *precaristas* was razed, the women and children hastily collected by the Guardia Civil and deposited along the Savegre River, and the men, including adolescents, incarcerated in the city of Quepos.⁶⁵ From early on, the *campesinos* had been advised to form a cooperative on the part of the PVP, ITCO, and fellow *campesinos* participating in the actions. By this time, a number of the *campesinos* were weary of the parcel approach, while others were encouraged by their visits to cooperatives elsewhere in Costa Rica and, particularly, to those in the region of Guanchías, Honduras.⁶⁶ Following the prompt release of the recuperation participants and a subsequent series of negotiations, CoopeSilencio R.L. was formally constituted in February 20, 1973, with 597 hectares of land, 42 families, and 42 associates; a membership greater than the current one despite the larger present-day population.⁶⁷ United Brands welcomed the cooperative with a

⁶⁴ Barrantes Calderón (1998) cites 72 families, while the Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe (1999) puts forth 58 families.

⁶⁵ With the city's jail filled beyond capacity with *precaristas*, the local church stepped in to take in some of the detainees. The high school students of Quepos and the city's chapter of the national *Alianza de Mujeres* applied pressure on the authorities to release those detained.

⁶⁶ An alternate account of the cooperative's beginnings was recounted to me by then manager of the cooperative, whose landholding family was among several families that entered the cooperative after the final recuperation action. He avows that "CoopeSilencio was not born for CoopeSilencio. In 1970, there were many abandoned *fincas*. The *precaristas* divided the land into parcels and sold the parcels. It was a business. When the people invaded El Silencio, ITCO told them not to sell their parcels anymore and made the cooperative instead. The people who were left wanted to sell the land. It was a good government strategy. It worked" (Interview, November 16, 2009); for more information on the Guanchías cooperatives, see USAID (1985, March).

⁶⁷ In the aftermath, some of the *campesinos* who had sought parcels parted ways, leaving behind 42 families to form CoopeSilencio. The cooperative only received a land title in 1981, before which time ITCO held formal possession of the land. The cooperative was initially required to pay ITCO 1,000 colones over an eighteen year span for each of the 597 hectares, a condition eventually waved by the institute.

housewarming gift of two tractors and an offer to clear a community road. President “Pepe” Figueres, a staunch anti-communist and architect of Costa Rican-style capitalist democracy, later visited the cooperative and garnered the respect of the residents, who bestowed upon him a gift of papayas and decades of allegiance.⁶⁸

Over subsequent decades, the cooperative and community faced a number of challenges to its initial organizational and social structure. For one, ITCO appointed the cooperative’s first manager, occasioning the cooperative’s struggle for administrative autonomy from ITCO, achieved later that year. Moreover, the ITCO administration of 1974 contrasted with its more accommodating predecessor. By 1974, ITCO began pressing for the parcelization of the cooperative, which the agency regarded with suspicion on account of the cooperative’s ties to FENAC and the PVP and of its alleged incongruity with the “*idiosincrasia del campesino costarricense*”, or rural individualism (Sobrado, 1998, p. 32). The cooperative countered pressures for parcelization through the creation of FECOOPA R.L., and in a further effort to ward off state hostility and secure greater institutional support, the cooperative shed its militant image by sponsoring the country’s major political parties. Over the next decade, in a process to which its critics often refer as a coup d’état, the *fundadores* were gradually unseated by the younger *asociados*, most of whom were sons of the former. As of 2009, only five of the founding *asociados* retained cooperative membership. With new leadership in the mid-1980s, the cooperative oversaw the introduction of oil palm, the overhaul of the cooperative’s internal policy, or *Reglamentos internos*, the institution of a wage scale, and the privatization of housing lots.

4.2.2. Subsistence and Early Market Agriculture: Rice, Maize, *la Lechería* (1973-late 1980s)

Over its almost forty year course, CoopeSilencio R.L. has experimented with a number of agricultural projects of varying duration, success, and failure. The agricultural land of El Silencio has been shared by fluctuating hectares of rice, maize, pasture,

⁶⁸ That Figueres’s party outlawed the PVP between 1949 and 1975 does not appear to deter even the few remaining self-identified communists from paying homage to Figueres’s memory.

papaya, cacao, sorghum, soya, beans, plantain, *yuca*, black peppercorn, and African oil palm, amongst other crops. Although drought, floods, and lack of credit plagued most endeavours, rice, maize, and dairy projects constituted the agricultural mainstays of the agricultural economy for well over a decade and into the age of oil palm.

Grown for community and domestic consumption, rice was amongst the first agricultural crops to be extensively cultivated by CoopeSilencio R.L., boasting a peak cultivation area of 420 hectares in 1979 (Mayorga Acuña, 1988). Although reduced to 235 hectares by 1985, rice farming experienced a surge in productivity owing to technological improvements and was the source of 69% of cooperative revenue (INFOCOOP et al., 1986). Covering one-third of El Silencio in 1985, rice occupied a greater percentage of farm land than any other crop. Although generating less employment than other principal agricultural activities,⁶⁹ accounting for only 11% of the cooperative payroll in 1985, the rice project supplied the community and national population, via the CNP, with a staple aliment. The climate, however, proved to both beckon and compromise the risk-filled project, as the hot, humid region was particularly vulnerable to both droughts and floods; a reality which often undercut the cooperative's credit and, in conjunction with shifting state policies and introduction of large-scale oil palm cultivation, led to its demise by the second half of the 1980s.

