

**A Political History of Central America's Democratic Exception:  
Liberty, Authoritarianism and Social Control in Costa Rica**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis is a political history of Costa Rica with a primary focus on social control. The country has a long tradition of having comparatively libertarian political institutions within Central America. From 1919 until the 1990s, Costa Rica was the region's democratic exception. Previous historical accounts have only identified proximate causes and constructed dispositional arguments for the country's exceptional status which has led to the idealisation of the nation and its inhabitants. Traditional historical analysis has also led to underestimation of deeply rooted structural factors that have produced structural disadvantage in Central America. In order to account for Costa Rica's democratic exceptionalism, it is necessary to identify the ultimate cause of this phenomenon by tracing the origins and development of the country's political institutions. In order to identify this cause, this thesis relies on long-term analysis of Costa Rica's political history which draws on classical liberal thought and social psychology. Connecting the ultimate cause with the proximate causes, involves tracing the development of Costa Rican democratic exceptionalism since the sixteenth century.

Analysis of Costa Rican political development reveals a number of unique geographically determined features which have produced several structural advantages, the most significant of which is a less authoritarian state apparatus. These structural factors would have profound implications for the subsequent political development of the province. The most striking difference with regards to social control in Costa Rica and the rest of Central America has been its comparative lack of violence. For these reasons, this thesis argues that Costa Rica has been the freest region in Central America since the early sixteenth century. This study undermines the Hobbesian conception of human nature and instead supports the classical liberal notions regarding natural human sympathy, the potential corruption by authority and the importance of individual liberty in promoting human development.

## Statement of Authorship

*Except where reference is made in the text of the thesis, this thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma. No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgment in the main text of the thesis. This thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.*

Tom Rose

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*For Bea*

**The Costa Ricans are in every sense the freest, most democratic people in Latin America. They have set a shining example, not merely for their sister Latin American States, but one that should provide the United States with a guideline for action.**

Ernest Gruening, United States Senate, November 1963.

## **Introduction**

Costa Rica is the oldest representative democracy in Latin America. It has maintained this regime type since 1919 when the country's last dictatorship collapsed. Two other Latin American states with long democratic traditions (i.e., Chile and Uruguay), both experienced military coups in 1973. However, this type of regime change was not possible in Costa Rica given that the country's military was abolished in 1948, after a brief civil war. Not only is Costa Rica the longest-running democracy in Latin America, but many scholars have also classified it as the most democratic state in the region.<sup>1</sup> The country's strong democratic tradition is especially remarkable given its location in Central America, a region known for its extreme violence and authoritarianism.<sup>2</sup> Central to the construction of the Costa Rican national identity is the notion that the country has been an exception within the region. The country's comparatively more democratic nature forms the core of its exceptional status. As historians Steven Palmer and Iván Molina have noted, it is "above all this democratic heritage that makes the exceptionalist proposition so compelling."<sup>3</sup> Therefore, it is not surprising that this topic has been a primary element in the literature on Costa Rican history.

### **Accounting for Costa Rica's Democratic Exceptionalism**

The most widely held position in the literature on the roots of Costa Rican exceptionalism has been the 'rural democracy' thesis. The essence of this position is that a scattered Indigenous population led to the development of small land plots cultivated by yeoman farmers during the colonial era because Spanish settlers lacked sufficient manpower to establish the sort of extensive plantations that were found in other regions of

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<sup>1</sup> See, among others, Ralph Lee Woodward Jr., 'The Rise and Decline of Liberalism in Central America: Historical Perspectives on the Contemporary Crisis,' *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, Vol. 26, No. 3, 1984, 300; Seligson noted that "for many years experts have rated Costa Rica as the most democratic country in all of Latin America;" Mitchell Seligson, 'Costa Rica,' in Howard Wiarda and Harvey Kline (Eds.), *Latin American Politics and Development* (Eighth Edition) (Boulder: Westview Press, 2014), 361.

<sup>2</sup> When the term 'Central America' is used in this thesis it is referring only to Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua and Costa Rica as their heritage is so similar. These five were part of the United Provinces of Central America which existed from 1823 to 1838. Most Central Americans generally consider Panama to be more South American in terms of its culture given that it is a former province of Colombia. Belize also has a rather different history from the Central American 'five' given that it was a British protectorate from 1862 to 1981.

<sup>3</sup> Steven Palmer and Iván Molina, 'Introduction,' in Steven Palmer and Iván Molina (Eds.), *The Costa Rica Reader: History, Culture, Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 1.

Central America. One early contributor to the rural democracy thesis was diplomat Felipe Molina who claimed in 1849 that there were no social classes in his country.<sup>4</sup> But perhaps the most influential exponent of the rural democracy thesis was historian Carlos Monge Alfaro who published his classic *Historia de Costa Rica* in 1941.<sup>5</sup> He also argued that the economic circumstances of colonial Costa Rica were such that “social classes or castes did not arise” and there “were no despotic officials who arrogantly kept themselves apart from the populace.”<sup>6</sup> Whilst there is some degree of truth to this position, the more mythical elements of the rural democracy thesis have been largely discredited in light of the historical revisionism which has undermined the idea that Costa Rica was egalitarian during the colonial era.

Since the 1970s, a number of scholars known as the ‘New Historians’ began to seriously challenge the rural democracy thesis. Their historical revisionism has demonstrated that Costa Rica’s level of egalitarianism during the colonial period was exaggerated by the proponents of this position. The country did indeed have a significant division between social classes since the start of the colonial period. A hierarchy was clearly evident in the colony in terms of the relationship between the producers and merchants. Nevertheless, it is important to note that Costa Rica was more egalitarian in terms of land ownership in comparison the other Central America provinces. In order to account for this, Iván Molina proposed that the answer is to be “found in the balance of social forces between the merchant and the farmer; as a result of the province’s poverty, the commercial sector was structurally weak and lacked the indispensable power to brutally subjugate the direct producer.”<sup>7</sup> Costa Rica was also a backwater that did not rely on a massive enslavement of Amerindians nor African populations unlike in large plantation-based economies such as Brazil. As a result, Spanish authorities did not need to create huge police and military forces to keep chattel slaves under control. Its comparative lack of slaves is indicative of its position as the least authoritarian nation in Central America.

Other historians have attempted to account for Costa Rica’s comparatively egalitarian land distribution during the colonial era. Carlos Meléndez observed that despite a more egalitarian land distribution, there were certainly a hierarchical class structure in

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<sup>4</sup> Felipe Molina, *A Brief Sketch of the Republic of Costa Rica* (London: P. P. Thoms, 1849), 11.

<sup>5</sup> Carlos Monge Alfaro, *Historia de Costa Rica* (San José: Imprenta Trejos, 1959).

<sup>6</sup> Carlos Monge Alfaro, ‘The Development of the Central Valley,’ in Marc Edelman and Joane Kenen (Eds.) *The Costa Rica Reader* (New York: Grove Weidenfield, 1989), 12.

<sup>7</sup> Iván Molina, *Costa Rica (1800-1850) El Legado Colonial y la Génesis del Capitalismo* (San José: Editorial de la Universidad de Costa Rica, 1991), 162.



colonial Costa Rica:

Bereft of their seigniorial illusions, many colonists had no choice but to take tools in hand, face the sun, and plant what they needed to survive. Although this had a leveling effect on colonial society, daily life was nonetheless based on status differences defined in accordance with Spanish tradition. The original colonists and their descendants behaved as a landed gentry, albeit a poor one. Social differentiation persisted but, in practice, each colonist lived on what he produced. Pressed by agrarian poverty, the colonists became more democratic.<sup>8</sup>

Lowell Gudmundson constructs a similar argument that wealth was not distributed as equally in colonial Costa Rica as had been previously maintained.<sup>9</sup> In this characterisation, the rural democracy thesis is a fallacy perpetuated in order to conform with convenient historical explanations for Costa Rican exceptionalism. Mario Samper concludes that by exaggerating the differences between Costa Rica and other parts of Latin America results in romanticised histories of rural Costa Rica.<sup>10</sup> Such histories are usually constructed along the lines of Costa Rica as an “idyllic democracy without violence or poverty.”<sup>11</sup> With some justification, the country has often been described as the ‘Switzerland of Central America.’

Although there are good reasons why Costa Rica has developed this image, there are some exaggerations and other problems with the construction of the country’s history, particularly its national myths. One problem with the extant accounts of Costa Rican exceptionalism is that they do not trace back far enough. Traditionally historiography has typically identified the roots of Costa Rica’s democratic exceptionalism in the colonial period. For example, the opening chapter of *The Costa Rica Reader* by editors Marc Edelman and Joanne Kenen is entitled ‘The Origins of Costa Rican Exceptionalism - Colonial Period and the Nineteenth Century.’<sup>12</sup> Most accounts usually point to proximate causes which are in fact outcomes of previous historical periods and therefore fail to provide an appropriate historical context. In order to account for Costa Rica’s unique political situation, it is important to identify the ultimate cause of this phenomenon by

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<sup>8</sup> Carlos Meléndez, ‘Land Tenure in Colonial Costa Rica,’ in Marc Edelman and Joane Kenen (Eds), *The Costa Rica Reader* (New York: Grove Weidenfield, 1989), 18.

<sup>9</sup> Lowell Gudmundson, ‘Costa Rica Before Coffee: Occupational Distribution, Wealth Inequality, and Elite Society in the Village Economy of the 1840s,’ *Journal of Latin American Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 2, 1983. This article was subsequently extended to book form; Lowell Gudmundson, *Costa Rica Before Coffee: Society and Economy on the Eve of the Export Boom* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986).

<sup>10</sup> Mario Samper, *Generations of Settlers: Rural Households and Markets on the Costa Rican Frontier, 1850-1935* (Boulder: Westview Press., 1990), 18-19.

<sup>11</sup> Theodore Creedman, *Historical Dictionary of Costa Rica* (Metuchen: The Scarecrow Press, 1977), x.

<sup>12</sup> Marc Edelman and Joanne Kenen, ‘The Origins of Costa Rican Exceptionalism - Colonial Period and the Nineteenth Century,’ in Marc Edelman and Joanne Kenen (Eds.), *The Costa Rica Reader* (New York: Grove Weidenfield, 1989).

tracing the country's political institutions. As this thesis will demonstrate, this requires analysis of the forms of political organisation that existed in the area on the eve of the Conquest. Although there are some historical accounts that mention the pre-Hispanic era, this is typically only in reference to the country's comparatively small Indigenous population.<sup>13</sup>

One of the foundational elements of the rural democracy thesis is based on the idea that Costa Rica's pre-Hispanic population was comparatively small within Central America. The first systematic effort to estimate the figure was not conducted until the late nineteenth century by Bishop of Costa Rica Bernardo Augusto Thiel. After completing considerable research into the topic which included visiting some of the country's Indigenous reservations, Bishop Thiel estimated that the Amerindian population of Costa Rica between 1502 and 1522 was 27 200.<sup>14</sup> Recent scholarship on the genetic composition of the country's people suggests that the Indigenous population was perhaps larger than Thiel estimated given that nearly one-third of the genetic composition of contemporary Costa Ricans is Amerindian. Three of the country leading biologists reported that in the early 21st century, the gene admixture was as follows: European (61%), Amerindian (30%) and African (9%).<sup>15</sup> However, it is impossible to infer the Indigenous population size during the sixteenth century based on this finding.

Today the most commonly cited population estimate of pre-Columbian Costa Rica is that of geographer William Denevan who arrived at the number at 400 000 people. In the second addition of his book, Denevan reduced the estimated number of Indigenous peoples in pre-Columbian America after having originally overestimated by almost four million in the first edition.<sup>16</sup> Recent research has argued that the 400 000 number is inaccurate, and that Thiel's estimate was closer to the actual number.<sup>17</sup> The latter estimate is more consistent with the accounts from the colonial era regarding the small numbers of

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<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Steven Palmer and Iván Molina, 'The Birth of an Exception?' in Palmer, Steven and Molina Jiménez, Iván, (Eds.), *The Costa Rica Reader: History, Culture, Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

<sup>14</sup> Bernardo Augusto Thiel y Hoffman, 'Monografía de la Población de la República de Costa Rica en el Siglo XIX,' *Población y Salud en Mesoamérica*, Vol. 9, No. 1, 2011, 12.

<sup>15</sup> Bernal Morera, Ramiro Barrantes and Rafael Marin-Rojas, 'Gene Admixture in the General Population,' *Annals of Human Genetics*, Vol. 67, 2003, 74.

<sup>16</sup> The breakdown of population in 1492 for the rest of Central America was as follows: Guatemala (2 million), Belize and Honduras (850 000), El Salvador (750 000) Nicaragua (825 000) and Panama (800 000); William Denevan, 'Native American Populations in 1492: Recent Research and a Revised Hemispheric Estimate,' in William Denevan, (Ed.), *The Native Population of the Americas in 1492 (Second Edition)* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin, 1992), xxviii.

<sup>17</sup> Juan Carlos Solórzano, 'La Población Indígena de Costa Rica en el Siglo XVI al Momento del Contacto con los Europeos,' *Anuario de Estudios Centroamericanos*, Vol. 43, 2017.

Amerindians in the region. For instance, King Phillip II wrote in 1560, based on the reports he had received, that there were “few Indians” in Costa Rica who were “very spread out.”<sup>18</sup> Estimates by *conquistadores* from the mid 1560s put the Indigenous population between 5 000 and 30 000 people.<sup>19</sup>

Although it is possible that Thiel’s number was underestimated, it is also possible that Denevan’s estimate was inadvertently exaggerated as part of a commendable effort to highlight Spanish atrocities against the Native Americans. For example, after mentioning the 400 000 number, the political scientist Mitchell Seligson cites figures which estimate a mere 4500 Amerindians still living in Costa Rica in 1581.<sup>20</sup> One may wonder how the Indigenous population died so quickly given that the only a small section of the Central Valley had been conquered by the early 1560s. There is no doubt that the Spanish committed atrocities when colonising the region. However, such a rapid destruction of life may lead some to reasonably infer that there was a greater amount of deliberate extermination than had actually occurred at that stage. It is possible that smallpox killed that many people, but this seems somewhat unlikely. From 1510 to 1560 there were only intermittent expeditions to explore and conquer the territory which limited the contact between Amerindians and the Spanish. Regardless of whether one takes the minimal or maximal number, there is no disagreement that Costa Rica had the smallest pre-Hispanic Indigenous population in Central America.

Traditional historiography of Costa Rica has typically omitted deep analysis of the political systems of its Indigenous peoples from the discussion. There are some historical accounts that provide some Indigenous history such as the work of Ricardo Fernández Guardia, who is one of Costa Rica’s most famous historians. Fernández Guardia’s books provide some valuable information on the conquest of Costa Rica but reflect some of prejudicial attitudes towards Indigenous communities that were common in the early twentieth century. He wrote both a general history of the conquest of Costa Rica and

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<sup>18</sup> Rey Felipe II, ‘Cédula del Rey de España dirigida á la Real Audiencia de los Confines, en contestación á la carta que ésta le escribió con fecha 18 de diciembre de 1559. – Año de 1560,’ in León Fernández (Ed.) *Colección de Documentos para la Historia de Costa Rica: Tomo I* (San José: Imprenta Nacional, 1881), 159.

<sup>19</sup> The lower estimate was from Juan Dávila and the larger estimate was reportedly made by Juan Vasquez de Coronado; Juan Dávila, ‘Relación circunstanciada de la provincia de Costa-Rica, que envió Juan Dávila. – Año de 1566,’ in León Fernández (Ed.) *Colección de Documentos para la Historia de Costa Rica: Tomo III* (San José: Imprenta Nacional, 1883), 44. Palmer and Molina estimated that there were 120 000 Amerindians in Costa Rica in 1569; Palmer and Molina, ‘Introduction,’ 10.

<sup>20</sup> Seligson, ‘Costa Rica,’ 364.

another on the attempted conquest of Talamanca.<sup>21</sup> Historian Juan Carlos Solórzano has written about Indigenous rebellions in the Talamanca region between 1502 and 1710.<sup>22</sup> There are no detailed historical accounts that cover Indigenous resistance in Greater Talamanca from 1709 to 1788 which was the most significant period in terms of uprisings in that region during the colonial era. Beginning in the 1870s, there were several ethnographic studies that provided valuable information about the lifestyles and customs of the Talamancan Amerindians that could previously only be attained through official government accounts.<sup>23</sup> There are also several historical studies of Limón between the 1870s to the first half of the twentieth century, but they focus on the United Fruit Company (UFC) and the discrimination faced by West Indian banana plantation workers.<sup>24</sup> Historian Alejandra Boza Villarreal has conducted some important work on the political organisation of Indigenous Talamancans between 1840 until the 1920s.<sup>25</sup> Boza Villarreal has provided evidence that male Talamancan Amerindians have been voting in national elections since the 1890s.<sup>26</sup> One area that historians have not explored in much of the literature on Talamanca is the level of political decentralisation that is still found amongst its Indigenous communities.

A common problem with the discussions of Costa Rica's pre-Hispanic period is the tendency to exaggerate the level of centralisation of the Amerindian's political systems. This overestimation has often coincided with a focus on the more negative societal aspects

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<sup>21</sup> Ricardo Fernández Guardia, *History of the Discovery and Conquest of Costa Rica* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1913); Ricardo Fernández Guardia, *Reseña Histórica de Talamanca* (San José: Imprenta, Librería y Encuadernación Alsina, 1918).

<sup>22</sup> Juan Carlos Solórzano, 'La Rebelión de los Indígenas Bajo la Dirección de Pablo Presbere (Talamanca 1709-1710),' *Cuadernos de Antropología*, No. 21, 2011. Carlos Solórzano and his co-author also briefly discuss Talamanca in the last section of the final chapter in their book on Spain's initial exploration and conquest of Costa Rica; Juan Carlos Solórzano Fonseca and Claudia Quirós Vargas, *Costa Rica en el siglo XVI: descubrimiento, exploración y conquista* (San José: Editorial UCR, 2014).

<sup>23</sup> William Gabb, *On the Indian Tribes and Languages of Costa Rica* (Read before the American Philosophical Society, Aug. 20, 1875) (Philadelphia: McCalla and Stavely, 1875); Henry Pittier de Fábrega, 'Folklore of the Bribri and Brunka Indians in Costa Rica,' *The Journal of American Folklore*, (Vol. 16, No. 60, 1903); Alison Skinner, *Notes on the Bribri of Costa Rica* (Indian Notes and Monographs, Vol. VI, No. 3) (New York: Museum of the American Indian Heye Foundation, 1920).

<sup>24</sup> Aviva Chomsky, *West Indian Workers and the United Fruit Company in Costa Rica, 1870-1940* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996); Ronald Harpelle, *The West Indians of Costa Rica: Race, Class, and the Integration of an Ethnic Minority* (Monreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001); Lara Putnam, *The Company They Kept: Migrants and the Politics of Gender in Caribbean Costa Rica, 1870-1960* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002); David Lansing, 'Discourse and the production of territorial hegemony: Indigenous peoples, the United Fruit Company and the capitalist state in Costa Rica, 1872-1916,' *Journal of Historical Geography*, Vol. 45, 2014.

<sup>25</sup> Alejandra Boza Villarreal, 'Política en la Talamanca Indígena: El Estado Nacional y los Caciques. Costa Rica, 1840-1922,' *Anuario de Estudios Centroamericanos*, Vol. 29, No. 1-2, 2003; Alejandra Boza Villarreal, *La Frontera Indígena de la Gran Talamanca: 1840-1930* (Cartago: Editorial Tecnológica, 2014).

<sup>26</sup> Alejandra Boza Villarreal, 'Indigenous Citizenship between Borderlands and Enclaves: Elections in Talamanca, Costa Rica, 1880-1913,' *Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 96, No. 4, 2016.

such as warfare.<sup>27</sup> Historians and social scientists have tended to make anachronistic assumptions along the lines that all societies must necessarily be hierarchical like the modern nation-state. A typical example of this tendency is the following statement by Fernández Guardia: “The family and the respect and absolute obedience to the aristocrats and chiefs was the basis of the social order.”<sup>28</sup> This description is inconsistent with the archaeological and historical research that exists today and reflects the typical misrepresentation of how these systems actually functioned. In comparison to the hierarchical political systems that European colonists imposed on the region for over two and a half centuries, the Indigenous tribes found in pre-Hispanic Costa Rica were comparatively egalitarian in the sense of an absence of hierarchical decision-making.