Maize cultivation constituted an additional pillar of the cooperative's agricultural operations. As with rice, maize yields served both community and national alimentary demands. At its peak in the mid-1980s, maize cultivation was the second most important generator of cooperative revenue, providing the cooperative with 26% of its earnings (INFOCOOP et al., 1986). By mid-decade, maize occupied 115 hectares, or 16% of cooperative lands, an area surpassed at the time only by rice and pasture. Maize, moreover, supplied the greatest source of employment for the cooperative, as its cultivation accounted for almost one-quarter of the total cooperative payroll in 1985. Large-scale maize cultivation eventually ceased as oil palm operations expanded.

⁶⁹ Modest employment generation resulting from rice cultivation is largely on account of the high level of mechanization that characterizes the sector.

At 165 hectares, pasture covered 23% percent of CoopeSilencio lands in 1985. By mid-decade, the dairy project counted 332 heads of cattle, and, despite only generating 3% of cooperative revenue and accounting for 14% of the cooperative payroll, served a crucial community function by providing the residents of El Silencio with subsidized dairy products made possible in part by cattle sales. Ultimately, profit stemming from the dairy farm came secondary to its basic alimentary function. Damage inflicted to soybean and sorghum crops by 1988's Hurricanes Joan and Gilbert, however, induced the cooperative to sell much of its cattle to pay off resultant debts (Barrantes Calderón, 1998). The cattle were later fully removed under state instruction in favour of extractive forestry of teakwood and melina, initiated in 1991, and in preparation for more extensive oil palm cultivation.⁷⁰

In addition to the early triad of rice, maize, and dairy, the cooperative cultivated beans, *yuca*, and plantain, primarily for community consumption. Crops bound for the national and international markets included papaya, cacao, tobacco, sorghum, and soybeans. Peaking at 45 hectares in 1979 (Mayorga Acuña, 1988), the papaya project was initially spurred by favourable state policies and supplied fruit to the nation's capital until domestic oversupply, low prices, removal of state support, and the introduction of oil palm operations extinguished the project.⁷¹ A devastating El Niño-induced drought in 1982 prompted the cooperative to yield to the state's preference for cacao production by planting 50 hectares of the crop over the next three years (Barrantes Calderón, 1998).⁷² The project, however, was abandoned only later that decade, for monilia plague, withdrawal of state support, low international prices, and increasing production costs conspired in its demise, as it did so across the country (Barrantes Calderón, 1998). Tobacco additionally enjoyed a brief stint on the cooperative, until hurricane-induced

⁷⁰ This was the second time that the dairy farm had ceased; the first on account of its sale being used to offset hurricane-induced soybean and sorghum losses.

⁷¹ Papaya was later reintroduced between 1993 and 1994, although in reduced scale.

⁷² According to INFOCOOP et al. (1986), in 1985, cacao occupied 6% of cooperative lands and accounted for 24% of the cooperative payroll. According to CEPAL (1999), the 1982 El Niño-induced drought that had devastated rice production incentivized the production of cacao, tobacco, and tubers such as *yuca*.

crop damage and adverse institutional conditions halted the project.⁷³ As in the case of tobacco and cacao, soybeans and sorghum were by mid-decade touted as part of the Agriculture of Change.⁷⁴ In 1985, much of the 25 hectares of sorghum crop succumbed to drought, however, while the 1988 hurricanes halted plans for any further sowings (INFOCOOP et al, 1986; Mayorga Acuña, 1988). For a brief period, CoopeSilencio R.L. encouraged women in the community to cultivate black peppercorn; yet, as several *fundadoras* recounted, once the black pepper crop started to produce and ripen, the cooperative hastily razed the hectare of black peppercorn, much to the dismay of the women, reportedly due to a diminished market demand for the crop.

Given the conclusion of many of its former agricultural projects, CoopeSilencio R.L. has made several attempts over the past decade to diversify its agricultural activities (FECOOPA, 2009). Among several projects in operation are the pig, goat, and (reintroduced) dairy farms, as well as a small organic garden, in which papaya, plantains, melons, maize, *yuca*, peppers, and other crops are cultivated in relatively modest quantities.⁷⁵ Unlike the oil palm plantations, these smaller projects are more purposely integrated into the voluntourism itinerary. Despite its generally denigrated standing as an unprofitable venture, the dairy farm boasts approximately 80 heads of free-grazing cattle, which provide dairy and meat to residents for half the market price. The pig and goat farms, the former of which counts up to 20 heads, provide additional sources of dairy and meat products to the community. A recent addition is a chicken farm run by Coopetrasi R.L., a cooperative, largely constituted by women, operating within El Silencio lands.⁷⁶ Despite these endeavours, El Silencio remains marked by a verdant monoculture.

⁷³ According to Barry (1991), British America Tobacco and Philip Morris dominated the Costa Rican tobacco sector during this period.

⁷⁴ According to Mayorga Acuña (1988), sorghum harvests were largely absorbed by the CNP and by domestic companies engaged in the manufacture of animal feed for the national market.

⁷⁵ The organic garden has been met with its fair share of challenges: 2008's tropical storm Alma, thievery, and the community's continued patronage of outside producers.

⁷⁶ A new cooperative maize project is currently in discussion. This would follow the efforts of Coopetrasi R.L., whose associates planted parcels of maize for alimentary and animal feed purposes in 2009. The project bore poor results, however, as it became clear that the voluntourists had not sown the plot correctly. I, unfortunately, was one of those voluntourists.