Some historical accounts create confusion by their use of the terms ‘tribe’ and ‘chiefdom.’ Chiefs are sometimes incorrectly described as tribal leaders which blurs the lines between two political institutions that require a clear distinction. For instance, Scottish historian Murdo Macleod wrote in relation to the political structure of Costa Rica’s Indigenous peoples: “Their organization seems to have been basically tribal, with headmen and caciques [chiefs] leading bands or tribes of relative equals.”<sup>29</sup> Part of the confusion stems from the definition of the term ‘tribe’ as referring to any Indigenous group regardless of that society’s level of political centralisation. A tribe can be more usually defined as a non-hierarchical system wherein no individuals have political authority over other individuals. Although tribal systems contained a natural authority that is exemplified by a parents’ initial protection of their child, there were no political institutions which granted formal decision-making power over other people.

In Max Weber’s classic typology, there are three types of authority (legal-rational, charismatic and traditional).<sup>30</sup> Traditional authority is derived from long-established traditions, whereas charismatic authority rests on the influence commanded by extraordinary individuals. Legal-rational authority provides the basis of state power by granting the “right of those elevated to authority under [normative] rules to issue commands.”<sup>31</sup> This term is often used interchangeably with political authority. Using Weber’s typology, the latter form of authority could not be said to be applicable to tribal

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<sup>27</sup> Eugenia Ibarra Rojas, ‘Exploring Warfare and Prisoner Capture in Indigenous Southern Central America,’ *Revista de Arqueología Americana*, No. 30, 2012. pp. 105-131.

<sup>28</sup> Ricardo Fernández Guardia, *Cartilla Histórica de Costa Rica* (San José: LIL Editorial, 2010), 11.

<sup>29</sup> Murdo Macleod, *Spanish Central America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 27.

<sup>30</sup> Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (Mansfield Centre: Martino Publishing, 2012), 328.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

societies. Although an ideal type in the Weberian sense could not be said to exist with regards to a democratic or egalitarian political unit, tribes are arguably the most egalitarian and democratic of potential political systems. The typology employed in this thesis excludes bands which are indeed smaller and perhaps even more egalitarian.<sup>32</sup> However, they are not classified as a political unit given the nomadic lifestyle of their members.

In comparison to a tribe, a chiefdom denotes a higher level of complexity in which a certain degree of legal authority is bestowed upon the leaders of the society. Anthropologist Robert Carneiro astutely characterised the chiefdom as the ‘precursor of the state.’<sup>33</sup> Within tribes, anthropologists now distinguish between ‘simple chiefdoms’ which have one level of political hierarchy above the populace and ‘complex chiefdoms’ which consist of multiple levels. Whilst there were some chiefdoms in sixteenth century Costa Rica (especially in the Central Valley), they appeared to have been more simple than complex.<sup>34</sup> Definitional confusion can lead to exaggerations of the complexity of Indigenous societies. Prior to the mid- 1980s, archaeologists specialising in pre-Hispanic Lower Central America (Costa Rica and Panama) incorrectly presumed that chiefdoms were the most common form of political organisation in the region.<sup>35</sup> They previously concluded that the presence of gold or jade automatically indicated the existence of chiefdoms. Frederick Lange, perhaps the foremost academic in Central American archaeological studies, observed in 1993, “Too often, archaeologists (myself included) have automatically assumed that fancy jade, gold pendants, or polychrome ceramic vessels indicate chiefly status, centralized control, and a stratified society.”<sup>36</sup> Lange concurred with many of his peers that the evidence is much weaker than they previously thought and that the concept of chiefdoms may even be inappropriate for either Central America or the Intermediate Area.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> On account of their relatively egalitarian nature, Friedrich Engels described hunter-gather societies as ‘primitive communism;’ Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (London: Penguin, 2010). However, this term is rarely used today because the term ‘communism’ has become associated with extreme state centralisation.

<sup>33</sup> Robert Carneiro, ‘The Chiefdom: Precursor of the State,’ in Grant Jones and Robert Kautz (Eds.). *The Transition to Statehood in the New World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

<sup>34</sup> Solórzano, ‘La Población Indígena de Costa Rica en el Siglo XVI al Momento del Contacto con los Europeos,’ 319.

<sup>35</sup> See, for example, Mary Helms, *Ancient Panama: Chiefs in Search of Power* (Austin: University of Texas, 1979).

<sup>36</sup> Frederick Lange, ‘The Conceptual Structure in Lower Central American Studies: A Central American View,’ in Mark Graham (Ed.). *Reinterpreting Prehistory of Central America*. Niwot: University Press of Colorado, 1993), 312.

<sup>37</sup> Frederick Lange, ‘Gaps in Our Databases and Blanks in Our Synthesis,’ in Frederick Lange (Ed.), *Paths to Central American History* (Colorado: University Press of Colorado, 1996), 312. The Intermediate Area is a term used by archaeologists to denote the region stretching from Mesoamerica to the Central Andes region.

Using archaeological and anthropological research in comparison with a more balanced reading of the historical record reveals pre-Hispanic Central American societies as comparatively more egalitarian and non-violent than their more centralised neighbours. In his comparison of pre-Columbian Mesoamerica and Central America, Lange concluded:

In the present model, what is lacking is any evidence for large-scale diversion of human and material culture resources to non-productive channels of society. Lacking also is evidence of ... socio-economic-political religious competition and conflict; ... Also absent is evidence for any form of large-scale warfare, human sacrifice, and the like... The Mesoamerican world view is summarized as power, patrilineal, theocracy, encumbered, and imperialistic expansion; the Central American world view as local autonomy, largely matrilineal, unencumbered, equal distribution of resources, and animism. In short, Central America was a kinder and gentler place to live.”<sup>38</sup>

Given that ancient Mesoamerica included all of modern-day Guatemala and El Salvador as well as parts of Honduras and Nicaragua, Lange’s description is especially accurate with regards to Costa Rica and Panama. Within Central America, there are clear historical differences between the northern half of the region, compared with its southern half. The ‘Northern Triangle’ (Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras) has historically been more centralised and violent than Lower Central America. By comparison, archaeological research conducted in the last four decades has demonstrated that tribes were the most common form of political organisation in pre-Hispanic Lower Central America.<sup>39</sup> The historical record also reveals some significant differences between the levels of centralisation of their pre-Hispanic political systems of Costa Rica and Panama in comparison to Nicaragua which is sometimes included as part of Lower Central America.

Analysis of this region reveals the unique structural and environmental conditions of the region, especially in Central America’s democratic exception. The land mass that came to be known as ‘Costa Rica’ was situated in the middle of the more centralised political systems encroaching from both the Mayans and Aztecs from the North and the Incans from South America.<sup>40</sup> The latter two civilisations were evidently the most hierarchical and authoritarian political systems that had developed in pre-Hispanic America. The Indigenous societies of Lower Central America stood out in stark contrast to

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<sup>38</sup> Lange, ‘The Conceptual Structure in Lower Central American Studies: A Central American View,’ 316-317.

<sup>39</sup> See, for instance, Winifred Creamer and Jonathan Haas, ‘Tribe versus Chieftdom in Lower Central America,’ *American Antiquity*, Vol. 50, No. 4, 1985.

<sup>40</sup> From this point on in the thesis, the name ‘Costa Rica’ will, for simplicity purposes, also be used to describe the land mass that existed in the pre-Hispanic period.

the Aztec and Incan civilisations. As archaeologist Terence Grieder noted, “eastern Costa Rica and Panama were among the places where that simplifying authoritarian trend was best withstood.”<sup>41</sup> The former also appears to have been comparatively stable much earlier than since the eve of the Conquest. Archaeologist Payson Sheets has observed that “Costa Rica is notable for relative stability in population, adaption, economies, and societies for many millennia.”<sup>42</sup> As this thesis will demonstrate, the inhabitants of Costa Rica have experienced less authoritarianism than their Central American counterparts since the eve of the Conquest.

The central argument of this thesis is that Costa Rica has been the comparatively freest region in Central America since the eve of the Spanish conquest. The term ‘freest’ is defined here as being the extent to which its inhabitants were spared from living under the authority of arbitrary and domineering political institutions. Unfortunately, there is a lack of knowledge on how political systems functioned in pre-Hispanic Costa Rica in comparison to ancient Central America which is often studied less than the Incan and Aztec civilisations. Some scholars have tended to dismiss pre-Hispanic Lower Central America as ‘backward’ in comparison to the more ‘complex’ political systems in Mesoamerica.<sup>43</sup> Conversely, the Aztec, Incan and Mayan civilisations have often been praised by many for their remarkable achievements. For instance, Australian historian Geoffrey Blainey has characterised these civilisations as “impressive.”<sup>44</sup> This is perhaps because the attainment and maintenance of power is typically held as a marker of success whereas non-hierarchical political systems are generally portrayed in a negative light. This negative portrayal also serves to justify the colonial legacy as the advancement of ‘civilisation,’ ‘progress’ or ‘economic development.’

Another reason for the comparative lack of knowledge in this area is the difficulty in acquiring evidence. However, as the story of the proverbial drunk struggling to find his keys under a streetlight demonstrates, historians should not refrain from researching areas of knowledge merely because they have inferior lighting. A goal of this thesis is to bring previously dark areas to the light. This will be achieved by analysing the historical record with support from the archaeological and anthropological research on the region. Despite

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<sup>41</sup> Terence Greider, ‘A Global View of Central America,’ in Mark Graham (Ed.), *Reinterpreting Prehistory of Central America* (Niwt: University of Colorado Press, 1993), 47.

<sup>42</sup> Payson Sheets, ‘The Pervasive Pejorative in Intermediate Area Studies,’ in Frederick Lange (Ed.), *Wealth and Hierarchy in the Intermediate Area* (Washington: Trustees for Harvard University, 1992), 35.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 19.

<sup>44</sup> Geoffrey Blainey, *A Short History of the World* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2003), 213, 216, 227.



its difficulty, this analysis is an important part of the history of humankind. As anthropologist Robert Carmack observed, this is the “history of once autonomous diverse groups of peoples, highly creative and successful in many ways. As such they deserve their own place in history alongside the important ancient civilizations and peoples in Spain and other regions of the world.”<sup>45</sup> With regards to the gaps in the literature on the pre-Hispanic and colonial eras, this thesis will be extending the length of the roots of the democratic exception as well as correcting the overestimation of the centralisation levels of Costa Rica’s Indigenous societies in the colonial era. Although this case study will contain some elements of social history, its primary focus will be a political history given it is primarily tracing the interplay between authoritarianism and liberty in Costa Rica.

### **Costa Rica’s Political Development Since Independence**

Given that Costa Rica did not truly begin to enjoy major economic success until after Central America’s independence from Spain in 1821, it is understandable why many historians have focused on the post-independence period and the century that followed it.<sup>46</sup> The importance of this period which is reflected in the existing literature. In his book on post-colonial development in Spanish America, political scientist James Mahoney contends that in Spanish America, a country’s ‘level of colonialism’ is correlated with its post-colonial position within the region. He observed that the relative position of these former Spanish colonies has tended to persist to this day.<sup>47</sup> This argument certainly holds true for Costa Rica. According to Mahoney, a comparison of the Central American republics shows that Costa Rican exceptionalism has its origins during the early post-independence period.<sup>48</sup> Its position as a colonial backwater allowed Costa Rican liberals to “consolidate power and enact enduring reforms without being supplanted by conservatives.”<sup>49</sup> The period from the

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<sup>45</sup> Robert Carmack, *The Indigenous Peoples of Mesoamerica and Central America: Their Societies, Cultures, and Histories* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2017), 6.

<sup>46</sup> Margarita Silva Hernández, *Estado y Política Liberal en Costa Rica: 1821-1940* (San José: Editorial Universidad Estatal a Distancia, 1991); Juan Rafael Quesada Camacho, *Educación en Costa Rica, 1821-1940* (San José: Editorial Universidad Estatal a Distancia, 1991); David Díaz Arias, *Construcción de un Estado Moderno: Política, Estado e Identidad Nacional en Costa Rica, 1821-1914* (San José: Editorial Universidad de Costa Rica, 2005); Iván Molina Jiménez, *Del Legado Colonial al Modelo Agroexportador: Costa Rica (1821-1913)* (San José: Editorial Universidad de Costa Rica, 2005); David Díaz Arias, *La Fiesta de la Independencia en Costa Rica, 1821-1921* (San José: Editorial UCR, 2007).

<sup>47</sup> James Mahoney, *Colonialism and Postcolonial Development: Spanish America in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.

region's independence from Spain in 1821 until 1870 is known as the 'conservative era' in Central America history.

Many other scholars argue that Costa Rica began to exhibit its unique character shortly after independence. They identify the development of the coffee industry in Costa Rica in the 1830s and when the country broke away from the United Provinces of Central America in 1838 as being particularly significant.<sup>50</sup> Political scientist Bruce Wilson contends that democratic exceptionalism "cannot be explained by relying only on the colonial period."<sup>51</sup> Whilst this is true, identifying the ultimate cause of Costa Rican democratic exceptionalism must involve looking back not forward in time as Wilson suggests. In order to explain Costa Rica's later advancements during the nineteenth century, it is important to investigate why the colony's political development took the course it did. Although Costa Rica's isolation is an important factor in explaining early liberalisation, there are important differences between Costa Rica and its neighbours such as the scarcity of its Indigenous population, that were already evident during the colonial period. Thus, this is not the period where the roots of the country's exceptionalism are to be found. When appropriate historical context is provided, it is clear that Costa Rica's exceptional position was merely strengthened with the onset of the post-independence era.

Costa Rica was the first Central American country to liberalise both its economy and political system after the region gained independence.<sup>52</sup> At the end of the conservative period, there was a shift to liberal leadership throughout the region that is known as the 'liberal reform' era which is typically deemed to be approximately between 1870 and 1920. In Costa Rica, the first major leader to gain power during this period was the military officer Tomás Guardia (1870-1882). Despite the introduction of various liberal reforms, the Guardia regime employed authoritarian methods of control on the general population. In *Control and Political Domination in the Regime of Tomás Guardia*, Costa Rican psychologist Efraín Danilo Pérez Zumbado analysed the authoritarian mechanisms of

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<sup>50</sup> See, Andrew Reding, 'Costa Rica: Democratic Model in Jeopardy,' *World Policy Journal* (Vol. 3, No. 2, 1986), 301; Victor Bulmer-Thomas, *The Political Economy of Central America Since 1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 10; Robert Williams, *States and Social Evolution: Coffee and the Rise of National Governments in Central America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994); D. Michael Shafer, *Winners and Losers: How Sectors Shape the Development Prospects of States* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), Ch. 6; Jeffrey Paige, *Coffee and Power: Revolution and the Rise of Democracy in Central America*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).

<sup>51</sup> Bruce Wilson, *Costa Rica: Politics, Economics, and Democracy* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998), 314.

<sup>52</sup> For a good account of liberalism in Costa Rica during the conservative period, see, Lowell Gudmundson and Hector Lindo-Fuentes (Eds.), *Central America, 1821-1871: Liberalism Before Liberal Reform* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1995).

control that were employed by the Guardia regime to crush political opponents with coercion and violence. Pérez Zumbado noted how hegemony was also maintained by Guardia's regime in the Gramscian sense of the term.<sup>53</sup> The liberal reform era ended in Costa Rica with the regime of Federico Tinoco (1917-1919).

The collapse of the Tinoco dictatorship led the way for the proliferation of the labour movement in the 1920s and 30s. Pressure coming from trade unions helped lead Rafael Calderón's government to establish a welfare state in the early 1940s. This development led to tensions which culminated in the 1948 civil war.<sup>54</sup> After the war ended, the 'father of Costa Rican democracy' José Figueres proscribed the military, a move that placed the country in sharp contrast with the other Central American republics. In much of the literature, the 1940's are identified as being a watershed in the development of Costa Rican democratic exceptionalism. Many studies argue that it was not until after World War II when the country truly became exceptional with the development of a considerable welfare state and the abolition of its armed forces.<sup>55</sup> In Chamberlain's estimation, the country "can credit much of its 'exceptional' status in Central America to public ownership of a wide range of productive means."<sup>56</sup> Political scientist Deborah Yashar also constructs a similar argument by comparing political reforms in Costa Rica and Guatemala stretching back to the liberal reform period and concludes that political development was similar in both countries prior to the 1950s.<sup>57</sup> Although there was a further divergence between the two countries after the 1954 coup in Guatemala, a review of these countries' histories reveal major differences between the two countries that were already evident in the 1870s. Some of the differences included a smaller military and a more liberal state apparatus which help explain why social reforms succeeded in Costa Rica but not in Guatemala which reverted to authoritarianism after a decade of social liberal reforms that began in 1944.

In light of the major differences in terms of their political development, it is clear that the 1940s is not an appropriate period for identifying the origins of Costa Rica's

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<sup>53</sup> Efraín Danilo Pérez Zumbado, *El Control y la Dominación Política en el Regimen de Tomás Guardia* (San José: Editorial Universidad Estatal a Distancia, 2013).

<sup>54</sup> For a general overview of the 1948 civil war in English, see, John Patrick Bell, *Crisis in Costa Rica: The 1948 Revolution* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971).

<sup>55</sup> See, for example, Jacobo Schifter, 'Democracy in Costa Rica as the Product of Class Neutralization,' in Marc Edelman and Joane Kenen (Eds.) *The Costa Rica Reader* (New York: Grove Weidenfield, 1989); John Booth, *Costa Rica: Quest For Democracy* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998); Wilson, *Costa Rica*, 81; Andrew Reding, 'Costa Rica: Democratic Model in Jeopardy,' 301.

<sup>56</sup> Anthony Chamberlain, *Privatization in Costa Rica: A Multi-Dimensional Analysis* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2007), 144.

<sup>57</sup> Deborah Yashar, *Demanding Democracy: Reform and Reaction in Costa Rica and Guatemala, 1870s-1950s* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

democratic exceptionalism. Nevertheless, it is true that the 1940s were a turning point for Costa Rica in terms of the social reforms, the civil war and the subsequent abolition of the military that all occurred during that decade. Whilst it is evident that Costa Rica did become even more exceptional after 1948, it is important to emphasise again that the country's exceptional status with Central America has long historical roots. The country's avoidance of authoritarianism and large-scale political violence since 1919 demonstrated just how exceptional the country had become. Costa Rica's democratic exceptionalism stood out particularly during the 1930s and 40s when its neighbours were ruled by some of the region's most notorious dictators. The relatively small 1948 civil war was the country's largest conflict since it became a representative democracy. The government's decision to abolish the army after the war was instrumental in demonstrating the country's unique character during the Central American crisis of the late 1970s and 80s which plagued much of the region with extreme political violence.<sup>58</sup> Although Costa Rica escaped this aspect of the crisis, it did experience an economic crisis consistent with the rest of Latin America. At the time, some Costa Ricans were concerned with the potential undermining of Central America's democratic exception in the neoliberal era.

Since the late 1980s, there has been several works written by authors who claim that Costa Rica's democratic exception is being undermined. This phenomenon was described by political scientists Fabrice Lehoucq and Mitchell Seligson along the lines that there were problems in 'paradise.'<sup>59</sup> These problems were largely due to a reduction of support for the country's political system since the 1980s. Some authors have maintained that the peaceful, democratic country has been undermined a result of the Reagan Administration's pressuring of Costa Rica to militarise as part of its strategy against Nicaragua's Sandinista regime.<sup>60</sup> Others point to US influence in the country's political development during the 1980s which saw the introduction of a neoliberal policy framework.<sup>61</sup> Whilst the potential loss of Costa Rica's exceptional status was a genuine concern during the 1980s, some forty years later, these fears have largely not come to fruition.

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<sup>58</sup> See, for example, Tom Barry, *Roots of Rebellion: Land and Hunger in Central America* (Boston: South End Press, 1987).

<sup>59</sup> Mitchell Seligson, 'Trouble in Paradise? The Erosion of System Support in Costa Rica, 1978-1999,' *Latin American Research Review*, Vol. 37, No. 1, 2002; Fabrice Lehoucq, 'Costa Rica: Paradise in Doubt,' *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 16, No. 3, 2005.

<sup>60</sup> See, for instance, Martha Honey, *Hostile Acts: U.S. Policy in Costa Rica in the 1980s* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1994).

<sup>61</sup> See, for example, Thomas Marois, 'From Economic Crisis to a 'State' of Crisis? The Emergence of Neoliberalism in Costa Rica,' *Historical Materialism*, Vol. 13, No. 3, 2005.

Apart from some brief discussions of public opinion and propaganda during the 1980s, this is one area that has often been overlooked with regards to Costa Rica. In his general overview of the country for instance, Central American specialist Tom Barry has a short discussion in which he argued that the United States and the Costa Rican media undermined the union movement during the 1980s.<sup>62</sup> Bruce Wilson also briefly mentions the role of propaganda in his article which contends that social democrats in the Costa Rica government pursued neoliberals independently of foreign interference. Therefore, the introduction of neoliberalism cannot be solely attributed to pressure by multilateral lending institutions.<sup>63</sup> Wilson observed that interest groups “used the media extensively and effectively to influence public opinion” in the country during the 1980s.<sup>64</sup> Given how comparatively democratic and peaceful Costa Rica was at the time, scholars have focused on the political violence in the Northern Triangle and Nicaragua during the 1970s and 80s. Consequently, the country was often largely ignored, if not omitted altogether in studies of the region during the final stages of the Cold War.<sup>65</sup> Even though Costa Rica lost its democratic status in the 1990s when all the Central American states had become representative democracies, the effects of Costa Rica’s comparatively libertarian and democratic heritage are still clearly evident to this day.

### **A Multidimensional Approach**

A unique methodological framework is necessary in order to facilitate the long-term analysis for this case study. The methodology that will be employed is partially based on analysis of the *longue durée* (long duration) which was developed by the French *Annales* school of history. Fernand Braudel, the most famous of the *Annales* school’s scholars, distinguished between three primary types of temporal periods: events, conjunctures and the *longue durée*. From his perspective, one weakness with traditional historical analysis is that it tends to focus on events or conjunctures. In Braudel’s estimation, events are the ‘dust of history’ which blows into one’s eyes and prevent us from recognising the underlying social, political and economic structures which help develop a better understanding of

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<sup>62</sup> Tom Barry, *Costa Rica: A Country Guide* (Albuquerque: Inter-Hemispheric Education Resource Center, 1991).

<sup>63</sup> Bruce Wilson, ‘When Social Democrats Choose Neoliberal Policies: The Case of Costa Rica,’ *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 26, No. 2., 1994.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

<sup>65</sup> See, for instance, Thomas Anderson, *Politics in Central America: Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 1988).

history.<sup>66</sup> The study of the *longue durée* is employed as a solution to what Francois Simiand termed ‘episodic history,’ by which he meant the tendency of some scholars to emphasise events at the expense of long-term history.<sup>67</sup>

According to the *Annales* school historians, studying events in isolation results in a tendency to underestimate structural factors in favour of individual agency. This tendency is especially problematic for political histories that focus on events. However, as Braudel noted, “Political history is not necessarily bound to events, nor is it forced to be.”<sup>68</sup> This point was demonstrated in his magnum opus *Civilization and Capitalism* which covers a history of pre-industrial Europe from the fifteenth century to the eighteenth century.<sup>69</sup> In terms of human history, this represents a small amount of time even though it is evidently longer than most historical accounts. Although studies conducted over the *longue durée* are criticised for their large length, their great strength is encapsulated by the phrase the ‘whole is more than the sum of its parts.’ It is also important to recognise that histories of varying temporal periods can in fact complement each other. Long-term studies can complement short-term analyses by helping to create a better understanding of social change and human experiences. This thesis covers an approximately 500-year time span starting from the pre-Hispanic period which is where the ultimate cause of Costa Rican exceptionalism is to be found.

In order to manage the large timeframe, the concept of path dependence will be employed as part of this thesis’ methodological framework. Path dependency essentially means that past events restrict choices for actors which lead countries on a particular course of development. Political scientist Margaret Levi defines it as a process whereby “once a country or region has started down a track ... the entrenchments of certain institutional arrangements obstruct an easy reversal of the initial choice.”<sup>70</sup> In recent decades there has been an increasing awareness in the social sciences that institutions are extremely important

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<sup>66</sup> Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism 15<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> Century – Volume I: The Structures of Everyday Life* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), 560.

<sup>67</sup> Fernand Braudel, ‘History and the Social Sciences,’ in Richard Lee (Ed.), *The Longue Durée and World-Systems Analysis* (State University of New York Press, 2012), 244.

<sup>68</sup> Fernand Braudel, *On History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), 28.

<sup>69</sup> Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism 15<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> Century – Volume I*; Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism 15<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> Century – Volume II: The Wheels of Commerce* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992); Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism 15<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> Century – Volume III: The Perspective of the World* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992).

<sup>70</sup> Margaret Levi, ‘A Model, a Method, and a Map: Rational Choice in Comparative and Historical Analysis,’ in Mark Lichbach and Alan Zuckerman (eds.), *Comparative Politics: Rationality, Culture, and Structure* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 28.

with regards to shaping human behaviour and economic organisation.<sup>71</sup> In this view, the causes of underdevelopment are deeply rooted in a country's institutional structures. Much like the *Annales* school, proponents of the path dependent approach stress the importance of providing sufficient historical context. Political scientists Evelyn Huber and John Stephens note, a "single case study analyzing developments over a short period of time will privilege actors' choices and play down the structural constraints that limit the options of some actors and enable others."<sup>72</sup> This is precisely what this thesis is seeking to avoid. Path dependency theory forms part of historical institutionalism and institutional analysis in a broader sense. Historical institutionalists would surely agree with sociologists Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann's observation that "it is impossible to understand an institution adequately without an understanding of the historical process in which it was produced."<sup>73</sup> Thus, it may be necessary to trace the origins of modern political institutions in order to provide accounts with sufficient historical perspective.

The path dependency approach has sometimes been criticised in the social sciences for not employing falsifiable hypotheses which, some of its critics argue, makes it extremely difficult to determine in which cases path dependence matters.<sup>74</sup> This criticism is misguided however because it is evident that path dependence matters in every case given that institutions are built upon traditional historical processes. The primary way in which the significance of path dependence is demonstrated is through the identification of critical junctures. Given its significance to the path dependence approach it is useful to define a critical juncture. This concept can be defined as a "period of significant change, which typically occurs in distinct ways in different countries (or in other units of analysis) and which is hypothesized to produce distinct legacies."<sup>75</sup> The path dependent approach sidelines explanations which primarily or solely emphasise short-term causes in favour of one based on the effects of long-term historical processes. Path dependency theory has been

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<sup>71</sup> Douglass North, *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Avner Greif, *Institutions and the Path to the Modern Economy: Lessons From Medieval Trade* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Peter Hall, 'Historical Institutionalism in Rationalist and Sociological Perspective,' in James Mahoney and Kathleen Thelen (Eds.) *Explaining Institutional Change: Ambiguity, Agency, and Power* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

<sup>72</sup> Evelyn Huber and John Stephens, *Development and Crisis of the Welfare States: Parties and Policies in Global Market* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 8-9.

<sup>73</sup> Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Anchor, 1966), 54-55.

<sup>74</sup> See, for instance, Daniel Drezner, 'Is Historical Institutionalism Bunk?' *Review of International Political Economy*, Vol. 17, No. 4, 2010, 792.

<sup>75</sup> Ruth Collier and David Collier, *Shaping the Political Arena: Critical Junctures, the Labour Movement, and Regime Dynamics in Latin America* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), 29.

applied to Central America during the liberal reform era by James Mahoney in *The Legacies of Liberalism* wherein he traces the mid-twentieth century regime legacies of the region to this period. Unlike the ‘military-authoritarian’ regimes (El Salvador and Guatemala) and the ‘traditional dictatorial’ regimes (Nicaragua and Honduras), Costa Rica was the only liberal democratic regime in the region by the 1950s.<sup>76</sup> The liberal reform was one of the most important critical junctures or conjunctures in Central American history but is yet another proximate cause of Costa Rican exceptionalism.

Whilst many historical accounts simply identify proximate causes of Costa Rican exceptionalism, such accounts are more plausible than those which stress dispositions over institutional structures. In particular, the country’s strong democratic tradition is assumed to reflect the dispositions of *Ticos*, as Costa Ricans call themselves. For instance, Mitchell Seligson averred that *Ticos* have a greater preference for democracy than their counterparts in Latin America. He suggested that Costa Rica has been historically more democratic than the rest of Central America simply because most of its citizens support that regime type. Seligson based his conclusion from a 1996 survey which reported that 84.5% of *Ticos* believe “democracy is preferable to any other form of government” in comparison to 49.2% of Hondurans, 55.9% of Guatemalans, 62.2% of Salvadorans and 63.9% of Nicaraguans.<sup>77</sup> According to Seligson, “respect for the rule of law and willingness to hold government accountable for its actions are factors that make Costa Ricans different from their counterparts elsewhere in Latin America.”<sup>78</sup> These findings are not surprising given the comparative lack of social problems in Costa Rica compared to the rest of Central America. However, the issue with this argument is that it is unfair to blame general populations for the historical structural disadvantage and the imposition of authoritarian political institutions by elites for which they can hardly be held to account. Some of the phrasing regarding differences in Costa Rica implies that much of the general populations of Central America actually support authoritarianism.

Other authors have inadvertently criticised the other Central American countries through their praise of Costa Rica. For instance, in *Democracy in Costa Rica*, historian Charles Ameringer wrote that *Ticos* “are indeed a decent people, and that may explain why

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<sup>76</sup> James Mahoney, *The Legacies of Liberalism: Path Dependence and Political Regimes in Central America* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2001).

<sup>77</sup> Mitchell Seligson, ‘Costa Rican Exceptionalism: Why the “Ticos” Are Different,’ in Roderic Camp (Ed.), *Citizen Views of Democracy in Latin America* (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press, 2001), 93.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.



their country is a democracy.”<sup>79</sup> Although surely not the author’s intention, such statements may lead others to infer that other Central Americans were not decent given their countries were still authoritarian up until the end of the Cold War. Another example is Sol Sanders’ 1986 statement that “Costa Rica has little of the color and none of the social and political drama that large Indian and black minorities have given most of her neighbors.”<sup>80</sup> Notice that the blame for social and political turmoil is unfairly placed on Amerindians and Afro-Central Americans.

### **Costa Rica’s White Legend**

The most controversial explanation for Costa Rica’s exceptionalism has been its classification as a predominately ‘white’ society which is known as the country’s White Legend.<sup>81</sup> Its proponents typically claim that a higher percentage of Spanish blood is responsible for both Costa Rica’s higher level of economic development and stronger democratic tradition. A good articulation of the White Legend is provided in a 1951 US State Department report:

For 300 years the Spanish colonists and their descendants lived a simple and isolated existence on the Central Plateau of Costa Rica. Their economy was virtually non-monetary, based upon barter exchange, and no families of great wealth or political domination were created. The Spanish culture and predominantly European blood-strain, with but a relatively slight mixture of indigenous blood, was retained to a large degree. As a result, there is less social stratification in Costa Rica than there is elsewhere in Latin America, the literacy rate is high, and the standard of living is higher generally than in any other Central American republic. Costa Rica has a long tradition of political democracy, as the outgrowth of these unique and favorable conditions.”<sup>82</sup>

In the following year, the Twentieth Century Fund stated that the racial composition of the country is unique in Central America given that the majority of its people are of “white

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<sup>79</sup> Charles Ameringer, *Democracy in Costa Rica* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1982), 1.

<sup>80</sup> Sol Sanders, *The Costa Rican Laboratory* (New York: Priority Press Publications, 1986), 11.

<sup>81</sup> For a good summary of the White Legend from Costa Rica’s independence from Spain to the start of World War I see, Ronald Soto Quirós, ‘Imaginando una Nación de Raza Blanca en Costa Rica: 1821-1914,’ *Les Cahiers ALHIM*, Vol. 15, 2008.

<sup>82</sup> Department of State, ‘Document 756: Policy Statement Prepared in the Department of State - Costa Rica, Washington, March 3, 1951,’ in Ralph Goodwin, Stephen Kane, Harriet Schwar (Eds.), *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1951, The United Nations; The Western Hemisphere, Volume II* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1979), 1315.

European stock.”<sup>83</sup> As late as the 1980s, the military historian Gwynne Dyer described Costa Rica as a “relatively prosperous white nation.”<sup>84</sup>

The discussion of this topic is important given the structural disadvantages that stem from being codified as white in a racist political environment like that of colonial Latin America. However, unless one mentions problems such as structural disadvantage and institutionalised racism in Central America, statements such as those above may sound like an implication of white superiority, whether this was the intention or not. This has especially been true when foreigners of European descent mention Costa Rica’s advanced economic development in conjunction with the view that it is a largely white country. The White Legend is now generally considered to be both false and racist.<sup>85</sup> Whilst the biological determinist version of the legend should be rejected as untenable, this thesis proposes an alternative version of the White Legend which stresses environmental or structural factors. When discussing this topic however, it is important to distinguish fact from its fictional elements.

It would be unhelpful for analysis of institutionalised racism not to recognise the differences between the peoples of Central America. Anyone who has visited Central America cannot fail to observe that the skin colour of Costa Ricans is typically lighter than the general populations of its neighbouring countries. It is commonly believed that *Ticos* generally have lighter skin pigmentation largely because the country had the smallest indigenous population at time of the Conquest. However, one cannot hastily assume that this is solely due to a larger Spanish biological component in the Costa Rican population. Although this is no doubt a factor, there are also other factors such as the effects of environmental conditions and its relative lack of African slaves during the colonial era. Costa Rica’s comparative lack of slaves during the early colonial period is demonstrated by comparing the census records in Lower Central America.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Stacy May et al., *Costa Rica: A Study in Economic Development* (Baltimore: The Lord Baltimore Press, 1952), 23.

<sup>84</sup> Gwynne Dyer, ‘Costa Rica,’ in John Keegan (Ed.), *World Armies* (Second ed.) (London: Macmillan Publishers, 1983), 128.

<sup>85</sup> Ameringer, *Democracy in Costa Rica*, 3.

<sup>86</sup> A census taken in 1611 gives the total population of Costa Rica as 19, 293 people which included 15 489 Amerindians, 2 659 Spaniards, Latinos and *Zambos* and 1,145 chattel slaves. ‘Zambo’ was the term given to the offspring of a Mosquito Amerindian and a black man or woman; Carlos Meléndez and Quince Duncan, *El Negro en Costa Rica* (San José: Editorial Costa Rica, 2013), 40. By comparison, Panama had a much larger population descended from Africa. According to a 1610 census, 75% of Panama City was either ‘mulatto’ or ‘black;’ Robert Harding, *The History of Panama* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2006), 13.

Recent post-modernist scholarship has sought to highlight the continued importance of the White Legend by claiming that ‘whiteness’ is a major feature of Costa Rican exceptionalism. The proponents of this position argue that whiteness needs to be deconstructed in order to highlight the marginalisation or ‘erasure’ of the country’s Afro-*Tico* and Indigenous populations.<sup>87</sup> With regards to the latter, Political scientist Erica Townsend-Bell wrote that “no recasting or expansion of the myth of whiteness can explain an indigenous presence in the nation, for a story predicated on such a foundational myth is fundamentally at odds with the prior existence of a non-white population.”<sup>88</sup> However, a closer review of the historical record and in particular, the origins of the White Legend, reveals that Amerindians played a much greater role than is commonly recognised. There is evidence to suggest that some Amerindians living in Costa Rica had lighter skin than their Central American counterparts before the province was established in 1561.

There are references to ‘*Indios blancos*’ (white Indians) in Costa Rica and other Latin American countries stretching back to the sixteenth century.<sup>89</sup> The Spanish even referred to an Indigenous group to as the Blancos which are today known as the Bribri and Cabécar tribes. According to US palaeontologist William Gabb, the Teribe were also categorised by the Spaniards along with the Bribri and Cabécar “under the generic term of Blancos.”<sup>90</sup> It was most likely one of these two tribes that Christopher Columbus encountered on his fourth voyage to the Americas. This analysis is important given that the character assessments and treatment of Indigenous Central Americans varied based on the latter’s physical appearance, customs and the way in which they greeted their European visitors.

In 1935, Diego Povedano, the Secretary of the Spanish Embassy in San José, published an eye-witness account of white Amerindians in Talamanca which is the only historical account that directly deals with this subject of ‘*Indios blancos*’ in Costa Rica.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> See, Erica Townsend-Bell, ‘Whitening via erasure: Space, place and the census in Costa Rica.’ *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Research*, Vol. 20, No. 3, 2014, 436-454; Michelle Christian, ‘Racial Neoliberalism in Costa Rican Tourism: Blanqueamiento in the Twenty-First Century,’ *Current Perspectives in Social Theory*, Vol. 34, 2015.

<sup>88</sup> Townsend-Bell, ‘Whitening via erasure,’ 437.

<sup>89</sup> Panama is the only other Central America country in which there have been reports of Indigenous groups with lighter complexions than the average Amerindian; See, for instance, Richard Marsh, *White Indians of Darien* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1934).

<sup>90</sup> Gabb, *On the Indian Tribes and Languages of Costa Rica*, 525.

<sup>91</sup> Diego Povedano, ‘Los indios blancos,’ in *Los Aborígenes de Costa Rica: Textos Históricos, Periodísticos y Etnográficos* (Compilador: Elías Zeledón Cartín) (San José: Editorial Universidad Estatal a Distancia, 2017).

Povedano confirmed the Indigenous element of the White Legend in his sympathetic portrayal of the Bribri in Telire:

After a while several Indians arrived with their arrows, they were all stocky young men, and for the first time we could appreciate them in all their beauty. They were shoulder wide and muscular, with a cut nose and a completely Hellenic forehead; only by protruding cheekbone and facial angle could they be determined as belonging to the aboriginal race. Their same sallow colour looked more like a sun-tanned man than the skin tone of the South American Indian. *There was justification [razón] in the legend to call those aborigines 'white Indians.'*<sup>92</sup>

According to Povedano, not all of the Amerindians in the region had that particular skin tone. He concluded that the “few aborigines of small build and dark color” he encountered had “descended from the Bribri race that inhabited lower Telire.”<sup>93</sup> Thus, the different environmental conditions between lower and the mountainous regions helps account for the discrepancy in skin colour between different Amerindian tribes.<sup>94</sup>

Since the mid-1960s, scientists have conducting research on the genetic composition of the Indigenous population in Talamanca. Matson et al. reported that the Bribri had the lowest levels of a subtype of haptoglobin (Hp<sup>1</sup>) frequencies in the region. As the authors put it, “The gene frequency of Hp<sup>1</sup> among the Bribri is low in comparison to other tribes in Costa Rica. Indeed, this is the lowest frequency for the Hp<sup>1</sup> gene found in Indians of Middle America. The explanation for this is not known.”<sup>95</sup> Although this gene is not directed with skin pigmentation, studies tracking the global levels of Hp<sup>1</sup> frequencies have demonstrated its lowest levels are found in South Asia and Northern Europe. Conversely, South America and West Africa have the highest levels of the Hp<sup>1</sup> gene in the world.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 162-163, emphasis added.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 163.

<sup>94</sup> Povedano also wrote that at the “source of the Telire River there is a tribe of Cabécar Indians, with burnt white complexions and entirely European features;” Diego Povedano, ‘Costumbres, Creencias, y Fiestas de los Indios Bribri y Cabécares de Talamanca, Costa Rica,’ in *Los Aborígenes de Costa Rica: Textos Históricos, Periodísticos y Etnográficos* (Compilador: Elías Zeledón Cartín) (San José: Editorial Universidad Estatal a Distancia, 2017), 143.

<sup>95</sup> G. Albin Matson, H. Eldon Sutton, Jane Swanson, A. R. Robinson, ‘Distribution of Haptoglobin, Transferrin, and Hemoglobin Types Among Indians of Middle America: In British Honduras, Costa Rica and Panama,’ *The American Journal of Physical Anthropology*, Vol. 23, No. 2, 1965, 124.

<sup>96</sup> Kymberly Carter and Mark Worwood, ‘Haptoglobin: A Review of the Major Allele Frequencies Worldwide and Their Association with Diseases,’ *International Journal of Laboratory Hematology*, Vol. 29, 2007.