4.2.3. Oil Palm and Palma Tica

Although widespread African oil palm cultivation had emerged in the region more than thirty years earlier, the oil palm plantation made its first appearance in El Silencio in 1985, then comprising 40 hectares of seedlings (INFOCOOP et al., 1986). Although United Brands and ITCO had pressed CoopeSilencio R.L. to adopt the African oil palm plantation system in the early 1980s, the cooperative nonetheless resisted such pressures in view of the prospective vulnerability stemming from the monopolistic purchasing arrangement between oil palm producers and United Brands (CEPAL, 1999). In 1985, with new leadership at the helm, the cooperative shifted position, and Chiquita Brands introduced oil palm into El Silencio, simultaneous to the company's introduction of the crop to the then newly-founded CoopeCalifornia R.L. To accommodate the new project, the cooperative eliminated its rice, maize, dairy, and papaya projects, in a move mirroring that of other producers in the larger Aguirre-Parrita sub-region. As part of the initial contractual agreement between Chiquita and CoopeSilencio R.L., Chiquita extended to the cooperative oil palm saplings, transport trucks, technical support, and worker training, the latter two in effect to date, in exchange for the supply of the raw material. From the time of the first harvest in the late 1980s to the present-day, *coyoles* from El Silencio have been delivered to Palma Tica's oil extraction plant, which processes not only the oil palm fruit grown on company lands but that grown by small and medium producers throughout the region.

CoopeSilencio R.L. is presently a member of the Palma Tica-dominated CANAPALMA. With currently over 530 hectares of oil palm plantations, CoopeSilencio has expanded operations to become the second-largest producer of African oil palm fruit in the entire canton of Aguirre, drawing large and medium oil palm producers from all across Central America, Mexico, and Colombia seeking to catch a glimpse of the cooperatives renowned oil palm operations. The cooperative has moreover expressed plans to tap into the emerging agrofuel market as encouraged by MAG, Ministerio de Ambiente, Energía y Mares (MINAE), and FECOOPA R.L. (MAG, 2007).⁷⁷ As a result,

⁷⁷ CIPA representatives at the November 18, 2009 assembly made explicit Fecoopa R.L.'s support for palm oil/agro-fuel initiatives, which CIPA and Fecoopa R.L. attribute to European market demands (personal observation, November 18, 2009).

while federal laws prohibit crops on existing cooperative lands to be cultivated for the purposes of agrofuel, the cooperative is seeking to acquire additional territory, likely that in the southern Brunca region, in efforts to expand its productive capacity and market prospects.⁷⁸

4.2.4. “La guerra de palma”⁷⁹

The cooperative’s dependency on Palma Tica for the sale and processing of oil palm fruit has been a contentious issue for membership since the inception of the oil palm project. Yet, whether, when, and how an alternative to Palma Tica might be realized remains a subject of intense debate, oftentimes revealing bitter familial and ideological divisions within cooperative membership. During the latter quarter of 2009, the cooperative faced a monumental juncture in its oil palm operations, as its 12-year contract with Palma Tica was on the verge of expiring, providing the cooperative with the option of either renewing the contract with Palma Tica or signing with the Consorcio Cooperativo Industrial de Palma (CIPA), of which CoopeSilencio R.L. is currently a member. The prospect of a severing of ties between Palma Tica and CoopeSilencio R.L. was enough to prompt representatives of the former to visit El Silencio six times within the month leading up to the general assembly vote, a remarkable fact, given that twelve years had passed with not one official company visit to the site. The Palma Tica-CIPA debate culminated in a two-part *Asamblea extraordinaria* on November 18 and 25, 2009, which saw both Palma Tica and CIPA implore the CoopeSilencio R.L. membership for support. The proceedings of the two-part *Asamblea extraordinaria*, which I had the fortuitous opportunity to attend, were overwhelmingly shaped by familial loyalties, with one prominent family claiming direct ties to CIPA arguing for a contract with the consortium, and two other principal families endorsing the status quo.

The first part of the *Asamblea extraordinaria* comprised of presentations given by the contract bidders, which included Palma Tica’s Division Manager as well as Palma

⁷⁸ According to one CNP official (and son of a former associate) interviewed in El Silencio in November 2009, China is yet another prospective agrofuels trading partner for oil palm producers.

⁷⁹ As the following debate has come to be known among the cooperative’s associates.

Tica's Supervisor of Independent Producers. Palma Tica's arguments for a continuation of the present course centred primarily on a "hypothetical debt" of over \$190,000, which the cooperative would be obliged to pay as a penalty were the assembly to refuse a renewal of the contract.⁸⁰ Another equally commanding factor was that of a \$125,000 loan, framed as a gift "for associates to divide amongst themselves."⁸¹ Additional inducements included Palma Tica's continued coverage of fruit transport costs, provision of saplings, and extension of low-interest loans for tractor and fertilizer purchases.⁸² With greater yawns emanating from the assembly, and fewer figures and material incentives to present, the CIPA associates employed an anti-imperialist discourse, replete with expressions of *campesino* solidarity and humility, as well as condemnations of "*los grandes capitalistas*", in hopes of winning over the sympathies of the membership.⁸³ CIPA representatives additionally attempted to appeal to the industrial aspirations of the cooperative, urging the assembly to become *dueños* of CIPA and to cease to be solely a supplier of raw materials. CIPA further pledged "fair and stable" purchasing prices and assured that, with the full support of state institutions, such as INFOCOOP and CNP, major public universities, the Centro Cooperativo Sueco, and the IADB, CIPA would soon have the financial and technical capacity to further develop operations and a transport system of international reach.

For the second part of the *Asamblea extraordinaria*, Palma Tica delayed the debate, arriving "dressed as Santa Claus with a gift"⁸⁴ of four loading carts and \$1.5

⁸⁰ Pro-CIPA supporters insisted on the illegality of this threat, as they claimed that state law stipulates that interest can only be applied over time, not on a conditionality introduced at the time of one's refusal to renew a contract.