Important for the development of the White Legend, studies have shown that there has been admixture between Indigenous Talamancans and people of African descent.<sup>97</sup> Blood samples taken from individuals in the Bribri, Boruca, Teribe and Cabécar tribes showed a presence of the haplogroup subtype R<sub>0</sub> which is rare or absent amongst Amerindians but is prevalent amongst African peoples.<sup>98</sup> This finding, most likely a result of Jamaicans immigration to the region since the 1870s, is inconsistent with the argument which suggests that there has been a continued state policy of ‘whitening’ in order to erase Costa Rica’s Amerindian population.<sup>99</sup> It is true that some Costa Rican elites in the second half of the nineteenth century and first half of the twentieth century favoured ‘whites’ when formulating government policies, especially in relation to migration.<sup>100</sup> Although there are postmodernists who reference some instances of individual racism, they do not provide adequate evidence for their claims of ‘whitening’ efforts in the modern era.<sup>101</sup> Nevertheless, it should be noted that in this view, ‘whiteness’ does not necessarily correlate with one’s skin pigmentation, but rather, appears to be connected with the extent to which an individual adheres to the dominant ideology.<sup>102</sup> One major difference between the Talamancan Amerindians and Afro-Costa Ricans was that foreigners have given comparatively more positive descriptions of the former in the historical documents.

From the very first accounts of Columbus’ arrival in Costa Rica in 1502, foreigners have given surprisingly positive character assessments to the country’s inhabitants. These include being described as ‘intelligent,’ ‘gente de razón’ (people of reason) or as having ‘good dispositions,’ among others.<sup>103</sup> These kinds of positive assessments have persisted since that time, albeit with different terminology. Highlighting the comparatively humanised language used to describe Costa Rica’s inhabitants is important given its implications regarding the behaviour demonstrated by Spanish administrators and foreign governments in their relations with the country. There is evidence both within and outside

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<sup>97</sup> Jorge Azofeifa and Ramiro Barrantes, ‘Genetic Variation of the Bribri and Cabécar Amerindians from Talamanca, Costa Rica,’ *Revista de Biología Tropical*, Vol. 39, No. 2, 1991, 250.

<sup>98</sup> Matson et al., ‘Distribution of Haptoglobin, Transferrin, and Hemoglobin Types Among Indians of Middle America,’ 127.

<sup>99</sup> Townsend-Bell, ‘Whitening via erasure.’

<sup>100</sup> Lara Putnam, ‘Ideología Racial, Práctica Social y Estado Liberal en Costa Rica,’ *Revista de Historia*, Vol. 39, 1999.

<sup>101</sup> Townsend-Bell, ‘Whitening via erasure;’ Christian, ‘Racial Neoliberalism in Costa Rican Tourism.’

<sup>102</sup> For example, Christian claimed that the “malleability of racial neoliberalism allows for the appropriation of white skills without the physical markers of whiteness;” Michelle Christian, ‘Racial Neoliberalism in Costa Rican Tourism,’ 184.

<sup>103</sup> The term ‘people of reason’ was used by the Spanish in their American colonies to describe those Indigenous peoples who had converted to Christianity.

the psychology lab that dehumanising language increases the likelihood that atrocities will be perpetrated against potential victims.<sup>104</sup> Also, individuals and governments have tended to be more brutal towards people that they have deemed to be inferior.

It was a commonly held belief by Spanish and other Western scientists in the nineteenth century that whites were inherently superior to non-white people. Even though scientific racism is associated with the nineteenth century, Historian Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra has argued that the “science of race, with its emphasis on biological determinism, its focus on the body as the site of behavioural-cultural variations, and its obsessions with creating homogenizing and categories, was first articulated in Colonial Spanish America in the seventeenth century, not in nineteenth century Europe.”<sup>105</sup> The main reason he gives for this development was that Creoles wanted a scientific justification for their supposed superiority to people of colour in order to counter European scholarship at the time which suggested that environmental influence was the cause of physical and intellectual underdevelopment.<sup>106</sup> An early example of this perceived superiority was provided by the King of Spain’s cosmographer Enrico Martinez in 1606. When discussing the topic of intelligence, Martinez claimed that Amerindians and “also the dark-skinned ... are far inferior in skill to that of the Spaniards.”<sup>107</sup> In this kind of intellectual environment, it is not difficult to imagine how individuals with lighter skin pigmentation had a decisive structural advantage over those with darker pigmentation.

Historical analyses of Costa Rica reveal a pattern of comparatively favourable treatment towards its inhabitants by European imperial powers and their offshoots. Within Central America, the inhabitants of Nicaragua have most often been contrasted in relation to those of Costa Rica. The latter’s national myths including the White Legend, have been constructed in certain ways that present Nicaraguans or *Nicas* as the ‘other.’ These constructions ignore the structural disadvantage of Nicaragua that can be highlighted by giving an appropriate historical context. As sociologist Carlos Sandoval-García noted, “the analysis of long-term processes can contribute to an understanding of how the sense of Costa Rica’s uniqueness and the representation of the Nicaraguan other have been

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<sup>104</sup> Albert Bandura, ‘Moral Disengagement in the Perpetration of Inhumanities,’ *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, Vol. 3, No. 3, 1999, 200-201.

<sup>105</sup> Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, ‘New World, New Stars: Patriotic Astrology and the Invention of Indian and Creole Bodies in Colonial Spanish America, 1600-1650,’ *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 104, No. 1, 1999, 35.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>107</sup> Enrico Martínez, *Repertorio de Los Tiempos* (Mexico City: n.p., 1606), 176.

configured.”<sup>108</sup> Several authors have argued that the White Legend narrative has resulted in disadvantage for Nicaraguans in Costa Rica including the unequal provision of health services for *Nicas* in comparison to *Ticos*.<sup>109</sup>

Whilst the term ‘personal responsibility’ is applicable to everyone to some extent, a radical application of this principle has the effect of erasing the structural factors that places constraints on an individual’s behaviour. If historians do not address the effects of long-term structural disadvantage, then it is likely that restraints on policy choices will be overlooked in their accounts. In *Varieties of Liberalism in Central America*, political scientist Forrest Colburn and economist Arturo Cruz contend that a comparison of Costa Rica and Nicaragua “underscores the considerable weight of local decisions, in particular of the kinds and quality of public institutions built, and of the investments made (or not made) in social services.”<sup>110</sup> The authors suggest that unlike Nicaraguans, *Ticos* have made clever choices with regards to their political development. This position again fails to take into account the structural disadvantage faced by Nicaragua which is the second poorest in the Western Hemisphere after Haiti. Nicaragua also happens to be the country which has experienced the greatest amount of US interventions. However, one needs to be careful about inferring causality here as the US has historically intervened in countries that were disadvantaged and unstable in the first place. Along with Guatemala, Nicaragua was one of the first areas in Central America to experience revolts back in the first half of the sixteenth century.<sup>111</sup> The contrast between US policy in Nicaragua and Costa Rica is quite striking given that the latter has never been invaded by the United States. While it is well understood that Nicaraguan policy makers were not passive actors, they were more restricted in the policy options available to them which has resulted from historical and geographical differences in the region.

After one reviews the historical record, it is clear that a geographical determinist argument provides a much better explanation for Costa Rica’s democratic exceptionalism in Central America than a biological determinist one. In this view, environmental pressures led to a concentration of natural resources amongst certain individuals, ultimately leading different societies to take different development paths. The essence of the geographical

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<sup>108</sup> Carlos Sandoval-García, *Threatening Others: Nicaraguans and the Formation of National Identities in Costa Rica* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2004), 63.

<sup>109</sup> Lisa Campo-Engelstein and Karen Meagher, ‘Costa Rica’s “White Legend:” How Racial Narratives Undermine its Health Care System, *Developing World Bioethics*, Vol. 11, No. 2, 2011.

<sup>110</sup> Forrest Colburn and Arturo Cruz, *Varieties of Liberalism in Central America: Nation-States as Works in Progress* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), xiii.

<sup>111</sup> Woodward Jr., ‘The Rise and Decline of Liberalism in Central America,’ 292.

determinist position was captured well by geographer Jared Diamond, “History followed different courses for different peoples because of differences among peoples’ environments, not because of biological differences among peoples themselves.”<sup>112</sup> Geographical determinists maintain that social inequality largely developed as an historical accident due to environmental conditions which led to major variations in development paths throughout human history. This position accounts for Europe’s dominance since 1500 by highlighting its superior environmental conditions as opposed to the inherent superiority of the ‘white race.’

Perhaps the most serious criticism of geographical determinism comes from economists Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson who argued that a country’s political institutions, not geographical location, is the major cause of economic development and underdevelopment. They argue that Diamond’s position does not explain economic development differences within geographical regions.<sup>113</sup> Whilst this observation is accurate, it is also true, as with the case with Costa Rica, that political institutions have been historically shaped by environmental/geographical factors. There are several works which stress importance of Costa Rica’s political institutions for its post-World War II political stability.<sup>114</sup> Analysis of how Costa Rica’s natural environment affected the development of its political institutions demonstrates that geographical factors have played a huge role in determining its exceptional status in Central America. This thesis will analyse several environmental and historical factors which help explain why the country has been the most libertarian part of Central America since the eve of the Conquest.

Chapter one lays out this thesis’ theoretical framework which draws on classical liberal thought and social psychological research in order to explain the effects of authority and social control on human beings. The second chapter outlines the unique geographical features of Costa Rica that produced the ultimate cause of the country’s later democratic exceptionalism. It also will describe the initial contact between Europeans and the original inhabitants of Central America as well as the initial stages of the conquest of the province. Chapter three demonstrates how the Indigenous tribes in Greater Talamanca defended themselves in the eighteenth century against repeated attempts by the Spanish to colonise

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<sup>112</sup> Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs and Steel: A Short History of Everybody for the Last 13,000 Years* (London: Vintage, 2005), 25.

<sup>113</sup> Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson, *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2012), 48-56.

<sup>114</sup> Fabrice Lehoucq, *Political Competition, Constitutional Arrangements, and the Quality of Public Policies in Costa Rica*, *Latin American Politics and Society*, Vol. 52, No. 4, 2010; Wilson, *Costa Rica*.



the region. The fourth chapter highlights Costa Rica's unique circumstances which allowed the country to liberalise its economy and political system after its citizens gained independence from Spain in 1821. The chapter will also cover the National Campaign of 1856-57 and its role in constructing Costa Rica's national identity.

Chapter five explains how the introduction of several liberal reforms in the 1870s allowed the country to develop a representative democracy by the late nineteenth century. The sixth chapter outlines the origins of Costa Rica's welfare state as well as the effects of the 1948 civil war. It will also cover the reasons for the subsequent strengthening of its relationship with the United States after the conflict. Chapter seven traces the origins of the Central American crisis (1979-1990) to the Alliance for Progress period. It explains how Costa Rica's political system largely protected the country from the violence and social turmoil experienced by its neighbours during the 1980s. The final chapter tracks the efforts to move the country closer towards a neoliberal development model in order to deal with the debt crisis that spread throughout Latin America at the beginning of its 'Lost Decade.' Despite its ideological shift in the 1980s, Costa Rica continues to be exceptional with regards to the other Central American republics which also shifted their policies and institutions in a similar direction in the 1990s when the whole region transitioned to representative democracies.

## **Chapter 1 – Social Control, Corruption by Authority and Impaired Empathy**

**The violent superposition of people on people forbids the establishment of the primal bonds between the upper and the lower. In the composite society, therefore, order seems to be wholly a creation of state and law, and its thinkers are apt to form too low an estimate of the social capabilities of human nature. Although the social fabric is at first held together by sheer force of arms, time gradually masks naked might, and moral and spiritual influences partly replace brute force. It is in the composite society, then, where the need of social control is most imperative and unremitting, that the various instruments of regulation receive their highest form and finish.**

Edward Alsworth Ross, *Social Control*, 1901.<sup>115</sup>

This chapter will analyse the effects of authority structures on human beings. In order to properly discuss this topic, it is necessary provide a picture of human nature. If one reviews human history, it is arguable that the classical liberal conception of human nature is the most plausible. The classical liberals had a sympathetic image of people which is why they opposed authoritarian institutions. One lamentable effect of such institutions is they impede an individual's human development.<sup>116</sup> A corollary of this view is that people should be largely left alone to pursue self-actualisation without undue interference by those in authority. The impediment of human development has clearly been demonstrated in Central America and by Costa Rica's partial exception in this regard. Laying out this theoretical framework is essential for properly understanding Costa Rica's comparative avoidance of the authoritarianism which has had such deleterious consequences in Central America. This chapter employs liberal political theory and social psychological research in order to both highlight the classical liberal view of human nature and demonstrate the deleterious effects of authoritarianism on human development. It will outline the nature of social control, how authority and violence affect empathy as well as a discussion of the techniques of control in representative democracies.

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<sup>115</sup> Edward Alsworth Ross, *Social Control: A Survey of the Foundations of Order* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1918), 57.

<sup>116</sup> Human development in the context of development studies refers to a person's overall well-being. In 1990, the United Nations developed the UN human development index which is determined by a combination of factors including health, education and other social indicators.

## The Nature of Social Control

Social control refers to the ways in which leaders of a society regulate the behaviour of general populations. It exists in one form or another under all political systems. In the modern nation state, human beings function within a complex web of inter-related political institutions which can be described as authority systems. A system of authority “consists of a minimum of two persons sharing the expectation that one of them has the right to prescribe behavior for the other.”<sup>117</sup> Every individual lives under several overlapping authority systems within an overarching system, namely the state. Authority systems are important units of analysis because of their importance in shaping human behaviour. Although human beings create their own social environment, they are also conditioned by it. Sociologists maintain that people tend to internalise the dominant values or ideology of their society. As Talcott Parsons put it, “values and other facets of a common culture are shared by the members, internalized in their personalities, and institutionalized in the social structure.”<sup>118</sup> The internalisation of values is a form of social control that occurs under tribal political systems.

Although social control exists in tribal systems it understandably function quite differently in comparison to political systems that are based on hierarchical decision-making. The form of control that is most common in these systems is the development of taboos and education which conditioned people to behave in accordance with the dominant values of the society. This certainly classifies as a method of control if one accepts anthropologist Morton Fried’s broad conception of social control which he defines as “all the nongenetically acquired processes by which individual and group behaviour is directed along certain lines and diverted from others.”<sup>119</sup> According to Fried, the education system is the most significant of the apparatuses of social control.<sup>120</sup> Even though this kind of social control also exists in today’s political systems, the development of political authority evidently changed the nature of social control. In particular, the development of nation states expanded the capacity for wide-ranging social control. In the first study on this subject, Edward Ross observed that complex political organisation “presupposes some kind

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<sup>117</sup> Stanley Milgram, *Obedience to Authority* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2009), 142-143.

<sup>118</sup> Talcott Parsons, ‘Authority, Legitimation, and Political Action,’ in Carl Friedrich (Ed.) *Nomos I Authority* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958), 197.

<sup>119</sup> Morton Fried, *The Evolution of Political Society: An Essay in Political Anthropology* (New York: Random House, 1967), 9.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

of control.”<sup>121</sup> This argument is often countered by the claim that centralised control is necessary to prevent disorder. Much like Dostoevsky’s Grand Inquisitor, it is often argued by those in positions of authority that human beings “will be persuaded that they will never be able to be free, because they are feeble, depraved, insignificant and mutinous.”<sup>122</sup> However, the complex historical record of human history requires one to take a more nuanced look at this issue.

## The Human Nature Debate

It is customary to mention debates over human nature when discussing social control as they are often drawn upon in order to justify political ideologies. Any discussion dealing with questions of human nature usually leads to debate over the opposing positions of Thomas Hobbes and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. In *Leviathan*, Hobbes outlined the case for strong authority structures to keep the supposed aggressive nature of humans in check. He famously argued that in the ‘state of nature,’ there was a ‘war of all against all.’<sup>123</sup> Hobbes’ ideas are still evoked to this day to justify authoritarian political institutions and as part of critiques of Indigenous political systems.<sup>124</sup> The Marxist variant of this position is based on the social constructivist notion that human beings are ‘blank slates’ and that a strong ‘transitional’ state is needed to contain the enemies of socialism.<sup>125</sup> Marxists have been routinely criticised by libertarians for lack of faith in the ability of human beings to run their own affairs in favour of centralised control.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Ross, *Social Control*, 40.

<sup>122</sup> Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* (London: Penguin, 2003), 330.

<sup>123</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

<sup>124</sup> For instance, sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein quotes Hobbes’ famous line that life within tribes or what he called ‘mini-systems’ was “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short.” According to Wallerstein, these societies “operated by the oppressiveness of custom (which is how age maintained its authority);” Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Politics of the World-Economy: The States, The Movements, and the Civilizations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 150. However, Wallerstein does not explain how customs could be considered ‘oppressive’ without the existence of coercive institutions with which to compel obedience. As sociologist Franz Oppenheimer observed about tribes: “The older men, thanks to their greater experience, have a certain authority; but no one feels himself bound to render them obedience;” Franz Oppenheimer, *The State: Its History and Development Viewed Sociologically* (n.p.: Forgotten Books, 2012), 28.

<sup>125</sup> As Karl Marx put it, the “essence of man is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations;” Karl Marx, *The German Ideology: Including Theses on Feuerbach and Introduction to The Critique of Political Economy* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1998), 570. The authoritarian nature of the ‘transitional’ socialist state was outlined in 1875 by Engels who argued, in opposition to the anarchists, that such an apparatus was necessary in order to “hold down one’s adversaries by force;” Friedrich Engels, ‘A Letter to A. Bebel,’ *Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism: Selected Writings by Marx, Engels, Lenin* (New York: International Publishers, 1972), 153.

<sup>126</sup> See, for instance, Michael Bakunin, *Statism and Anarchy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

By comparison, Rousseau had a much more sympathetic view towards human beings which he believed were “born free,” but are “everywhere in chains.”<sup>127</sup> He believed that after social inequality really developed, people became corrupted by the civil state which led to increased violence and disorder.<sup>128</sup> Against this position is the argument which holds that there is less violence in the modern world than in ‘pre-civilized’ political systems.<sup>129</sup> This position is arrived at by cherry-picking certain violent episodes which its proponents present as being typical of Indigenous societies.<sup>130</sup> Such a view of human beings is quite inconsistent with the overall available evidence. A very different picture emerges from the anthropologists who contend that violence has actually increased in the modern era with the development of state power.<sup>131</sup> The Costa Rican case supports the argument that tensions and violence between Indigenous populations and European conquerors in the ‘tribal zone’ led to increased warfare which many incorrectly interpret as evidence for a greater propensity for war in ‘pre-civilised’ societies.<sup>132</sup> Contrary to the charge that is levelled at so-called ‘neo-Rousseauians,’ proponents of this view are not romanticising life in native societies but are rather attempting to provide a more accurate picture of how Indigenous political systems functioned.<sup>133</sup> Furthermore, this argument only suggests that the violence increased with European contact, not that violence and war was non-existent in such societies.

The increase of violence after European colonisation in areas such as Costa Rica is not surprising given the expansion of political authority and hierarchical political institutions. Social psychologist Stanley Milgram argued that once human beings enter into an authority structure, they begin to perceive themselves as agents for executing the wishes

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<sup>127</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract* (London: Penguin, 1968), 49. Friedrich von Hayek took the opposite position to Rousseau: “*Man has not developed in freedom. The member of the little band to which he had had to stick in order to survive was anything but free. Freedom is an artefact of civilization that released man from the trammels of the small group, the momentary moods of which even the leader had to obey;*” Friedrich Hayek, *Law, Legislation and Liberty* (London: Routledge, 2013), 496, his emphasis.

<sup>128</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality* (London: Penguin, 1984).

<sup>129</sup> See, among others, Lawrence Keeley, *War Before Civilization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: The Decline of Violence in History and its Causes* (London: Penguin Books, 2011).

<sup>130</sup> Brian Ferguson, ‘Pinker’s List: Exaggerating Prehistoric War Mortality,’ in Douglas Fry (Ed.), *War, Peace and Human Nature: The Convergence of Evolutionary and Cultural Views*, (New York, Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>131</sup> See, for instance, Raymond Kelly, *Warless Societies and the Origin of War* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2000).

<sup>132</sup> Brian Ferguson and Neil Whitehead, ‘The Violent Edge of Empire,’ in Brian Ferguson and Neil Whitehead (Eds.), *War in the Tribal Zone: Expanding States and Indigenous Warfare* (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 2005).

<sup>133</sup> This term was employed by archaeologist Lawrence Keeley to describe the work of anthropologists such as Brian Ferguson; Keeley, *War Before Civilization*, 21.

of their superiors – what he termed the ‘agentic state.’ Milgram describes this process in further detail in the following passage:

The person entering an authority system no longer views himself as acting out of his own purposes but rather comes to see himself as an agent for executing the wishes of another person. Once an individual conceives his action in this light, profound alterations occur in his behavior and his internal functioning. These are so pronounced that one may say that this altered attitude places the individual in a different *state* from the one he was in prior to integration into the hierarchy.<sup>134</sup>

Once this process occurs, according to Milgram, a majority of people will no longer act according to their consciences but rather to the dictates of those in positions of authority.<sup>135</sup> Given that the majority of the Amerindians in Costa Rica were living in egalitarian tribes indicates they would not have been operating under the agentic state.

After the Spanish forced the Amerindians tribes to live under authoritarian institutions, there was an inevitable change in their psychological states. Once people became ‘civilised’ by living under the authority of the state, they internalise the rules that such a life entails, the most fundamental of which is showing deference to authority.<sup>136</sup> Milgram’s findings can also help explain why the Amerindians living in Costa Rica were both initially non-aggressive and comparatively successful at maintaining their independence throughout the colonial era. As it was outside his purview, what is missing in his analysis is a concrete historical picture of how and why human beings were incorporated into more centralised political systems. Costa Rica provides a good case study on account of its unique position in a region whose general population has experienced a great amount of authoritarianism. By conducting such a study, we can help shed some light on the ways in which authoritarian institutions have impeded “human development in its richest diversity” - to borrow Wilhelm von Humboldt’s phrase.<sup>137</sup>

### **The Classical Liberal Perspective**

In contrast to the Hobbesian position, the classical liberals argued that human beings are naturally sympathetic to others but have been corrupted by authoritarian political

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<sup>134</sup> Milgram, *Obedience to Authority*, 133.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 152.

<sup>137</sup> Wilhelm von Humboldt, *The Limits of State Action* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1993), 48.

institutions.<sup>138</sup> The libertarian position holds that authority systems essentially provide the justification for their own maintenance in the sense that hierarchical political institutions are deemed necessary to prevent the very disorder they helped produce. Whilst it is true that violence may result when an authority system that was keeping individuals under control is weakened or abolished, it is possible that in some cases, more violence and disorder can arise as a result of legal mechanisms designed to control individual behaviour. As Ross put it, “Hierarchical organization is still more a test of orderliness, inasmuch as in the sharing of unlike burdens and the division of unequal benefits, men are more apt to fall afoul of one another.”<sup>139</sup> The Hobbesian conception of human nature is still used to justify political authoritarian institutions today. In his study of social systems, Parsons observed that “certain types of socialization tend to generate deeply anti-authoritarian sentiments so that at least some kinds of authority cannot be tolerated by some people.”<sup>140</sup> Whereas Hobbesian views on human nature have strengthened authoritarian methods of social control, classical liberal have had the opposite effect.

The classical liberal conception of human nature is based on several key suppositions. A central, but often overlooked tenet of classical liberalism is the idea that humans have a ‘right to live.’<sup>141</sup> One of the most influential of the classical liberals was the Prussian linguist Wilhelm von Humboldt.<sup>142</sup> In his view, human beings demonstrate a remarkable capacity for creativity. However, authoritarian-run institutions have resulted in the impediment of human development and prevented the self-actualisation of people so that they reach their full potential.<sup>143</sup> A corollary of this position is that work conducted under authoritarian conditions is dehumanising to the individual. As Humboldt expressed it, “Whatever does not spring from a man’s free choice, or is only the result of instruction and guidance, does not enter into his very being, but remains alien to his true nature; he

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<sup>138</sup> Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (New York: Penguin, 2009); Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*.

<sup>139</sup> Ross, *Social Control*, 2.

<sup>140</sup> Talcott Parsons, *The Social System* (Louisiana: Quid Pro, 2012), 25.

<sup>141</sup> This notion extends back to the work of John Locke who wrote in 1690 that individuals have the right to “Life, Liberty and Estate;” John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 323. Thomas Green was also a strong advocate of the right to live; Thomas Hill Green, *Lectures on the Principles of Political Obligation and Other Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 116-117.

<sup>142</sup> Humboldt’s work was extremely influential for John Stuart Mill who wrote the quintessential classical liberal text *On Liberty* in 1859. Mill’s arguments heavily echo those of Humboldt’s with statements such as the following: “Human nature is not a machine to be built after a model, and set to do exactly the work prescribed for it, but a tree, which requires to grow and develop itself on all sides;” John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (Mineola: Dover, 2012), 49.

<sup>143</sup> Humboldt, *The Limits of State Action*.

does not preform it with truly human energies, but merely mechanical exactness.”<sup>144</sup> From this conception of human nature follows the notion that individuals should have the freedom to reach their creative potential “without the arbitrary limiting effects of coercive institutions,” as linguist Noam Chomsky observed.<sup>145</sup>

The classical liberal view of human beings undermines both the Hobbesian and neoliberal conceptions of human nature. Unlike classical liberals, neoliberals maintain that people are naturally selfish. No conception of human nature can be proven. However, this conception is only vaguely plausible if one takes a decidedly ahistorical view. After one reviews the historical record extending back to prehistoric times, this does not lead one to draw such a conclusion. Contrary to the neoliberal position, Humboldt argued that humans are “naturally more disposed to beneficent than selfish actions.”<sup>146</sup> Even though Adam Smith is widely known for being a champion of selfishness, his views are much more nuanced. Supporters and critics alike often quote his famous ‘invisible hand’ passage from *The Wealth of Nations* which reads: “By pursuing his own interest he frequently promotes that of the society more effectually than when really intends to promote it.” Smith had reasons to believe that self-interest is not “always the worse for the society that was no part of it.”<sup>147</sup> However, there are also occasions when this is certainly not the case as Smith observed further into his most famous work: “To promote the little interest of one little order of men in one country, it hurts the interest of all other orders of men in that country, and of all men in all other countries.”<sup>148</sup> In his first book *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith argued that human beings are “naturally sympathetic.”<sup>149</sup> He asserted that even the “greatest ruffian, the most hardened violator of the laws of society, is not altogether without” sympathy.<sup>150</sup>

A common criticism of the classical liberal position is that it often conflicts with how many humans act in the modern world. It is easy to see why so many people observe violent conflicts and conclude that Hobbes was correct. Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that intellectuals have often adopted a pessimistic view of human nature, as Ross observed in this chapter’s opening epigraph.<sup>151</sup> This criticism was addressed by Rousseau

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>145</sup> Noam Chomsky and Michel Foucault, *The Chomsky-Foucault Debate: On Human Nature* (New York: The New Press, 2006), 37.

<sup>146</sup> Humboldt, *The Limits of State Action*, 80.

<sup>147</sup> Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations: Books IV-V* (London: Penguin, 1999), 32.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 195.

<sup>149</sup> Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 28.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>151</sup> Ross, *Social Control*, 57.



who concluded that the common mistake of philosophers “is to confuse natural man with men they have before their eyes.”<sup>152</sup> This is an early example of the corruption by authority argument. This position was perhaps most famously expressed by Lord Acton who wrote in 1887: “Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men, even when they exercise influence and not authority, still more when you superadd the tendency or the certainty of corruption by authority.”<sup>153</sup> There are many iterations of this argument found throughout classical liberal and libertarian texts. Social psychologist Phillip Zimbardo eloquently describes this notion as the spoiling of ‘good apples’ in ‘bad barrels.’ Zimbardo employs this analogy in order to argue that contrary to the popular notion of a ‘few bad apples’ spoiling the barrel, it is actually the ‘bad barrel’ which produces ‘rotten apples.’<sup>154</sup>

### **Obedience to Authority**

Classical liberal ideas on human nature were given more of an empirical basis during the 1960s and 70s. Several social psychological experiments that grew out of genocide studies, have undermined popular post-war explanations on the question of why the Holocaust occurred. Many of these explanations were based on assumptions regarding the supposed authoritarian nature of certain individuals, especially Germans. For instance, in *The Authoritarian Personality*, Adorno et al. believed they could identify authoritarian psychological traits amongst particular individuals who they claimed would be more likely to support fascism.<sup>155</sup> A whole line of thinkers from the genocide studies field challenged these studies. In 1961, Hannah Arendt made the controversial assessment that Nazi lieutenant colonel Adolf Eichmann was merely an ‘ordinary man’ - typical of what she

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<sup>152</sup> Jean Jacques Rousseau, ‘The State of War,’ in Donald Cress (Ed.) *The Basic Political Writings (Second Edition)* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2011), 257.

<sup>153</sup> Lord John Acton, ‘Letter to Mandell Creighton, Cannes, April 5, 1887,’ in *Essays on Freedom and Power* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1949), 364.

<sup>154</sup> Phillip Zimbardo, *The Lucifer Effect* (New York: Random House, 2007), 323; Philip Zimbardo, ‘The barrel that spoils the apple: How good people turn evil,’ *RSA Journal*, Vol. 154, No. 5529, 2007.

<sup>155</sup> Theodore Adorno et al., *The Authoritarian Personality* (London: Verso, 2019). Elms and Milgram observed that the “submission to authority and similar characteristics” in *The Authoritarian Personality* “were usually measured in the same way as the personality characteristics with which they were correlated. As a result, certain forms of response set common to the measures both of authoritarian tendencies and of personality characteristics may have elevated whatever relationships existed, and may have ‘created’ relationships which did not exist;” Alan Elms and Stanley Milgram, ‘Personality characteristics associated with obedience and defiance toward authoritative command,’ *Journal of Experimental Research in Personality*, 1 (4), 1966, 286.

called the ‘banality of evil.’<sup>156</sup> Two years later, Milgram developed his classic obedience to authority experiments which have provided important insights into the reasons for the Holocaust.<sup>157</sup>

The obedience to authority experiments involved administering electric shocks for incorrect answers in what was seemingly a memory test. The ‘subject’ was actually a confederate who was not receiving any shocks at all. Furthermore, the experimenters were not testing memory but rather obedience to authority by the ‘teachers’ who were actually the true subjects. The surprising result of Milgram’s experiment was that almost 65% of subjects administered ‘electric shocks’ until they reached their maximum strength to the ‘subject’ when prompted by the experimenter.<sup>158</sup> One of the major criticisms of the experiments was the claim that the subjects knew the shocks were fake. However, this does not explain why “many obedient subjects heaved sighs of relief, mopped their brows, rubbed their fingers over their eyes or nervously fumbled cigarettes” or why some “shook their heads, apparently in regret.”<sup>159</sup> Moreover, when subjects felt they were no longer under supervision, the “great majority of subjects delivered the very lowest shocks to the victim when the choice was left up to them.”<sup>160</sup> When this experiment was controversially replicated with a puppy in the early 1970s, the experimenters gathered similar results to the experiments with an inauthentic victim.<sup>161</sup> The subjects certainly knew that the puppy was not a confederate who was faking its cries for the benefit of the experiment.

The primary conclusion Milgram drew from the obedience to authority experiments was that every human being functioning inside a malevolent authority system is capable of committing atrocities. Milgram’s conclusion is based on his observation that the “disappearance of a sense of responsibility is the most far-reaching consequence of submission to authority.”<sup>162</sup> To those who claimed that this analysis does not apply to democratic states, Milgram replied “the problem is not ‘authoritarianism’ as a mode of

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<sup>156</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin, 2006).

<sup>157</sup> Stanley Milgram, ‘Behavioral Study of Obedience,’ *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* (Vol 67, No. 4, 1963).

<sup>158</sup> Milgram, *Obedience to Authority*. In their personality assessments conducted after the experiments, Elms and Milgram authors did find personality differences with regards to authoritarianism that could help account for the behaviour of both obedient and disobedient subjects in the Milgram experiments; Elms and Milgram, ‘Personality characteristics associated with obedience and defiance toward authoritative command.’ Thus, although Milgram stressed the importance of situational factors in the results of his experiments, he did not discount personality differences altogether.

<sup>159</sup> Milgram, *Obedience to Authority*, 33.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>161</sup> Charles Sheridan and Richard King, ‘Obedience to Authority with an Authentic Victim,’ *Proceedings of the 80<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association*, 1972.

<sup>162</sup> Milgram, *Obedience to Authority*, 8.

political organization or a set of psychological attitudes but authority itself.”<sup>163</sup> In spite of this, Milgram argued against the anarchist position of dismantling all political authority. He reasoned, although the “existence of authority sometimes leads to the commission of ruthless and immoral acts, the absence of authority renders one a victim to such acts on the part of others who are better organized.”<sup>164</sup> Milgram work provides a convincing explanation for the Holocaust as well as his many astute observations regarding the effects of authority systems on human behaviour. In particular, his experiments undermine the notion that human beings are naturally aggressive and wish to exercise dominance over other individuals.

Despite his important contributions, there have been many who were appalled at Milgram’s findings. Some critics still prefer to believe the much more comforting proposition that only people capable of committing heinous acts of violence were their political enemies especially the Nazis. For instance, Goldhagen contends that many Germans were not simply ‘following orders’ but chose to commit atrocities on their own volition on account of the widespread hatred of Jews in Germany.<sup>165</sup> He maintains that it was the ‘fanatical antisemitism’ characteristic of the German character which led them to commit genocide.<sup>166</sup> However, what Goldhagen and others have failed to understand is that human beings living under a system of authority not only have an external but an internal basis for obedience to authority. In Milgram’s words, “While people will comply with a source of social control under coercion (as when a gun is aimed at them), the nature of obedience under such circumstances is limited to direct surveillance.”<sup>167</sup> Goldhagen dismisses Milgram’s findings and describe his position as providing a ‘moral alibi’ for the perpetrators of the holocaust.<sup>168</sup> Milgram, members of whose family were victims of the Holocaust, was doing nothing of the sort. It is important not to make the mistake of confusing an explanation for a justification. It is clear that Milgram was not interested in condemning his political enemies but rather was honestly attempting to account for the most extreme levels of violence in human history committed in such a short period of time.

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 179.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 212.

<sup>165</sup> Daniel Goldhagen, *Hitler’s Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997).

<sup>166</sup> Research has indicated that the majority Germans who voted for the Nazis did not do so simply because they were anti-Semitic but rather were primarily concerned about their country’s economy and the loss of national pride after the Treaty of Versailles; Douglas Porpora, *How Holocausts Happen: The United States in Central America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 54-55.

<sup>167</sup> Milgram, *Obedience to Authority*, 141.

<sup>168</sup> Goldhagen, *Hitler’s Willing Executioners*, 383.

The treatment of atrocities in the writing of history can be a delicate balancing act. It is easy to see how at one extreme it can result in a whitewashing where atrocities are justified or erased. At the other extreme, it can devolve into outright propaganda which typically involves highlighting or exaggerating the atrocities of one's enemies. For example, there was a propaganda campaign known as the Spanish 'Black Legend' that was conducted in an attempt to portray Spain as unusually brutal in comparison to supposedly more civilised European powers such as Britain.<sup>169</sup> This is contrasted with Spain's 'White Legend' which in this context refers to the positive portrayal of the country's imperial record. Just as Native Americans have been at times wildly misrepresented in literature from the Anglo-Saxon world, so too have the Spanish. Along with unfair historical representations of both the Spanish and Indigenous Americans, the romantic notion of a 'noble savage' should also be rejected. Instead, it is more helpful to discuss authority systems and their effects on human beings.

### **Impaired Empathy**

One of the most important effects of conditioning people to obey authority is the effect that this has on an individual's ability to demonstrate empathy. Essentially, empathy serves as an inhibitor to prevent humans committing acts that create suffering amongst other human beings. When explaining its function, Milgram noted that the "presence of conscience in men ... can be seen as a special case of the more general principle that any self-regulating automaton must have an inhibitor to check its actions against its own kind, for without such inhibition, several automata cannot occupy a common territory."<sup>170</sup> Nonetheless, it is clear that the mere existence of consciences does not always prevent the infliction of violence or pain against other individuals. The problem is that humans function within authority systems that put them in "situations and under circumstances, that minimize or even wholly exclude natural sympathy," as Ross observed<sup>171</sup> The minimisation of sympathy is a clearly observable phenomenon from a range of psychological research and the wider world. Although it has only been studied scientifically in the last half century, the psychological effects of reduced empathy have been observed for centuries. Adam Smith, for

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<sup>169</sup> See, for example, Charles Gibson, *The Black Legend: Anti-Spanish Attitudes in the Old World and the New* (New York: Knopf, 1971).

<sup>170</sup> Milgram, *Obedience to Authority*, 128.

<sup>171</sup> Ross, *Social Control*, 26.

instance, described this phenomenon in the eighteenth century as the “hardness of heart” which “renders a man insensible to the feelings and distresses of other people.”<sup>172</sup>

Insights from social psychology indicate that authority systems inhibit an individual’s ability to demonstrate empathy. The phenomenon manifests itself in two primary ways. Firstly, individuals in positions of authority are prevented from displaying empathy due to their institutional role. Milgram explains that when an individual merges into an authority system, “a new creature replaces autonomous man, unhindered by the limitations of individual morality, freed of humane inhibition” but now acutely conscious of sanctions within the authority structure.<sup>173</sup> Most significantly, when functioning under the “agentic state, a person’s moral judgements are largely suspended.”<sup>174</sup> Psychologist Albert Bandura described this notion as ‘moral disengagement.’<sup>175</sup> This minimisation of sympathy was demonstrated by the subjects in the obedience to authority experiments as well as later experiments which it influenced, the most notorious of which was Zimbardo’s Stanford Prison Experiment (SPE).

Although not technically an experiment, the SPE involved Zimbardo turning the bottom floor of the Stanford psychology department into a makeshift prison. He dismantled the ‘prison’ after six days after the ‘guards’ demonstrated cruel behaviour to the students who were designated as ‘prisoners.’ Zimbardo drew conclusions from the SPE that were consistent with Milgram’s obedience to authority experiments. The major difference was that in this case, the subjects who performed the role of prison guards had acted inhumanely as a result of their position of authority that had been vested in them as opposed to being directly instructed by an authority figure. Zimbardo argued that people’s actions in situations such as the SPE need to put in the context of the systems in which they operate. He maintains that systems are most significant because they “provide the institutional support, authority, and resources that allow Situations to operate as they do.”<sup>176</sup> In this view, police and military officers are often unfairly maligned as being aggressive individuals who abuse their authority. However, if one were to truly investigate this topic, then the effects of operating under the agentic state should be taken into consideration.

Along with the corruption of people in positions of authority, the minimisation of

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<sup>172</sup> Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 286.

<sup>173</sup> Milgram, *Obedience to Authority*, 188.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>175</sup> Albert Bandura, ‘Moral Disengagement in the Perpetration of Inhumanities,’ *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, Vol. 3, No. 3, 1999.

<sup>176</sup> Zimbardo, *The Lucifer Effect*, 226.

sympathy can also be observed in those who do not directly function inside authority systems. Nevertheless, they are indirectly affected by overarching political institutions or by virtue of living under systems of authority in a subordinate role. This phenomenon typically occurs after experiencing trauma from physical, sexual or emotional abuse. It is entirely possible that an entire body of people such as a Native American tribe could feel a type of collective trauma on account of Spain's colonisation efforts. Although we do not have firsthand accounts of the Conquest from Indigenous Costa Ricans, there are more recent documents which provide an insight into the Amerindian perspective. For instance, in the National Archive of Costa Rica there is an 1867 poem found amongst documents in the San Ramón police station that was written by an author whose name is listed simply as 'a Guatuso.' The poem contains the following line in the first stanza: "What shame and what pain the man in liberty suffers, when he lives in society; without respect."<sup>177</sup> Even in the late twentieth century, one member of the country's Indigenous community named Aurelio Bejarano described it as "very painful" that their hero Pablo Presbere "died at the hand of the Spaniards."<sup>178</sup> Feelings of revenge may account for the transition from the 'timid Indians' to the brave warriors that effectively halted Spanish colonisation in Talamanca in the eighteenth century. The notion of impaired empathy may help to shed light on this transition.

In the most extreme cases, human beings who fail to demonstrate sufficient empathy are described by psychologists as having psychopathy. To be exact, the "form of empathy most notoriously impaired in psychopathy is empathic concern, sometimes called sympathy."<sup>179</sup> Human beings are supposed to feel guilty when they inflict pain on other humans. Thus, the display of psychopathic tendencies is an indication that an individual is no longer functioning as a well-adjusted human being. "During normal development," Robert Blair noted, "individuals will witness other individuals displaying distress cues resulting in the activation" of what he calls a 'violence inhibition mechanism.' According to Blair, this is an important mechanism in the development of 'moral emotions' including empathy and remorse.<sup>180</sup> This argument confirms Milgram's experiment finding that

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<sup>177</sup> Un Guatuso, 'Elogio,' *Policia - No. 5458*, ANCR, 1867, 11.