⁸¹ Palma Tica's Supervisor of Independent Producers, observation, November 18, 2009

⁸² Palma Tica's Supervisor of Independent Producers assured the membership, "We made the investments not because we want to swindle you" (observation, November 18, 2009).

⁸³ The main CIPA speaker attempted to appeal to the associates, on a more personal level, through his own experience as a *peón*: "I was a producer and transporter on horse and would pass the Palma Tica plant day and night. There was nowhere to sit. We all made cues for 30 hours, enduring the hunger and fatigue, and they punished me for the quality of the fruit. When we handed in the fruit, it was deemed secondary or tertiary quality. It's like this for the small producer" (observation, November 18, 2009).

⁸⁴ Palma Tica's Supervisor of Independent Producers (observation, November 25, 2009)

million in incentives.⁸⁵ In response, CIPA supporters stressed that collaboration with CIPA would not bar CoopeSilencio R.L. from engaging in business with Palma Tica and implored the assembly to wait a period of six months for the current contract to expire, during which time mounting competition in the oil palm-producing south might potentially grant CoopeSilencio R.L. greater bargaining leverage. Although the initial debate had been predicated upon a contract to be agreed upon with either Palma Tica or CIPA, the CIPA advocates among the membership settled for a vote to be taken on the issue of whether the cooperative would sign immediately with Palma Tica or wait for up to six months for a definitive vote. The Palma Tica contract was selected by 25 to 9;⁸⁶ those behind the defeated vote comprised of four brothers and their supporters. Tensions flared following the vote, as one CIPA representative called the assembly “*peones de los transnacionales*” and claimed of having witnessed “an enterprise taking out the blood from the cooperative.” One *asociado* similarly lambasted the associates for choosing to immediately vote for a binding contract without having read the contract to which they had “chained themselves.” Another *asociado* underlined what he perceived as the irony of the situation, namely that “Palma Tica is the grandchild of the United Fruit Company, against which our *viejos* fought.” In response to one associate’s pronouncements of cooperativism and solidarity, another *asociado* reasoned that “personal sentiments have nothing to do with a cooperative. We shouldn’t compromise everyone for that.” Following the assembly, the associates ultimately discovered that one loan that had been promised as part of the contract was of a different amount and at a much higher rate of interest than had been previously expressed.⁸⁷ In addition to the loans, credit extension, coverage of transportation costs, loading carts, and saplings, cooperative associates were to receive soccer jerseys, running shoes, and confections. Overall, votes reflected loyalty lines, the greater material appeal of the Palma Tica contract, and general apprehension towards the new and unknown. The prospect of a disruption of a long-established and substantial business relationship with a monopolistic bastion of the oil

⁸⁵ A \$400,000 loan designated for road construction; the initially offered loan of \$125,000 loan; and a \$167,377 loan without interest for the first four months and at 7.5% thereafter (observation, November 25, 2009).

⁸⁶ What was at first to be an open vote with raised hands was, in the minutes leading up to the vote, changed to one of secret ballots (observation, November 25, 2009).

⁸⁷ The \$167,377 loan turned out to be a \$300,000 loan at 12% interest to be paid over a 12-year period (personal communication, November 26, 2009).

palm industry, particularly in the context of widespread economic uncertainty, was all too unsettling for most associates. What many perceived as pragmatism appeared to weigh more heavily in the vote than ideological considerations. As one *asociado* commented to me at the conclusion of the event, “*es mejor lo viejo conocido que lo nuevo por conocer*” (personal communication, November 25, 2009).⁸⁸

4.2.5. *Los particulares de palma*

As in San Juan, hired non-member workers are the basis of the cooperative’s agricultural operations in El Silencio. Yet, unlike those of the pineapple-producing cooperative, the hired workers of CoopeSilencio R.L. are largely nationals and residents of the community. Referred to as *particulares*, these hired non-member workers greatly outnumber the forty associates for whom they work. Although one cooperative office worker placed the figure of *particulares* between 40 and 50, the president of the *consejo de administración* of CoopeSilencio R.L. reports the number to fall between 60 and 70, while most residents relate the figure of *particulares* to be between 60 and 80. Although Nicaraguan workers provide the basis of labour for nearby Palma Tica production operations, the predominance of Costa Rican workers in CoopeSilencio R.L. stems partially from membership’s aversion towards Nicaraguan labour, fueled by negative past experience coupled with both latent and overt xenophobia.⁸⁹ In addition, the populous community of El Silencio and its environs reportedly offer a sufficient labour pool from which cooperative workers may be drawn.

Included amongst the *particulares* are 12 women, mainly *coyoleras* charged with collecting bunches of *coyoles* severed from oil palm trees. These women include single-

⁸⁸ Similar in meaning to “better the devil you know than the devil you don’t”, without the explicitly malign implication of its English-language counterpart.

⁸⁹ One commonly recounted story was that concerning four Nicaraguan families. According to popular accounts, the cooperative had once moved four Nicaraguan families to a site beyond El Silencio. The cooperative constructed and furnished homes for the families and provided bicycles as a means of worker transportation to the oil palm plantations. After seven weeks, the families disappeared with all their supplies, leaving behind stripped and vandalized houses. This event prompted one *asociado* to declare, “*Los nicas* are worse than cows. They are worthless. That’s why we have only our own that live in the community” (personal communication, November 14, 2009).

mothers and even familial relations of cooperative associates. The male non-member workers, some of whom are kin to the associates, are primarily assigned to agrochemical and fertilizer application, weeding and tree pruning, *coyol* cutting, and short-haul fruit transport. Arguably amongst the most physically strenuous activities, *coyol* cutting is a manual process executed with long-shafted sickles, or *ganchos*, which are purchased and maintained by the cutters, in apparent violation of state labour laws. Wages are hourly-based (associates) or piece rate-based (hired non-member workers). Within the latter group, further wage differentiation is contingent upon the rated exigency of the task and quantity of work performed. For instance, cutters are remunerated for each *coyol* cut, and transporters for each tonne hauled. While not all oil palm field workers (ie. tractor drivers, supervisors, etc.) are *particulares*, all the *coyol* cutters and others engaged in more menial plantation tasks are hired from outside membership.