<sup>178</sup> Aurelio Bejarano cited in Asamblea Legislativa de la República de Costa Rica, *Conmemoración del fallecimiento de Pablo Presbere: Defensor de la libertad de los pueblos indigenas*, Serie Actos y Debates Legislativos – No. 14, 1997, 9-10.

<sup>179</sup> Abigail Marsh, 'What Can We Learn About Emotion by Studying Psychopathy?' *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, Vol. 7, Article 181, 2013, 9.

<sup>180</sup> Robert James Blair, 'A Cognitive Developmental Approach to Morality: Investigating the Psychopath,' *Cognition* Vol. 57, 1995, 3-4.

disobedience to the experimenter could be “explained by the enrichment of empathetic cues.”<sup>181</sup> In this view, psychopathy is seen as pathological not as a fundamental characteristic of natural human behaviour. Some psychologists have argued there is a genetic component to psychopathic personality traits.<sup>182</sup> Another explanation for psychopathy highlights an individual’s traumatic experiences which on many occasions is the result of parental mistreatment during childhood.<sup>183</sup>

It is difficult to determine exactly why psychological trauma impairs empathy, but it appears to be the result of an individual’s development of defence mechanisms. In order to deal with trauma, individuals develop defence mechanisms which sometimes can become pathological as with the case of psychopaths but usually play an important function in helping adults deal with their emotions. This is why Charles Tart has characterised defence mechanisms as ‘obstacles to compassion.’<sup>184</sup> From an evolutionary psychological perspective, it is possible that the development of empathy may be another feature in the adaptation process of natural selection.<sup>185</sup> An abundance of empathy could have inhibited the capacity for primitive humans to survive by limiting their ability to fight enemies effectively. It is possible that the trauma felt by Indigenous Costa Ricans produced a profound alteration in their psychological state of mind which meant they were better adapted to fight the *conquistadores*.

## **Authority Systems and Violence**

Social psychological research has demonstrated that human beings are more likely to commit atrocities against individuals and groups that have been dehumanised. For instance, Bandura conducted a Milgram-style experiment wherein individuals were split into three groups (humanised, dehumanised and neutral). He found that the ‘humanised’

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<sup>181</sup> Milgram, *Obedience to Authority*, 38.

<sup>182</sup> Kevin Beaver, Meghan Rowland, Joseph Schwartz and Joseph Nedelec, ‘The genetic origins of psychopathic personality traits in adult males and females: Results from an adoption-based study,’ *Journal of Criminal Justice*, Vol. 39, 2011.

<sup>183</sup> Blair, ‘A Cognitive Developmental Approach to Morality,’ 2. Also see, Jane Wooton et al., ‘Ineffective Parenting and Childhood Conduct Problems: The Moderating Role of Callous-Unemotional Traits,’ *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, Vol. 65, No. 2, 1997. Many serial killers are known to have experienced intense psychological trauma as children which could account for their psychopathic tendencies; Heather Mitchell and Michael Aamodt, ‘The Incidence of Child Abuse in Serial Killers,’ *Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology*, Vol. 20, No. 1, 2005.

<sup>184</sup> Charles Tart, ‘Defence Mechanisms: Obstacles to Compassion,’ *The Open Mind*, Volume 3, No. 2, 1985.

<sup>185</sup> Gary Leak and Steven Christopher, ‘Empathy from an Evolutionary Perspective,’ *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, Vol. 12, No. 1, 1982.

group (which received positive character assessments before the experiment) was 'punished' by the confederates at the lowest rate of all. The 'neutral' group (which received no character assessments) was punished somewhat more than the humanised group. Finally, the 'dehumanised group' (which received negative character assessments) received the most severe punishments out of all the groups.<sup>186</sup> Individuals and governments have tended to be more brutal towards people they regarded as racially inferior. This was demonstrated during the World War II with the treatment of Slavic peoples by the invading Nazi forces on the eastern front. Along with the Jews, Slavs were the primary victims of the Nazis who believed the former were 'subhuman.'<sup>187</sup> It is common for the perpetrators of violence to justify their actions after the fact. This is especially true when atrocities against official enemies are justified through ideological indoctrination. As Milgram averred, "Ideological justification is vital in obtaining *willing* obedience, for it permits the person to see his behaviour as a desirable end."<sup>188</sup> Given that systems of authority are only effective if the subjects obey the directives of authority figures, then mechanisms are put in place by the authorities in order to compel obedience including force and indoctrination.

The institution that involves the most intense level of indoctrination is the military. It is not therefore surprising that militaristic attitudes and values are largely internalised by those who function within that institution. Morris Janowitz, an expert in military sociology, observed that "indoctrination is now designed to eliminate the civilian contempt for the 'military mind'" which critics have charged as being authoritarian. Essentially the purpose of this indoctrination is to "supply the professional soldier with an opinion of all political, social, and economic subjects which his new role obliges him to hold." Janowitz was impressed with the "extent to which self-indoctrination succeeded in producing officers capable of functioning" in the desired manner in the "absence of institutional indoctrination."<sup>189</sup> This analysis is consistent with Milgram's observation that the "entire aim of military training is to reduce the foot soldier to this state, to eliminate any traces of ego, and to assure, through extended exposure, an internalized acceptance of

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<sup>186</sup> Bandura, 'Moral Disengagement in the Perpetration of Inhumanities,' 200-201.

<sup>187</sup> John Connelly, 'Nazis and Slavs: From Racial Theory to Racist Practice,' *Central European History*, Vol. 32, No. 1, 1999, 2.

<sup>188</sup> Milgram, *Obedience to Authority*, 142, emphasis in original.

<sup>189</sup> Morris Janowitz, *Military Institutions and Coercion in the Developing Nations* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 199-200.



military authority.”<sup>190</sup> These astute observations weaken the argument that human beings are naturally inclined to commit aggression.<sup>191</sup>

History has demonstrated that the most centralised and powerful political units have tended to be the most violent. It is apparent that the more egalitarian tribes in Costa Rica were less violent than the more centralised political systems such as those created by the Aztecs and the Incans. Along with a lack of political authority, there was also more social harmony and sharing of resources amongst people living in tribes. These factors could explain why “individuals living in territories marked by less institutional complexity (e.g., hunter-gatherer bands) enjoyed on average, healthier and longer lives during precolonial periods.”<sup>192</sup> A greater level of social harmony appears to have been the result of a lack of conflict over resources, an argument that is supported by realistic conflict theory. The 1954 Robbers Cave experiment lends credence to this theory as it demonstrated that competition over resources led to conflict amongst the adolescent boys who were randomly assigned to one of two groups (the ‘Eagles’ and the ‘Rattlers’). The designers of the experiment found that the Eagles and Rattlers initially cooperated when they had sufficient supplies but the relationship between the groups turned hostile when the experimenters manipulated conditions so that resources were made scarce.<sup>193</sup>

The case of Costa Rica also lends credence to Carneiro’s argument that environmental pressures stemming from insufficient agricultural production in circumscribed lands led to warfare, political centralisation and eventually to the rise of the state.<sup>194</sup> This argument can help explain why the more hierarchical political systems in the mountain-enclosed Central Valley were easily defeated in comparison to the mountainous but comparatively open terrain in Talamanca. Applicable in the latter’s case is Macleod’s observation that Costa Rica’s Amerindian population was generally “surrounded by fairly empty regions of rather similar environmental structure to which they could escape, if threatened, without great threats of their patterns of living.”<sup>195</sup> In his view, what was also significant was that “these less advanced tribes had not yet evolved to the level of societal complexity” of the Amerindians in Mesoamerica.<sup>196</sup> The case of Talamanca bears out the

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<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 181.

<sup>191</sup> See, for instance, Konrad Lorenz, *On Aggression* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1966).

<sup>192</sup> Mahoney, *Colonialism and Postcolonial Development*, 30.

<sup>193</sup> Muzafer Sherif et al., *The Robbers Cave Experiment: Intergroup Conflict and Cooperation* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1988).

<sup>194</sup> Robert Carneiro, ‘A Theory of the Origin of the State,’ *Science*, Vol. 169, No. 3947, 1970.

<sup>195</sup> Macleod, *Spanish Central America*, 27.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

validity of this argument, especially when compared to the Central Valley which is the most densely populated region of the country to this day.

Although social harmony strengthened the sustainability of tribal systems, one major downside is that such a society may find it difficult to defend itself from external attack. Milgram observed that societies in “which some of the members were warriors, while others took care of children and still others were hunters, had an enormous advantage over one in which no division of labour occurred.”<sup>197</sup> Divisions of labour tend to become more pronounced in societies that are more centralised. The technological advancements which tend to occur in more centralised political systems can also give such societies an advantage in warfare. In spite of these advantages, there are also downsides with the development of technology that were not recognised at the time of their creation. This is especially true with regards to military technology such as aerial bombers. Milgram understood that although “technology has augmented man’s will by allowing him the means for the remote destruction of others, evolution has not had a chance to build inhibitors against these remote forms of aggression to parallel those powerful inhibitors that are so plentiful and abundant in face-to-face confrontations.”<sup>198</sup> Thus, the greater the separation with regards to the proximity of the victim, the less likelihood an individual will produce inhibitors to aggression.

### **The ‘Violence’ of Poverty**

One of the most important conclusions Milgram drew from his experiments was that the closer the subjects were to their victim, the more resistance they displayed with regards to violence.<sup>199</sup> This is because proximity to the victim tends to increase an individual’s feelings of sympathy. This position also holds true with regards to the proximity of victims suffering from poverty which has sometimes been characterised as a form of violence.<sup>200</sup> Indigenous peoples living in tribes did not tend to experience this issue because their form of political organisation meant they lived in close-knit communities that shared food. It is extremely difficult to imagine that peoples could sit by and watch other

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<sup>197</sup> Milgram, *Obedience to Authority*, 124.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapter 4.

<sup>200</sup> For example, a lay minister from El Salvador once stated, “To watch your children die of sickness and hunger while you can do nothing is a violence to the spirit;” Cited in Noam Chomsky, *Turning the Tide: U.S. Intervention in Central America and the Struggle for Peace* (Boston: South End Press, 2015), 10.

members of their tribe starve and die in front of them from malnutrition any more than one can imagine seeing members of the same family today engaging in similar behaviour. As Noam Chomsky observed: “Simply put, most people are not gangsters. Few people, for example, would steal food from a starving child... Someone who did so would be properly regarded as pathological, and in fact, very few are pathological in this sense.”<sup>201</sup> Nevertheless, starvation has occurred on a major scale in Central America since the beginning of the Conquest which is a systemic issue that is not the fault of the general populations of the region.

In the early sixteenth century, the *encomienda* system of agricultural tribute was brought to the Americas. This system granted landlords land and indigenous serfs who were forced to pay tribute to their *encomenderos* (feudal lords). After the New Laws of 1542, gradually replaced the *encomiendas* with the *repartimiento* system which was created a similar feudal arrangement with the Indigenous people of Latin America. Indigenous food systems began to be replaced through the introduction of agro-export production of cacao and cattle ranching, a process which has led to food shortages and malnutrition. In the latter half of the 1500s, cattle entering previously Amerindian-run plantation areas resulted in increases malnutrition and starvations of Central America’s Indigenous population.<sup>202</sup> The *Jueces de Milpas* however, developed more convenient explanations for insufficient food productions. A *Juez de Milpa* was an official position created by the Spanish in the mid-sixteenth century in order facilitate the Amerindians’ production of agricultural produce. It was easier for them to “tell the Crown that a new crisis had arisen, that once again the ‘naturally lazy’ Indians were not producing enough food to feed the towns, or even themselves.”<sup>203</sup> This institution was later abolished when it became evident that reductions in food production were the result of overwork as opposed to the laziness of the Indigenous workers.<sup>204</sup>

Central America’s Indigenous peoples were often maligned as incompetent with regards to the production of food by the very individuals who had undermined their traditional subsistence systems. One example comes from Bernado de Vargas Machuca who participated in the colonisation of Panama. In the early seventeenth century, the Spaniard rebuked Amerindians for putting “themselves in danger of losing their lives to

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<sup>201</sup> Noam Chomsky, *Language and Politics* (Oakland: AK Press, 2004), 345.

<sup>202</sup> Macleod, *Spanish Central America*, 127.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid., 318.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid., 210.

hunger because they do not work (except when forced).”<sup>205</sup> The charge that Indigenous Americans were incapable of properly feeding themselves is even more egregious when laid by individuals who were directly involved in their immiseration. As John Milton wrote in 1642, “But now, with a most inhuman cruelty, they who have put out the people’s eyes reproach them of their blindness.”<sup>206</sup> In reality, a combination of fortuitous environmental conditions has made Central America home to some of the most fertile agricultural land in the world. Central America’s fertile soils meant that pre-Hispanic Indigenous populations living in the region were quite capable of meeting their basic nutritional needs.<sup>207</sup> The idea that pre-Hispanic Indigenous peoples were not able to adequately feed themselves is a serious misrepresentation of the issue based on the available evidence. It is apparent that Native Americans died primarily due to diseases such as smallpox which the European colonialists had accidentally brought to the ‘New World.’<sup>208</sup> However, this observation needs to be understood within the appropriate historical context. As historian Richard White observed, Amerindians actually “died in such prodigious numbers from disease in part because colonizers had wrecked their subsistence systems.”<sup>209</sup>

By the seventeenth century, cacao reproduction had been replaced by indigo as the most common export crop in Central America. In 1636, one preacher in Central America attested: “I have seen large Indian villages ... practically destroyed after indigo mills have been erected near to them... As most of these wretches have been forced to abandon their homes and plots of maize, many of their wives and children die also.”<sup>210</sup> The resource extraction aspect of European colonisation in the Americas was criticised by Adam Smith in 1776 who wrote about what he called the “savage injustice of the Europeans,” namely the “injustice of coveting the possessions of a country, whose harmless natives, far from having ever injured the people of Europe, had received the first adventurers with every mark of kindness and hospitality.”<sup>211</sup> Various forms of poverty including the dearth of food would continue to be a problem throughout the colonial era and into the nineteenth and

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<sup>205</sup> Bernardo de Vargas Machuca, *Defending the Conquest: Bernardo de Vargas Machuca’s Defense and Discourse of the Western Conquests* (edited by Kris Lane) (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), 69.

<sup>206</sup> John Milton, *The Prose Works of John Milton: Volume III* (London: William Clowes and Sons, 1883), 153-154.

<sup>207</sup> Michael McDonald, *Food Culture in Central America* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood Press, 2005), 1.

<sup>208</sup> Hugh Thomas, *World Without End: The Global Empire of Philip II* (St Ives: Penguin, 2015), 234.

<sup>209</sup> Richard White, *The Roots of Dependency: Subsistence, Environment, and Social Change Among the Choctaws, Pawnees and Navajos* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 315.

<sup>210</sup> Cited in Charles Brockett, *Land, Power and Poverty: Agrarian Transformation and Political Conflict in Central America* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988), 18-19.

<sup>211</sup> Smith, *The Wealth of Nations: Books IV-V*, 32.

twentieth centuries. During the 1970s and 1980, this type of ‘violence’ increased to such high levels in parts of the region coincided that it helped lead to greater authoritarianism, civil war and revolution.

From a social psychological view, the spread of political authority in Lower Central America that has occurred since the sixteenth century has resulted in higher levels of moral disengagement due to changes in the region’s political structures. When human beings operate under authority systems, aggressive and callous behaviour is often produced that is typically interpreted as a fundamental characteristic of human nature. Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau surmised that human beings sacrificed some of their liberties in exchange for security provided by the state – what they called the ‘social contract.’ However, far from any social contract between human beings, power was most likely centralised through force. Carneiro contends that a “close examination of history indicates that only a coercive theory can account for the rise of the state.”<sup>212</sup> Contrary to what Hobbes and other scholars have claimed, it was actually after the development of states that humanity saw a major increase in violence. David Hume questioned the notion of the social contract through his claim that human beings would never give consent to government and therefore cannot legitimately be claimed as the basis for legal authority.<sup>213</sup> This argument was of course made prior to the development of modern representative democracies in the nineteenth century. The legitimacy of a state is now generally determined by the degree to which it is ‘democratic,’ a term that has been interpreted in a wide range of ways in terms of its practical applications.

### **Social Control in Representative Democracies**

A representative democracy is commonly defined as a system of majority rule in which the government derives its authority from the ‘consent of the governed.’ It would be incorrect to argue the huge expansion of representative democracy in the early twentieth century represented a major transference of political power from elites to the general public.

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<sup>212</sup> Carneiro, ‘A Theory of the Origin of the State,’ 734.

<sup>213</sup> Hume wrote: “It is vain to say, that all governments are or should be, at first, founded on popular Consent, as much as the necessity of human affairs will admit. ... I maintain that human affairs will never admit of this consent; seldom of the appearance of it. But that conquest or usurpation, that is, in plain terms, force, by dissolving the ancient governments, is the origin of almost all the new ones, which were ever established in the world. And that in the few cases, where consent may seem to have taken place, it was commonly so irregular, so confined, or so much intermixed either with fraud or violence, that it cannot have any great authority;” David Hume, *Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary* (Revised Edition) (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1987), 473-474.

It did, however, represent a major evolution in the methods of social control, especially in the world's more economically developed countries. Traditionally, governments have used force in order to ensure their citizens obey authority which has been largely effective for governments attempting to control their populations. However, a major problem with force is the resentment and opposition that it fosters. Whilst the basics of formal or direct techniques of social control is self-evident, the more informal or indirect methods such as propaganda are less understood. If no or little force is employed by states, then implication of consent is either argued or implied as if force is only form of social control.<sup>214</sup>

Students of social control have long recognised that more informal methods of control are ultimately more effective than formal methods of control.<sup>215</sup> It is much preferable for governments to acquire the consent of their citizens through good governance or ideological indoctrination, rather than to control them via force. Given the choice, most governments would surely choose the former. This method involves limiting not only what information citizens have access to, but also the establishment of a framework for what ideas and opinions are socially acceptable.<sup>216</sup> In representative democracies, freedom of expression is generally promoted within some restrictions such as the incitement of violence. At the first level of approximation, there is generally an inverse relationship between force and indoctrination.<sup>217</sup> In general, as the level of force decreases, there is a proportionate increase in the level of education or indoctrination. Force is generally employed to lesser extent against more privileged populations which tend to behave in accordance with their country's laws and social expectations given that they reap greater benefits under the prevailing order. On the other hand, disadvantaged individuals are generally less satisfied with their position, and therefore governments often find it necessary to employ greater levels of force against them.

It is clear that the use of propaganda is used in all regime types. In authoritarian or totalitarian regimes, propaganda is much more direct and obvious than it is in representative democracies. Given that authoritarian regimes overwhelmingly rely on force as method of control, propaganda techniques are typically less sophisticated than in

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<sup>214</sup> For example, political scientist Bruce Gilley claimed the "rapid spread and persistence of Western colonialism with very little force relative to the populations and areas concerned is *prima facie* evidence of its acceptance by subject populations compared to the feasible alternatives;" Bruce Gilley, 'The Case for Colonialism,' *Academic Questions*, Vol. 31, No. 2, 2018, 4. However, the lack of significant levels of violent resistance does not necessarily imply the existence of consent from the governed.

<sup>215</sup> Ross, *Social Control*.

<sup>216</sup> For a detailed summary of this position, see, Noam Chomsky, *Necessary Illusions: Thought Control in Democratic Societies* (Boston: South End Press, 1989).

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, 167-168.

democratic states. As Noam Chomsky put it, “Propaganda is to democracy what violence is to totalitarianism.”<sup>218</sup> The Soviet regime, for instance, notoriously employed crude propaganda techniques that were largely ineffective and therefore had to rely on state terrorism. This point is clearly demonstrated via a comparison of social control in Costa Rica in the context of the Central America’s highly authoritarian regimes that existed during the twentieth century. The major difference with regards to Central America’s democratic exception is that social control is much closer to developed countries such as the United States. In the latter’s case, there was a major reduction in the use of governmental force against its citizens when the country transitioned to full representative democracy.

After women were given the right to vote in 1920, state violence, especially with regards to the suppression of labour organising, decreased as propaganda was increasingly employed as a method of shaping public opinion.<sup>219</sup> Prior to this time, US governments were certainly more coercive towards their citizens.<sup>220</sup> In the 1920s, leading propaganda advocates recognised the impracticability of continuing to rule via force. As political scientist Harold Lasswell put it, “Conventions have arisen which favor the ventilation of opinions and the taking of votes.” The majority of “which formerly could be done by violence and intimidation must now be done by argument and persuasion,” observed Lasswell.<sup>221</sup> In his 1927 study of propaganda methods during World War I, Lasswell commented on the emerging trend in terms of social control with the following analogy: “The new antidote to willfulness is propaganda. If the mass will be free of chains of iron, it must accept its chains of silver.”<sup>222</sup> Since the post-World War I era, propaganda experts have realised that indoctrination is ultimately a more effective means of social control than violence.

Along with Lasswell, two other propaganda experts of that period were Walter Lippmann and Edward Bernays whose work contain impressive insights into this particular

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<sup>218</sup> Noam Chomsky, *The Chomsky Reader* (Edited by James Peck) (New York: Pantheon Books, 1987), 136.

<sup>219</sup> Alex Carey, *Taking the Risk Out of Democracy: Propaganda in the US and Australia* (Edited by Andrew Lohrey) (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 1995).

<sup>220</sup> For instance, during a textile strike in February 1912, workers were brutally attacked by police leaving one pregnant woman unconscious and her foetus dead; *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>221</sup> Harold Lasswell, ‘The Theory of Political Propaganda,’ *The American Political Science Review* (Vol. 21, No. 3, 1927), 631.

<sup>222</sup> Harold Lasswell, *Propaganda Technique in World War I* (Cambridge, M.I.T. Press, 1971), 222.

field of inquiry.<sup>223</sup> Lippmann and Bernays worked for the first US government-run propaganda agency known as the Committee for Public Information (CPI) which was created in 1917. The CPI developed propaganda techniques which impressed on its members the fantastic power of propaganda by reversing US public opinion from majority opposition to US involvement in World War I to a position of majority support. These techniques included fabricating or embellishing German atrocities in Belgium and short public announcements given by the ‘Four Minute Men,’ among others.<sup>224</sup> The creation of new technologies of the radio and later the television had also allowed the mass dissemination of political information. In December 1917, the head of the CPI George Creel, wrote a letter to President Wilson in which he stated, “Propaganda, of course, goes hand in hand with policy.”<sup>225</sup> However, since that time, the term propaganda started to develop distinctly negative connotations. As Creel explained in 1920, “We did not call it propaganda, for that word, in German hands, had come to be associated with deceit and corruption.”<sup>226</sup> It should be noted however, the term propaganda is still sometimes used by individuals to refer to their own political information and therefore does necessarily imply an intent to deceive.

After World War I, the CPI started export information distribution techniques to other countries. The most detailed studies of the exportation of a US-style opinion management system were conducted by Australian psychologist Alex Carey. He argued that the US ‘corporate propaganda’ model was quite effective in undermining the union movement in Australia during the 1970s and 1980s much like it had in the United States during the 1930s and 40s.<sup>227</sup> With regards to Costa Rica, there is evidence the US government was tracking public opinion in Costa Rica towards the end of World War I.<sup>228</sup> In 1918, the US War Department stressed the importance of exerting psychological

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<sup>223</sup> Walter Lippman, *Public Opinion* (Blacksburg: Wilder Publications, 2010); Walter Lippmann, *The Phantom Public* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1993); Edward Bernays, ‘Manipulating Public Opinion: The Why and The How,’ *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 33, No. 6, 1928, pp. 958-971; Edward Bernays, *Propaganda* (Brooklyn: Ig Publishing, 2005).

<sup>224</sup> Lasswell, *Propaganda Technique in World War I*, 207, 211.

<sup>225</sup> George Creel, ‘Letter from the Chairman of the Committee on Public Information (Creel) to President Wilson,’ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1917-1972: Public Diplomacy, World War I* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 2014), 15.

<sup>226</sup> George Creel, *How We Advertised America* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1920), 4.

<sup>227</sup> Carey, *Taking the Risk Out of Democracy: Propaganda in the US and Australia*.

<sup>228</sup> Department of War, ‘Report Prepared in the Military Intelligence Branch,’ in Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1917-1972: Public Diplomacy, World War I* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 2014).



‘influence’ in Costa Rica.<sup>229</sup> This topic will be discussed in greater detail during the analysis of the liberal reform era in Chapter 5.

## **Liberalism and Libertarianism**

The development of representative democracy evidently influenced the nature of liberalism which was criticised across the political spectrum in the late nineteenth, early twentieth centuries. Although it is beyond the scope of this thesis to address all the different perspectives on liberalism, it is important to include the liberal and libertarian critiques which are broad political ideologies. Firstly, there was criticism from social liberals who argued that the new variant of liberalism (which later came to be known as neoliberalism), had undermined the right to live. There was a definite change in the character of liberalism after it became the dominant ideology in Great Britain and other parts of the world of the nineteenth century. The sympathy that was shown for human nature in the work of earlier liberals was lacking in this new variant of liberalism.

Although neoliberal ideas have only triumphed in much of the world since the 1980s, its intellectual origins have long roots. The economic historian Karl Polanyi traced the origins of neoliberal ideas to the late eighteenth century through the work of an English priest named Joseph Townsend.<sup>230</sup> In 1786, Townsend wrote a critique of the Poor Laws in which he argued that public provisions promoted indolence amongst the poor.<sup>231</sup> The Poor Laws were public provisions for the indigent that were typically administered through the country’s parishes. By 1834, the ideas of influential liberals such as Thomas Malthus, David Ricardo and Jeremy Bentham had helped persuade the Parliament into introducing the Poor Law Amendment Act which mandated that poor relief was to be predicated upon workhouse labour.<sup>232</sup> In the opposite direction, neoliberals criticised social liberalism (which has come to be commonly known as social democracy), as too close to socialism.

Criticism from libertarians who essentially argued that even minimal state interfered with the liberty of individuals. The term ‘libertarian’ has changed from being

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<sup>229</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>230</sup> Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Times* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001).

<sup>231</sup> Joseph Townsend, *Dissertation on the Poor Laws, by a Well-Wisher to Mankind* (Milton Keynes: Gale Ecco, 2010). In his words, “it is only hunger which can spur and goad [the poor] on to labour; yet our laws have said, they shall never hunger;” Ibid., 5.

<sup>232</sup> According to Polanyi, “The outcome was merely the pauperisation of the masses, who almost lost their human shape in the process. The Poor Law Reform of 1834 did away with this obstruction of the labour market: the ‘right to live’ was abolished;” Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, 86.

associated with left-wing anarchists in nineteenth century Europe to right-wing libertarians who are mostly located in the United States. The major difference between left-wing and right-wing libertarians is on the question of private power which the former criticise and the latter support. Busey captures the left-wing position on private corporations with the following observation:

There have been several deviants from the liberalism of [the 18th century]. One, for example, has consisted in a furious suspicion of all government, which has gone hand in hand with a peculiar blindness to the dangers of concentrated private power. To certain self-styled ‘libertarians’ or ‘conservatives,’ of the present age, the liberation of man from the chains of political tyranny is all that matters; his suffering at the hands of private exploiters is of little or no significance or concern.”<sup>233</sup>

Right-wing libertarians on the contrary, value individual private property rights. The anarcho-capitalist Murray Rothbard cites the ‘non-aggression axiom’ as the central tenet of his form of libertarianism. The axiom states that “no man or group of men may aggress against the person or property of anyone else.”<sup>234</sup> Regardless of their differences, libertarians of all types are opposed to government interference in the affairs of individuals.

An area where there is a large degree of agreement between left-wing and right-wing libertarians is their positions on Marxism. Although left-wing libertarians oppose private property like Marxists, they do not advocate placing any public institution, even briefly, in the hands of the state. The anarchist Rudolph Rocker criticised “Marxism and all other schools of authoritarian Socialism” for equating social liberation with economic equality. As Rocker observed, “Even in prison, in the cloister, or in the barracks, one finds a fairly high degree of economic equality, as all the inmates are provided with the same dwelling, the same food, the same uniform, and the same tasks.”<sup>235</sup> Right-wing libertarians would surely agree with this statement as evidenced by their criticism of the Soviet Union and other socialist countries. Whilst right-wing libertarians tend to stress freedom to engage in activities without external constraints (negative liberty), their left-wing counterparts tend to value the freedom to fulfill one’s potential (positive liberty).

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<sup>233</sup> James Busey, *Notes on Costa Rican Democracy* (Boulder: University of Colorado Press, 1967), 74.

<sup>234</sup> Murray Rothbard, *For A New Liberty: The Libertarian Manifesto* (Auburn: Ludwig von Mises Institute, 1978), 27.

<sup>235</sup> Rudolf Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism: Theory and Practice* (Oakland: AK Press, 2004), 14.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has laid out the parameters of this thesis' theoretical framework. Although the violent acts of soldiers and police officers are sometimes cited as evidence of the aggressive nature of human beings, social psychological research has demonstrated that everyone is capable of such acts under the right circumstances. Milgram argued that an individual's psychological state is dramatically altered after they enter into a system of authority. Once human beings are operating under the agentic state, their ability to demonstrate empathy is impaired which contributes to what the classical liberals characterised as corruption by authority. The expansion of political authority in Central America in the sixteenth century led to a major increase in violence. The governments that developed throughout the region stifled human development through the use of authoritarian methods of control. After World War I, Costa Rica's citizens removed their chains of iron when the country transitioned to a representative democracy.

According to some propaganda experts, there have been attempts by some in positions of authority to introduce chains of silver in the form of indoctrination via propaganda which they argue is ultimately a more effective means of social control than violence. In comparison to the brutal authoritarian methods employed by other Central American regimes, Costa Rica's methods of social control are much closer to those found in countries that have similar traditions of liberalism and representative democracy. Costa Rica has followed the trend of Western countries over the last century in terms of the transition away from force towards a greater reliance on more informal techniques of control. Whilst Costa Rica would rank amongst the freest countries in the world, social control continues to exist as it does in all states. As this thesis maintains, the reasons why Costa Rica took such a different path of political development have long historical roots. Tracing the origins of this path is the subject of the next chapter.

## **Chapter 2 – The ‘Discovery’ and Conquest of Veragua (1502-1565)**

**You say that the province of Veragua, which by another name is called New Cartago, is in this district and borders the province of Nicoya where we always have a mayor, and that, from two years to this part, they came from peace, some neighbouring Indians called Chomes, which have been well looked after in our name, and they have been provided with churches, priests, ornaments, mayors, and other important things to their Christianity as well as police; and that, apart from this, the Spaniards who had entered and walked almost the entire province of Veragua, have given news of having more gold in it than in any other part, some of which has been discovered; and that there are few Indians, and these are very spread out, and that easily and without war they could be brought to peace and we could have that great wealth without great difficulty.**

King Phillip II, ‘Document from the King of Spain addressed to the Royal Audience of the Confines,’ 1560.<sup>236</sup>

After Costa Rica began to develop as a relatively successful liberal state in the latter half of the nineteenth century, it became rather common to read of the country’s fortuitous position in Central America. In an 1873 pamphlet promoting British investment in Costa Rica, historian and diplomat Manuel Peralta wrote that his country “occupies an admirable position in the centre of the American Continent, where Nature seems to have placed it as a link between the two great hemispheres.”<sup>237</sup> Analysis of Costa Rica’s environmental conditions in conjunction with its historical record reveals the region has been in a fortunate geographical position even before the modern world emerged in 1500. This chapter contends that this was the initial factor in producing the country’s exceptional status. Along with its comparatively egalitarian political units and smaller Indigenous population, Costa Rica’s environmental conditions meant that it was conquered later than its neighbours. The chapter will outline the importance of its geographical location, the meeting between

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<sup>236</sup> Rey Felipe II, ‘Cédula del Rey de España dirigida á la Real Audiencia de los Confines,’ 159.

<sup>237</sup> Manuel Peralta, *Costa Rica: Its climate, Constitution and Resources: with a Survey of its Present Financial Position* (London: Straker Bros and Co., 1873), 2.

Christopher's Columbus' men and the Indigenous peoples of Central America as well the initial stages of the Spanish conquest of Costa Rica.

### **Costa Rica's Fortuitous Location**

One of the areas that really benefits from a geographical determinist analysis is the White Legend. It is apparent that Costa Rica's geographical location and climate have played a major role in its development. In the 1990s, data was collected from NASA's satellites which tracked and mapped out the levels of ultraviolet (UV) radiation throughout the world. Colour differentiation on the map corresponds to the continuum of UV levels ranging from the highest which is shown in light purple. After this, there is dark purple, light blue, dark blue, orange, yellow, green and finally grey which represents the lowest UV levels. Predictably, Africa contains the region's most light purple areas, whereas places such as Great Britain and Scandinavia are grey in colour. Within Central America, Panama and Costa Rica are coloured dark blue whereas the area stretching from Nicaragua to Guatemala is filled with mostly either light blue or light purple with some dark blue areas.<sup>238</sup> Although it is possible that UV levels have changed over the last 500 years, this factor may account for Costa Rica's comparatively less pigmented population. The country also has the least number of dry months annually, the highest average annual precipitation rates, and the lowest average temperatures for all of Central America.<sup>239</sup> Variation in skin pigmentation may account for some of the differences between the way in which slavery developed in Costa Rica in comparison to its neighbours.

The Indigenous slave trade developed quite early during the Conquest in Mexico and northern Central America. In his history of the first 200 years of colonial Central America, Macleod noted, "Raiding for slaves on the coast of Yucatan, among the Bay Islands, and on the northern coast of Honduras itself had begun some time before the area was conquered, perhaps as early as 1515."<sup>240</sup> A slave trade developed in Nicaragua during the 1520s which became the most lucrative aspect of Nicaragua's early economy.<sup>241</sup>

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<sup>238</sup> Nina Jablonski and George Chaplin, 'The Evolution of Human Skin Coloration,' *Journal of Human Evolution*, No. 39, 2000, 68.

<sup>239</sup> Carolyn Hall and Héctor Brignoli, *Historical Atlas of Central America* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003), 19.

<sup>240</sup> Macleod, *Spanish Central America*, 50.

<sup>241</sup> David Radell, 'The Indian Slave Trade and Population of Nicaragua during the Sixteenth Century' in William Denevan (Ed.), *The Native Population of the Americas in 1492* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin, 1976), 71.

Bartolome de Las Casas estimated that the number of Amerindians people sold during the period of Spain's slave trade's operations in Nicaraguan was at least half a million.<sup>242</sup> It appears that the Spanish sourced Indigenous slaves from areas with higher UV levels such as Nicaragua before relying on slaves imported from Africa. Although slaves are not known to have been sourced from Costa Rica in any significant numbers, beginning in the 1560s, chattel slaves were brought over to the province from Africa and the West Indies. Along with a comparative lack of Amerindians, the province also had less African slaves than its neighbours in Central America. This point represents yet another unique feature of Costa Rica's political development which would have later implications for the ways that social control would develop during the colonial period. This feature would also form part of the basis of the rural democracy thesis and thus ties the latter to the White Legend.

Pre-Hispanic Costa Rica's comparative egalitarianism lends credence to a smaller number as there appears to be a correlation between population size and level of political centralisation. One major reason given by some archaeologists as to why more centralised systems failed to emerge in Lower Central America was the region's distance from the powerful political centres in Mexico and Peru.<sup>243</sup> On the eve of the Conquest, Costa Rica was approximately halfway between the Aztec and Incan empire. It was directly in the middle of a buffer zone which separated the political systems that were expanding from both northern and southern directions. This meant that the region's inhabitants experienced less South American and Mesoamerican cultural influence. It also meant that the region appears to have fallen outside trade routes which are known to have existed in Panama. Costa Rican tribes did not appear to participate in the so-called 'Mesoamerican world system' which was a trading system that extended from Mexico to Nicaragua. Some anthropologists and archaeologists argue that this constituted a world system because of the trade of luxury and bulk goods between the numerous indigenous groups in the region.<sup>244</sup> Anthropologists Robert Carmack and Silvia Gonzalez contend that even southern Costa Rica was incorporated, albeit weakly, in the trading routes that extended throughout

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<sup>242</sup> Bartolome de Las Casas, *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indians* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 40-41.

<sup>243</sup> Frederick Lange, 'Cultural Geography of Pre-Columbian Lower Central America,' in Frederick Lange and Doris Stone (Eds.), *The Archaeology of Lower Central America* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984), 58. Mary Helms, 'Thoughts on Public Symbols and Distant Domains Relevant to the Chiefdoms of Lower Central America,' in Frederick Lange (Ed.), *Wealth and Hierarchy in the Intermediate Area* (Washington: Trustees for Harvard University, 1992), 326.

<sup>244</sup> Richard Blanton and Gary Feinman, 'The Mesoamerican World System,' *American Anthropologist*, 86/3 (1984).

Mesoamerica.<sup>245</sup> However, the majority of scholars studying this topic convincingly argue Costa Rica largely lay outside the Mesoamerican world system.<sup>246</sup> This debate has important implications for Costa Rican exceptionalism as it suggests the most of Costa Rica was structurally different from the rest of Central America (including Panama) prior to the arrival of the *conquistadores*.

The argument that the majority of Costa Rica was external to the Mesoamerican world system is strengthened by analysis of the Guanacaste province in the northwest of Costa Rica. In his reading of the archaeological evidence, Lange contends that although Guanacaste “had some contact with Mesoamerica,” it was never an “integrated political or economic part of the Mesoamerican sphere of influence.”<sup>247</sup> Guanacaste was part of Nicaragua until 1824 when its inhabitants decided to join Costa Rica, a fact that indicates the structural advantages that the latter had already demonstrated by this stage. Archaeologist Jane Day has suggested that the Gulf of Nicoya in eastern Guanacaste contained a waystation that connected up with Nicaragua which potentially meant that the “Spanish chose, as they often did, to use already established and well-known routes for their own transportation purposes.”<sup>248</sup> This allowed the Spanish to conquer Guanacaste more easily than Costa Rica’s pre-1824 territory. As Lange noted, the Amerindians “were betrayed by the very trade networks that for the previous centuries and millennia had circulated jade, obsidian, ceramics, and gold ornaments, as well as perishable goods such as feathers, skins, and food across and throughout southern Mesoamerica and Central America.”<sup>249</sup> In other words, unbeknownst to the Indigenous peoples in the region, their trading practices and village centres made them an easier target of Spanish colonisation after Europeans first landed in the region.

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<sup>245</sup> Robert Carmack and Silvia Gonzalez, ‘A World-Systems Perspective on the Archaeology and Ethnohistory of the Mesamerican/Lower Central American Border,’ *Ancient Mesoamerica*, 17, 2006.

<sup>246</sup> Michael Smith and Frances Berdan, ‘Spatial Structure of the Mesoamerican World System,’ in Michael Smith and Frances Berdan (Ed.) *The Postclassic Mesoamerican World* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2003).

<sup>247</sup> Frederick Lange, *Before Guanacaste: An Archaeologist Looks at the First 10, 000 Years* (San José: n.p., 2006), 79.

<sup>248</sup> Jane Day, ‘Golden Images in Greater Nicoya,’ in Frederick Lange (Ed.). *Costa Rican Art and Archaeology: Essays in Honor of Frederick R. Mayer*. Boulder: The University of Colorado, 1988), 206.

<sup>249</sup> Lange, *Before Guanacaste*, 56-57.

## Columbus' Travels in Central America

The first meeting between Europeans and Amerindians in Central America occurred on the Guanaja islands off the north coast of Honduras in July 1502. The most detailed first-hand account of Christopher Columbus' fourth voyage is provided by his son Ferdinand Columbus in a biography of his father which was published in 1539.<sup>250</sup> Upon their arrival, Admiral Columbus' sent his brother Bartholomew (who also held the title *Adelantado*), to investigate. Bartholomew happened to arrive when from a westerly direction a large canoe that was two and half metres wide and as "long as a galley" with an awning made of palm leaves. The boat was "freighted with merchandise from the westerns region around new Spain" which included embroidered shirts, hatchets and cacao etc.<sup>251</sup> This example indicates that there was significant level of trade of goods between Indigenous societies in northern Central America with the Mayans and perhaps the Aztecs as well. According to Ferdinand Columbus, the canoe and its contents impressed upon his father the "great wealth, civilization, and industry of the peoples of the western part of New Spain."<sup>252</sup> After a short stay, Columbus and his men headed west until they reached Caxinas Point on the Central American mainland before they turned south to what became Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama.