Figures on the *particulares* of CoopeSilencio R.L. have been significantly more difficult to confirm than those pertaining to workers in CoopeSanJuan R.L., as there appears to be greater awareness in El Silencio of state regulations against closed cooperative membership and against the extensive use of hired non-member labour in cooperatives. Greater discretion was therefore evident on the part of the participants in discussions on the topic of hired non-member labour. According to the *Ley de Asociaciones Cooperativas*, the number of hired non-member workers employed by a cooperative must not exceed 30% of the number of associates, which would, in the case of CoopeSilencio R.L., allow for only 12 hired workers.⁹⁰ CoopeSilencio R.L. is not an isolated case, however, for, as Prasnikar (1996) states, in reference to CoopeSilencio R.L., the “employment of non-members is a widespread strategy among production cooperatives” (p. 292). The manager of CoopeSilencio R.L. admitted that although he believes that cooperatives generally ought not to rely on non-member workers aside from the temporary or seasonal, the extension of membership to contracted workers would eliminate “equilibrium in production” (Interview, November 16, 2009). Sixty-three year old *asociado*, Pepe, remarks that

⁹⁰ The *Ley* nonetheless sanctions the employment of workers with special education and qualifications when existing workers are not appropriately qualified.

Here, one works for a *patrón*, but it is *disimulado* . . . Before the *encargado* and *trabajadores* worked the same. Now, *encargados* only takes notes. It changed because there was the wage scale. [Before,] no one earned more than anyone else. The manager, council earned the same as a worker . . . *Cuando no hay lucha, no hay nada*. (Pepe, Interview, November 12, 2009)

The introduction of African oil palm in 1985 did not in itself usher into El Silencio a labour regime predicated upon contractualization, for hired non-member labour had previously existed in the cooperative, namely in instances where labour was deemed insufficient to realize specific tasks of limited duration, such as corn harvests. For instance, in 1986, 20 “casual” workers were recorded as workers of the cooperative, during which time state law, if enforced, would have restricted their employment to a maximum of three months (INFOCOOP et al., 1986). Since the introduction of oil palm, however, the employment of hired non-member workers has been continuous. Thirty-one year old Marina recounts of a time when few *particulares* were needed, for “before, the system of work was different. The manager would work in the field and later in the office” (Interview, November 26, 2009). Presently, many of the *particulares* have been employed under contract for several years, some for up to 15 years or more. During their employment, many have applied for membership, only to be repeatedly rejected. This practice has led to embitterment amongst the *particulares* and apprehension and distrust on the part of associates, who view the membership aspirations of the *particulares* as threatening to the exclusive rights of the current membership as well as to the cooperative structure itself. This is particularly striking given the kinship connections between many of the associates and *particulares*. The nationwide practice of *aguinaldos*, or Christmas bonuses, highlights just one of the disparities between and *particular* and associate, as a *particular* may receive 80,000 colones, while an associate may collect five times that amount. According to one youth who has resorted to leaving the community in search of work, in times past, *particulares* would regularly converge, record grievances, and present their report before the council for redress. This practice of *particular*-associate negotiations has since dissipated for unstated reasons.

Since 2000, the cooperative has effectively maintained a closed membership, citing the benefit of the greater community, consolidation of the cooperative, necessity of checks on membership growth, and the desire to generate non-agricultural employment

as motivating factors (CEPAL, 1999). While the entirety of the cooperative associates interviewed generally endorsed the existence of controls on membership growth, the larger community, including non-member workers and relatives of associates, appeared critical of the status quo. Marta, a *fundadora* in whose home I lodged during my fieldwork, was amongst the most avowedly militant individuals whom I encountered during my fieldwork in El Silencio. Unsolicited, she offered a vehement denunciation of the wage scale, exploitation and exclusion of *particulares*, privatization of common lands, including housing plots, and alleged coup d'état against the initial *fundadore*-associates, of whom her father was one: “*Si se dice que todos son asociados, todos deberían ganar igual . . . Si una cooperative se supera, se supera para todos*”(Interview, November 26, 2009). Marta’s sister, Marina, confirms, “We don’t value the work of a *particular* because it’s a *particular*. But they do more work, and the work they do is harder” (Interview, November 26, 2009).

4.2.6. Women in Waged Work

I had no role. I worked for my husband and the *pioneros*. I didn’t want my children to separate. No one explained to me anything about the cooperative, what we were going to do. [My husband] never communicated anything with me. I was invited [to meetings] but never went to a meeting because I didn’t want to. [*pause*]. *Por la esclavitud de trabajo*. My children told me more about the cooperative than my husband did . . . The women in the beginning could attend the assemblies. But we had to make lunch. That was my only role . . . If I had had stimulus and support I would have attended . . . I was too embarrassed to speak at an assembly. I never felt like a cooperativist.

-Carmen, 78 year old *fundadora* describing her role in the cooperative (Interview, November 26, 2009)

A series of portraits of several *fundadoras*, mothers of current associates, adorn the walls of a conference room in the cooperative office; one of few markers of recognitions for their role in the cooperative community’s history. During the cooperative’s founding and consolidation, women performed a plethora of unwaged and waged, productive and reproductive labour: construction and maintenance of dwellings, provision of meals and childcare, and tending of crops and animals, amongst other

jobs.⁹¹ During the early stages of the cooperative's formation, women often laboured, unremunerated, alongside men in the fields, applying agrochemicals, and harvesting such crops as beans and maize. For most women, waged work in El Silencio originated with the *comisariato*, which, as the town's exclusive retail outlet, provided only a limited number of posts.⁹² La Alianza de Mujeres, which had played a significant conscientizing and organizing role during the land struggle, likewise came to formalize and remunerate women's productive labour. For a period, its members managed a communal garden as well as a chicken farm sponsored by the Instituto Nacional de Aprendizaje (INA). Such early efforts by women placed great weight on collectivized labour, equitable food distribution, capacity-building, and self-organization. La Alianza's successor, la Asociación de Mujeres de El Silencio (ASOMUSI), founded in 1993 on the initiative of the cooperative's *consejo de administración*, bore a comparable function of fashioning a distinct space for women's productive labour; a marginalized alternative to cooperative membership. Participating in ASOMUSI, women received training from INA in the areas of bartending, food handling, confectionery, and client service; skills which they used to manage their own *soda* (snack bar) and bakery. Although initiated with 30 women, membership concluded with twelve, as lack of regular pay, outstanding debts owed to the *soda*, and obligations of the home undercut the organization's operating capacity. By the late-1990s, the *cantina*/restaurant of the *albergue* largely supplanted the function of the *soda*, and several of the women were accordingly reoriented towards the former. While there does not exist any broad, formal women's organization in greater El Silencio, many of the women continue to perform waged and unwaged work in other areas: Most engage in housework; some have found paid work in the informal economy as nannies, cleaners, and in-house food vendors; others commute to workplaces outside the community; a handful of women are employed by the cooperative's tourism complex;

⁹¹ They, moreover, boldly confronted repressive state authority on earlier occasions and effectively organized pressure for the release of the imprisoned *precaristas* during the "*Grito del Silencio*".

⁹² One *fundadora*, Rosita, explained the change that has taken place over the decades within the community institution: "The *comisariato* system is now different. Before, we consumed milk, corn, beans, and rice. The price was much more accommodating. We distributed corn. Before, it felt more like a cooperative. It was cheaper. Now, it's a business of the cooperative. There's been a change in our lives" (Interview, November 27, 2009).

and one group of roughly a dozen women have even founded their own poultry-farming cooperative, Coopetrasi R.L.⁹³

Women's waged and unwaged work is a significant component of cooperative production, and basis of community reproduction. Although four women can claim cooperative membership, their number does not appear likely to dramatically increase in the near-term. Despite having been formally employed by the cooperative throughout the 1980s, three of the four female associates were only admitted in 1996; the last and youngest in 2000. Most of these *asociadas*, who are intimately connected to one of the community's most influential families, worked in the *comisariato* and *albergue* until ultimately acquiring office positions as a secretary, accountant, and treasurer, respectively. Their case is uncharacteristic of larger practice. For instance, Elena, who moved to the cooperative in 1987 and has since worked as one of the two principal dairy farm operators, has unsuccessfully applied for membership on multiple occasions. Forty-two year old Berta moved to El Silencio in the mid-1980s, having worked as a *coyolera* for much of her life in the Quepos region. Despite over a decade of service as a cook for the cooperative's *albergue* complex and marriage to an *asociado*, Berta has had her application for cooperative membership repeatedly rejected. Marta explains that although she had worked for 16 years in the *comisariato*, ASOMUSI, and *albergue*, not once has she felt encouraged to submit an application for membership. Common reasons given by *asociados* for the exclusion of women from membership range from an alleged lack of personal initiative to costly member shares, or capital social, of \$6,000 (in 2009); a great barrier, indeed, for *particulares* earning slightly more than \$300 per month in 2009. Most *asociados* and residents attribute the exclusion of women to a mutually-reinforcing combination of *machismo* and cooperative policy. While the *Reglamentos internos* outline that all prospective associates must exhibit capacity in all cooperative-level work (oil palm, forestry, dairy farm, *albergue*/tourism), most associates, including women associates, claim that the only sites suitable for women (*comisariato*, office, and *albergue*) are currently overstaffed. Chief generator of income and employment, the oil palm project offers women little in the way of opportunity beyond the post of *coyolera*.

⁹³ For further information regarding the role of women in the formation of CoopeSilencio R.L., see Marín Hernández (1999).

When the four female office workers were one day summoned for a field trial, they were subsequently ridiculed for collecting fewer *coyoles* by the shift's end than two male workers. This event has led many *asociados* to accuse these *asociadas* of having "spoiled it for the rest" of the community's women workers. This experience has been posited as proof of the unsuitability of women for cooperative membership, prompting one *asociado* to declare that "it is easier to bring the field worker into the office than the [female] office worker into the field" (personal communication, November 26, 2009). Most women in the community, however, do not so readily accept this assessment. Rosita, mother of Marta and Marina and spouse of an "ousted" *asociado*, is amongst the chief *fundadoras* who actively participated in discussions surrounding cooperative formation. A self-identified *cooperativista* and fierce critic of the current incarnation of the cooperative, she relates that

El decir de los hombres, como siempre machista, es que las mujeres no se pueden, pero si se puede Maybe we can't do it all, but we can do lots: the garden, the black peppercorn, the hen farm, we did it. (Interview, November 27, 2009)

Chapter 5. Discussion and Conclusion

A 21st century re-evaluation of Fals Borda's analysis of rural Latin America cooperatives, in conversation with a study of contemporary self-managed agricultural production cooperatives, highlights a number of suggestive themes. In assessing the degree to which CoopeSanJuan R.L. and CoopeSilencio R.L. have promoted structural versus marginal socioeconomic change, I invoke Fals Borda's three interrelated criteria for structural change: (a) the development of new productive forces (labour, material means of labour); (b) the manifestation of democratic and public control of production, distribution, consumption, and income; and (c) the self-determination of previously subordinated and exploited classes. In order to gauge whether these criteria for structural change have been met by my two cooperative case studies, I re-examine several variables submitted by Fals Borda.

With regards to the first variable, modernization, both CoopeSanJuan R.L. and CoopeSilencio R.L. have assimilated and fostered considerable technological innovation and agro-industrialization in the expansion of non-traditional monoculture, namely pineapple and oil palm. The course of modernization exhibited in both cooperatives, moreover, appears to have preserved exploitative tendencies that have historical antecedents and modern equivalents throughout the country and region as well as cultivated a dependency on, and subordination to, the terms dealt by the bastions of industry. The second variable, the increase in income, education, and professionalization of associates and their families, was not a prime focus of my investigation, although it was strikingly apparent that associates and their immediate family members exhibited greater formal education, as opposed to non-member hired workers. Income disparity between associates and non-member residents of CoopeSilencio R.L. could be perceived in the spatial composition of El Silencio as well as in the pronounced wage scale introduced following the introducing of oil palm in 1985, which has increasingly placed at a disadvantage the oil palm field workers, many of whom, such as cutters, *coyoleras/os*, and short-haul transporters, are subjected to a

piece-rate wage regime. A focus on hourly wages in the case of CoopeSanJuan R.L., by contrast, would efface the conditions under which non-member hired workers are drawn into, excluded from, and exploited by the cooperative. That all but one non-member hired worker resides in San Juan contrasts markedly with the reality in the immediate vicinity of the community, where Nicaraguan migrant workers constitute a resounding presence. As per the institutionalization of acceptable and limited social change, both cooperatives have actively restricted membership, establishing a de facto membership ceiling, and, in no small measure, have approximated conventional agri-business. An examination of the final variable of prevailing power structures and social relations relates to the previous variable and yields a recognition of the reproduction of capitalist social relations of production within the economic activities of both CoopeSanJuan R.L. and CoopeSilencio R.L. The prevalence of capitalist social class relations characterized by exploitation and subordination has been in part facilitated by, and reflected in, the centrality of the pineapple and oil palm monocultures and by the alignment of the cooperatives with the directives of state and capital.

The relative conformity of the two cooperatives to their mediated capitalist milieu has been achieved through the joint mechanisms of fragmentation and isolation, whereby the class conflict, around which the associates and residents of San Juan and El Silencio had rallied at the formative stages of their respective cooperatives, was seemingly placated by institutional parameters and a targeted development programme on the part of the state. As a result, CoopeSanJuan R.L. and CoopeSilencio R.L. stand apart from broader popular movements or alternative projects for progressive socioeconomic change, which cooperative associates might even regard as antithetical to their economic welfare. Such associations include FRENESAPP, whose social and economic vision entails the downfall of the prime source of income for the associates of CoopeSanJuan R.L., and CIPA, which has struggled to appeal to the commercial interests of the membership of CoopeSilencio R.L., who perceive an advantage in complying with an industry heavyweight. The mechanism of cooptation was most evident in CoopeSilencio R.L., where the initial cooperative leadership was unseated and where many of the current associates can claim connections to the district government and various dominant political parties. Nonetheless, the exclusive membership of both cooperatives signifies the historic development of a privileged socioeconomic group vis-

à-vis non-member workers and surrounding communities. The final mechanism by which the two cooperatives have adapted to neoliberal global capitalism is by way of the expansion and intensification of monoculture, which has reproduced and reinforced dominant social relations of production.

In brief, the democratic and public control of cooperative production in San Juan and El Silencio is severely limited by the exploitation and exclusion of hired non-member workers. And while the associates have successfully overcome landlessness and poverty to become propertied owners of production, there remain subordinated and exploited classes throughout the *zonas* and country, and within the cooperative's very own communities, who have yet to achieve the even structurally limited degree of self-determination enjoyed by cooperative membership. Overall, the development of new productive forces in San Juan and El Silencio has been thwarted by the private ownership of productive resources, division of labour, and prevailing relations of production marked by exploitation and domination of subordinated non-member workers on the part of associate-workers. An assessment based on Fals Borda's criteria suggest that CoopeSanJuan R.L. and CoopeSilencio R.L. pose little threat to the prevailing political, economic, and social structures, having largely achieved marginal change in the communities in which they have been founded and in the systems of which they are a part. That is not to claim, however, that the socioeconomic changes that families of associates in San Juan and El Silencio have experienced have been slight, for a majority of cooperative associates hail the relatively stable incomes and improved socioeconomic conditions as a dramatic improvement from the drudgery of subsistence agriculture. Yet, a focus on the latter point obscures the countervailing realities of the numerous hired non-member workers (*peones* and *particulares*) whose labour has facilitated the economic ascent of the cooperatives and their members.

In effect, agricultural production cooperatives in Costa Rica present a striking paradox. For one, their emergence and growth in prominence, particularly during the cooperative "boom" of the 1970s, transpired amidst the backdrop of a consolidating state presence and widespread rural social unrest and mobilization. In recent decades, the accelerating pace of global capitalist economic restructuring has nonetheless exposed cooperatives and small-scale producers to the increasing volatility and hostility of

“market forces” in ways that have prompted cooperatives to respond through various means. Far from consigned to irrelevancy, the Costa Rican state has played a role in both facilitating and mediating the transformative impulses sweeping over the countryside, accordingly modifying its web of institutions in the process. Cooperatives, as promoted by the state, have largely served a function of, on the one hand, fostering a level of socioeconomic development in the communities in which they have been founded, and, on the other hand, of channeling the more militant segments of the rural discontent into the state apparatus, thereby effectively neutralizing potential seeds of radical social transformation. To these and other aims, an extensive network of semi-autonomous state and cooperativist institutions continue to provide cooperatives with various forms of financial, technical, and organizational assistance.

As witnessed in periods of popular mobilization in Costa Rica and beyond, radical change of the popular, progressive, and emancipatory nature has frequently been mollified or averted through mild to extensive concessions granted by pragmatic capitalist and state sectors alike. These concessions have been exemplified by the allotment of collectivized land grants, preferential development programmes and modes of social assistance, and formal political recognition and/or access to political office, amongst other compromises and gains. Yet, early struggles between dispossessed and politicized peasants, on the one hand, and business and state interests have led to more than improved social development indices of the communities in which agricultural production cooperatives are based. For one, the multi-layered class conflict imbued in the early stages of cooperative formation did not dissipate upon a cooperative’s founding but continued in the relationships between cooperative and state, cooperative and dominant agribusiness interests, export-oriented cooperatives and small and medium basic grains producers, cooperative associates and hired non-member labourers, and even between cooperatives. Attendant to class conflict, moreover, is conflict played out along gender and racial lines. This is evident in the general exclusion of women from privileged economic activities of the cooperative and from cooperative councils and membership, despite the labour of women constituting a basis of cooperative and community production and reproduction, past and present. Similarly, Nicaraguans in Costa Rica, largely undocumented but also naturalized Costa Rican citizens and Costa Rican-born, are either pervasively exploited by cooperatives, and yet barred from

cooperative governance, or effectively excluded as a whole from the vision of self-managed agricultural production cooperatives by such organizations.

Cooperatives continue to figure prominently in national-level economic planning, often in ways that indicate a level of symbiosis with agribusiness, neoliberal policies, and capitalist values and practices. Cooperatives can facilitate in the latter regard through explicit and implicit means: assimilating industry technology and diffusing it throughout surrounding areas; entering commercial arrangements with agribusiness, supplying the latter with raw materials, and assuming many of the risks associated with agricultural production; employing contract labour in greater scale and in conformity with the norms of industry; abandoning traditional agricultural pursuits discriminated by state policies, and thereby leaving traditional agricultural sectors in the hands of monopolizing transnational agribusinesses, and reassigning land and labour for alternative use. Through compliance with industry and minimal resistance to the latter, cooperatives may therefore appear to legitimize prevailing industry practices, specifically, and late capitalist food and labour regimes, more broadly.

The degree to which cooperative production generally is, and can be, socialized within the context of neoliberal capitalism is a subject of ongoing debate. This thesis does not endeavour to probe the full range of such a debate. In fact, agricultural production cooperatives are neither utopian islands nor mere instruments of capital, for such cooperatives face tremendous challenges and pressures. Many a cooperative has risen and fallen across the Costa Rican countryside, and those that remain in most economically robust form, despite doubts cast on their cooperative praxis, have endured in part (as commercial enterprises, at least) due to their accommodation of neoliberal-driven agricultural change. In most cases, they have come to assume the state-sanctioned NTAE imperative of the sector's drivers. To what extent these organizations constitute genuine worker-run collectives is arguable, as many of these cooperatives have increasingly assimilated aspects of the industry that may appear to conflict with cooperative tenets and the very notion of worker self-organization.

Chief amongst these, notwithstanding the adoption and prioritization of NTAE crops, are the continual employment of hired non-member labour and exclusion of the

latter from cooperative membership. This phenomenon has apparently served to reinforce elite tendencies and labour divisions within cooperative organizations, perpetuating the hegemony of capital over labour and the primacy of surplus value (profit) over social and economic equity and justice. Gender-based and racial subordination within labour management and cooperative membership constitutes both a powerful function and facilitator of capitalist accumulation. Indeed, the exclusion of women, Nicaraguans, and workers in general from cooperative membership and their exploitation by membership have helped to strengthen the capitalist-*asociado* class (itself largely drawn from select kinship affiliations) vis-à-vis non-associate community residents and neighbouring communities. On the other hand, the marked exclusion and exploitation of women, Nicaraguan migrant workers, and workers in general are a typical practice and outcome of the capitalist mode of production and exchange, itself aimed at concentrated capital accumulation. The limitations imposed on worker self-management correspond to the stunted autonomy of the cooperative from the capitalist supra-structure, more generally, and industry drivers (ie. agribusiness) and state apparatus, more specifically. The cooperative's subordination to capitalist logic is moreover analogous to the Costa Rican state's deferential position within global neoliberal capitalism.

A paradox lies in the potential for such cooperatives to underscore the enduring importance of democratic mechanisms for redistribution, of control over one's own labour, and of horizontal social, political, and economic self-organization. If self-managed agricultural production cooperatives are to be envisioned as an alternative and equitable model of labour and social organization, or as vehicles of social change, they would need to address current social class relations, reassess production operations, and ultimately become more open, democratic, egalitarian, and oriented towards a broader and popular programme of socioeconomic transformation. It remains to be seen whether these criteria can be met by current, conventional self-managed agricultural production cooperatives, or whether these goals must be pursued by a new generation of cooperatives and social movements organized from the bottom-up and mindful of, as well as adversarial towards, the very structures and forces that set in motion the challenges faced by the *campesinos* who had recuperated the Vargas and UFCo *fincas* in decades prior.

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