In August 1502, they arrived at what is today the border of Honduras and Nicaragua, which Columbus dubbed *Cabo Gracias a Dios* (Cape Thanks to God). By all accounts, the explorers did not enjoy their experience in this location due to the harsh sea conditions on their journey from Caxinas Point. Admiral Columbus does not spend much time discussing his time there, except that his son Ferdinand was distressed on that part of the journey.<sup>253</sup> The characterisations of the inhabitants living there are also distinctly negative. In 1504, the historian Diego de Porras who travelled with Columbus on his fourth voyage called the Amerindians who lived there "very savage people."<sup>254</sup> Similarly, Ferdinand Columbus

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<sup>250</sup> Ferdinand Columbus, *The Life of the Admiral Christopher Columbus* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1959).

<sup>251</sup> Ibid., 231-232.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid., 233.

<sup>253</sup> Christopher Columbus, 'Letter Written by Christopher Columbus, Viceroy and Admiral of the Indies, to the Most Christian and Mighty King and Queen of Spain, our Sovereigns, Notifying them of the Events of his Voyage and the Cities, Provinces, Rivers and Other Marvels, also the Situation of the many Goldfields and Other Objects of Great Riches and Value,' in Joel Cohen (Ed.), *The Four Voyages of Christopher Columbus* (London: Penguin Books, 1969), 286.

<sup>254</sup> Diego de Porras, 'Relacion Hecha por Diego de Porras, del Viaje e de la Tierra Agora Nuevamente Descubierta por el Almirante D. Cristobal Colon,' *Coleccion de Documentos para la Historia de Costa Rica Relativos al Cuarto y Ultimo Viaje de Cristobal Colon* (San José: Atenea, 1952), 44.



described the natives as “almost black in color, ugly in aspect, [they] wear no clothes and are very wild in all respects. According to the Indian who was our prisoner, they eat human flesh and raw fish.”<sup>255</sup> He also observed that when these Amerindians dressed up for festivities, some adorn an ostrich-like beak whilst others painted their faces with red or black paint which he believed made them “look like devils.”<sup>256</sup> The Indigenous peoples to which they were referring were most likely the Mosquito Amerindians who still populate the eastern parts of Honduras and Nicaragua today.

It does not appear that the explorer’s negative assessments were due any kind of mistreatment by the Indigenous population. On the contrary, the Amerindians welcomed their visitors with food. As Ferdinand Columbus later recalled, “when boats were sent ashore to take formal possession of the land in the name of the Catholic Sovereigns, more than a hundred Indians bearing food came down to the shore.”<sup>257</sup> The *Adelantado* then instructed that the Amerindians be rewarded with beads and hawk’s bells etc. The natives were apparently so pleased by their exchange with the Europeans that they gave their visitors several types of food the next day including beans, goose, roasted fish and chicken.<sup>258</sup> During their stay in Cape Gracias a Dios, there is no indication that the convoy faced any violent confrontation with the Indigenous peoples of the kind described by the *conquistadores* in the more centralised areas such as Mexico.<sup>259</sup>

Columbus’ convoy then moved south until on September 25th they arrived at the tiny island of Quiribiri off the coast of Cariay which is now located in the city of Puerto Limón on Costa Rica’s Caribbean coast. It is possible that this name was derived from the Spanish word ‘*caray*’ which means ‘wow’ in English. The primary accounts present a remarkably positive image of the Amerindians residing in this area which were most likely members of the Bribri or Cabécar tribes. Out of these two tribes, there is higher probability that they were members of the Bribri whom the Spanish colonists “found closer to the coast” than the Cabécar or Teribe peoples.<sup>260</sup> In a striking contrast to what he wrote of the

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<sup>255</sup> Ibid., 234.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid., 235.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid., 234.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid.

<sup>259</sup> For instance, Bernal Diaz, a *conquistador* who fought under Hernán Cortez during the conquest of the Aztec Empire, recounted a story about an Aztec chief he encountered in 1517: “With a smiling face and every appearance of friendliness, he made signs that we should go to his town, where they would give us food and everything else we needed.” Diaz noted that he “gave us so much evidence of peaceful intentions” that he and his men were completely surprised after the chief “started shouting to some bands of warriors whom he had placed in ambush to kill us;” Bernal Diaz, *The Conquest of New Spain* (London: Penguin, 1963), 18-19.

<sup>260</sup> Solórzano, ‘La Rebelión de los Indígenas Bajo la Dirección de Pablo Presbere,’ 20.

individuals he met in Cape Gracias a Dios, Diego de Porras stated that these Amerindians were “people of very good disposition.”<sup>261</sup> A few year later, Bartholomew Columbus’ relayed to an Italian friar his account of the fourth voyage in which he described Cariay as “inhabited by people of a good sort who live by their industry.”<sup>262</sup> Ferdinand Columbus wrote that in Cariay they found the “best country and people that we had yet seen.”<sup>263</sup> He witnessed people coming out the surrounding areas when the Europeans landed, many of whom carried spears, cross-bows as well as wooden clubs known as *macanas*. According to Ferdinand, the Amerindians wanted to prevent their landing until they recognised that “we came in peace,” at which point, they wanted to trade their cotton clothes and weapons with the Europeans.<sup>264</sup>

Instead of trading with their hosts, Columbus ordered that the Indigenous people be given presents so that they saw the Europeans’ good intentions. These gifts were most likely hawk bells, beads and other trinkets of the kind they had given to the Amerindians in Cape Gracias a Dios. When the Europeans left their boats a few days after their arrival, they found that the tribal members had placed all their gifts on the shore. Once they saw their visitors were ready to receive them, they alighted their ships and were immediately welcomed by an old man of “venerable presence bearing a banner tied to a stick” along with two young girls.<sup>265</sup> According to Admiral Columbus, they were “magnificently attired girls, the elder of whom could not have been more than eleven and the other seven.” Columbus’ estimation of their ages makes his following statement even stranger. The Admiral wrote that the girls were “so shameless that they might have been whores.”<sup>266</sup> It does not appear that this was a serious assessment by Columbus but perhaps rather stemmed from his surprise that these girls’ behaved so different from those in Europe who were conditioned to defer to paternal authority. Ferdinand Columbus considered the sending of these two girls as a reflection of “much intelligence on the part of those Indians.”<sup>267</sup> He

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<sup>261</sup> Porras, ‘Relacion Hecha por Diego de Porras,’ 44.

<sup>262</sup> The Italian friar then passed the Bartholomew’s account onto Alessandro Zorzi who subsequently published it in the Zorzi Codex; Cited in Carl Sauer, *The Early Spanish Main* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), 145.

<sup>263</sup> Columbus, *The Life of the Admiral Christopher Columbus*, 236. Bartolome de Las Casas also wrote that in Cariay, “they found the best people and land;” Bartolome de Las Casas, ‘Historia de Las Indias,’ *Coleccion de Documentos para la Historia de Costa Rica Relativos al Cuarto y Ultimo Viaje de Cristobal Colon*, 213. Given that Las Casas did not travel on the fourth voyage and the similarities in the language, his observation appears to be merely a summary of Columbus’ account.

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.*, 236.

<sup>265</sup> *Ibid.*, 237.

<sup>266</sup> Columbus, ‘Letter Written by Christopher Columbus,’ 297.

<sup>267</sup> Columbus, *The Life of the Admiral Christopher Columbus*, 237.

recalled that the girls who “always looked pleasant and modest,” were treated well by his father who fed and clothed them before sending them ashore “where the old man who had brought them and fifty more Indians came out to receive them with much rejoicing.”<sup>268</sup> This story lends credence to the position that before the creation of political authority women were in a position of parity with men.<sup>269</sup>

The next day, the Admiral and his men alighted from their boat and sat down peacefully with tribal members on the shore in order to obtain information from their hosts. After the scribe took out his pen to make notes, some members of the tribe were reportedly frightened after viewing the European writing on a piece of parchment.<sup>270</sup> Ferdinand Columbus’ explanation for their behaviour, was that the natives believed the Europeans were enchanterers even though it was “they who impressed us as sorcerers.” This assessment was made on account of sprinkling and burning of some spices or powders, the smoke of which blew towards the faces of the Europeans.<sup>271</sup> The Admiral also made a similar point when he wrote that the young girls who had entered his ship had “magic powders concealed about them.”<sup>272</sup> On October 2<sup>nd</sup>, the ships were cleaned and restocked for the next leg of the voyage.

After they finished preparing the boats, Admiral Columbus sent a small group of men led by his brother Bartholomew in order to investigate Cariay’s natural environment as well as the customs, dwellings and ways of life of its Indigenous inhabitants. What seemed to impress the group the most was a sepulchre which is mentioned in all the accounts of the Columbus family. Ferdinand gives the most detailed description of the burial place:

In a large wooden palace roofed with canes were some tombs, in one of which was a corpse, dried and embalmed, and in another two more bodies, with no bad odor, wrapped in cotton cloth; over each tomb was a tablet carved with figures of beasts, and on some the effigy of the dead man, adorned with many beads, *guanines*, and other things they most prize.<sup>273</sup>

In his account, Christopher wrote: “I saw on a mountain a sculptured tomb as big as a house, on top of which a corpse lay embalmed.” However, neither the Admiral nor his son actually

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<sup>268</sup> Ibid.

<sup>269</sup> For a good example of this position see, Eleanor Leacock, ‘Women’s Status in Egalitarian Society: Implications for Social Evolution,’ *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 19, No. 2, 1978.

<sup>270</sup> Columbus, *The Life of the Admiral Christopher Columbus*, 237.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid.

<sup>272</sup> Columbus, ‘Letter Written by Christopher Columbus,’ 297.

<sup>273</sup> Columbus, *The Life of the Admiral Christopher Columbus*, 240.

witnessed the structure themselves which helps explain Columbus' next sentence: "I was also told of other excellent works of art."<sup>274</sup> The only individual who actually went on the small expedition and saw the tomb was Bartholomew who relayed that he "saw a sepulcher with its cubicle vault above, on which were carved animals of diverse kinds."<sup>275</sup> Thus, this tribe impressed the Columbus family not only in terms of their apparent intelligence and strategies but also their architecture and art.

Up until this stage, the initial meeting between the European visitors and their native hosts in Cariay appears to have been a peaceful interaction from both parties. As Fernandez Guardia pondered, "What does strike one as strange is the facility with which the Indians of Cariay entered into relations with the discovers."<sup>276</sup> Putting talk of sorcerers and magic powders aside, this was most likely a result of several factors including their hospitality and ingenuity which appears to have impressed Columbus and his men. Ferdinand Columbus wrote that the people he met in Cariay were the "most intelligent Indians they had seen in those regions."<sup>277</sup> Evidently, there was something about their behaviour or appearance which led the explorers to believe those Amerindians were more civilised or like themselves in comparison to the Indigenous peoples in Cape Gracias a Dios. Carmack speculated that Columbus and his entourage were "relieved to encounter native peoples more advanced upon arriving at Cariay."<sup>278</sup> By using the term 'advanced' here, Carmack was surely not referring to their level of centralisation as the political system of the Indigenous people in Cariay was most likely a tribe. None of the accounts mention meeting any authority figures such as chiefs in this region as they do elsewhere, apart from the 'venerable' old man who was one of the tribe's elders who most likely only had charismatic authority.

Despite its generally positive nature, the Europeans' stay in Cariay did not pass without incident. Before the convoy left, Admiral Columbus decided to kidnap two Amerindians in order to help escort and interpret for the foreigners on the next stage of their voyage. The Admiral explained to his captives that they would be released after they helped guide them along the shoreline.<sup>279</sup> However, the Amerindians did not appreciate

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<sup>274</sup> Ibid., 297-298.

<sup>275</sup> Cited in Sauer, *The Early Spanish Main*, 145. These animals were most likely the gold pendants discovered by archaeologists which represent animal figures such as frogs and jaguars.

<sup>276</sup> Fernandez Guardia, *History of the Discovery and Conquest of Costa Rica*, 38.

<sup>277</sup> Columbus, *The Life of the Admiral Christopher Columbus*, 240.

<sup>278</sup> Carmack, *The Indigenous Peoples of Mesoamerica and Central America*, 4. Macleod also described the Amerindians in Cariay as "more advanced" than the people Columbus had encountered in Cape Gracias a Dios; Macleod, *Spanish Central America*, 38.

<sup>279</sup> Columbus, *The Life of the Admiral Christopher Columbus*, 240.

anyone taking liberties with their freedom and unsuccessfully attempted to retrieve their tribal members through an exchange of various goods including two boars. Ferdinand Columbus relayed that his father “admired the intelligence of those people but this made him more eager to learn what he could about them.”<sup>280</sup> It is noteworthy that there is no mention of any violence being employed by any tribal members in retaliation. Nevertheless, in Fernandez Guardia’s estimation, this event was “perhaps was the origin of the implacable hatred of Spaniards that was always shown in the years following by the natives” of the Caribbean coast.<sup>281</sup> Although no fighting had erupted up until this point, this pattern was broken when the explorers made their way down the Atlantic coast of what is today called Panama.

In early October, the convoy arrived at Carambaru just past the current Costa Rica border but before Cerabaró Bay which is located on the eastern side of Lake Chiriquí in the province of Ngäbe Buglé. Carambaru was where the explorers first heard reports of large quantities of gold in Veragua. In 1503, Admiral Columbus wrote that the Amerindians in the region “go naked, wearing shining gold discs round their necks, but they would not sell or barter them.”<sup>282</sup> Columbus also mentions the amount of gold he had viewed when assessing the potential future colonisation of Veragua:

One thing I dare to say, since there are so many witnesses to it, and this is that in the land of Veragua I saw more evidences of gold in the first two days than in four years in Hispaniola, that the lands hereabouts could not be more beautiful or better cultivated, that the people could not be more timid, and there is a good harbor, a lovely river, which could be defended against the world. All this makes for the safety of the Christians, and their security of possession, and also offers great hopes of honour and expansion to the Christian faith.<sup>283</sup>

It is possible that the harbour Columbus was referring to was the one in Cerabaró Bay where they traded three hawk’s bells for a gold mirror with the help of one of the interpreters they had kidnapped in Cariay. In the following weeks they landed in several places in Ngäbe Buglé where they continued to trade for gold. By October 21<sup>st</sup>, they had acquired 19 mirrors that were made of gold.<sup>284</sup>

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<sup>280</sup> Ibid.

<sup>281</sup> Fernandez Guardia, *History of the Discovery and Conquest of Costa Rica*, 36.

<sup>282</sup> Columbus, ‘Letter Written by Christopher Columbus,’ 287.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid., 299.

<sup>284</sup> Columbus, *The Life of the Admiral Christopher Columbus*, 241-242.

In late October, the explorers landed in what is today's Panama's Veraguas province where they traded more goods for golden mirrors made by the Amerindians. Unlike in Costa Rica, there are many references to large-scale trade in Ferdinand Columbus' account. Almost half-way along the eastern coast of Panama, they "came to five villages of active trade" including "Veragua, where according to the Indians, gold was found and the mirrors were made."<sup>285</sup> The next day, explorers arrived in a village called Cubiga, which is today known as Coclé del Norte in the Colón province. It was here that an Amerindian they had captured in Costa Rica told them this village "marked the end of the trading country that extended for fifty leagues along the coast," from Cubiga to Cerabaró Bay.<sup>286</sup> None of the historical accounts of Columbus' fourth voyage give evidence that there were any similar trading practices amongst the Indigenous people of Costa Rica. In a place called Cateba, they also saw evidence of a more centralised political systems compared to the tribes in Cariay. Ferdinand Columbus' account mentions that there was a king here who most likely a chief who was "dressed like the others but was protected from the drenching rain by a huge leaf."<sup>287</sup> This was also where the explorers had first seen an example of masonry in the form of a building made of stucco, stone and lime.<sup>288</sup>

The explorers then stayed in a place they named *Puerto de Bastimentos* (Port of Supplies), after the amount of corn fields they observed in the surrounding islets. In a little harbour named Retrete the Admiral observed: "At first the Indians came peacefully to trade, but later when they saw the sailors sneaking ashore from the ships, they withdrew to their huts, for the sailors, a greedy and dissolute set of men, committed innumerable outrages." Admiral Columbus added that these actions "provoked the Indians to break the peace, and some fights broke out between the two sides."<sup>289</sup> Columbus' notary Diego Mendez also recalled the incident when a chief's son shoved him after a disagreement. After subsequently impressing the man with the demonstration of a haircut, Mendez asked him to "send for some food, which they brought immediately, and we ate and drank in love and comradeship and remained friends."<sup>290</sup> The following day, Mendez advised his Admiral that they should "seize the *cacique* and all his captains, because once we had them in our

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<sup>285</sup> Ibid, 243.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid., 244-245.

<sup>290</sup> Diego Mendez, 'Account by Diego Mendez of Certain Incidents on Christopher Columbus' Last Voyage' in Joel Cohen (Ed.), *The Four Voyages of Christopher Columbus* (London: Penguin Books, 1969), 307.

power the common people would be subdued.”<sup>291</sup> These observations indicate that the pre-Hispanic Indigenous societies in Panama were more centralised than their counterparts in Costa Rica. This helps explain why the Spanish conquered the latter province several decades later than its neighbour to the south.

### **Spanish Attempts to Conquer Veragua**

In Costa Rica, the obduracy of the Indigenous population meant that Spanish authorities found it difficult to conquer their newly acquired territory. Many authors have recognised the difficulties that were faced by the conquerors of Costa Rica.<sup>292</sup> In 1918, Dana Munro observed the following regarding the colonisation of the region: “The Spanish pioneers who founded the city of Cartago in the latter part of the sixteenth century were unable from the outset to establish a colony similar to those in other parts of the Isthmus” due to the lack of a “dense agricultural population to be divided up as laborers among the settlers.”<sup>293</sup> By contrast, in the more centralised parts of the Americas, the Indigenous populations had been “forced with surprisingly little difficulty to work for their new masters.” Munro concluded that the more egalitarian tribes in Costa Rica were not accustomed to authoritarian labour practices and therefore were not “promising material for a serf class like that existing at the time in Guatemala and Nicaragua.”<sup>294</sup> Similarly, Busey observed that within the Aztec and Incan empires, the population had grown “accustomed to long centuries of organized slavery at the hands of their own native masters.”<sup>295</sup> Centralised control was largely achieved in these areas by replacing Indigenous authority figures with Spanish ones. Anthropologist Mary Helms found this to be the case in Western Guatemala where “Hispanic control of the densely populated native states was essentially achieved by replacing native rulers with Spanish administrators.”<sup>296</sup> In short, it is much easier to simply replace the head of an existing hierarchy than to create an entirely new authority structure.

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<sup>291</sup> Ibid., 308.

<sup>292</sup> Iván Molina and Steven Palmer, *The History of Costa Rica: Brief, Up-To-Date and Illustrated (Second Edition)* (San José: Editorial UCR, 2007), 20; Wilson, *Costa Rica*, 12; Monica Rankin, *The History of Costa Rica* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood, 2012), 17.

<sup>293</sup> Dana Munro, *The Five Republics of Central America: Their Political and Economic Development and their Relations with the United States* (London: Forgotten Books, 2012), 139.

<sup>294</sup> Ibid.

<sup>295</sup> Busey, *Notes on Costa Rican Democracy*, 57.

<sup>296</sup> Mary Helms, ‘Introduction,’ in Mary Helms and Frank Loveland (Eds.), *Frontier Adaptations in Lower Central America* (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1976), 10.

In order to explain this apparent paradox, it is essential to analyse the political organisation of the Indigenous peoples in pre-Hispanic Central America. Anthropologists and historians have recognised that the ways in which modern civilizations developed were contingent upon the kind of indigenous society that preceded them.<sup>297</sup> For instance, anthropologists Brian Ferguson and Neil Whitehead have highlighted the importance of analysing the “prior political organization of the native people.” They also suggest it is important to take into consideration the “nature of the contact process.”<sup>298</sup> Thus there is much to gain from tracing the origins of current political systems such as Costa Rica all the way back to their beginnings of the modern world. In this case, this involves investigating the first attempts to conquer what at that stage was known as Veragua. The name ‘Veragua’ has often been used loosely to define several geographical limits. When the name was mentioned by Christopher Columbus, he was most likely referring to the land from the coast of Bocas Del Toro to Veraguas province in Panama as it matches up with his descriptions of where he witnessed the largest quantities of gold.

The first *conquistador* to attempt to conquer the region was Diego de Nicuesa, who was given royal authorisation to colonise Veragua in 1508. At the time, the territory of Veragua stretched along the coast from Cape Gracias a Dios to western Panama before it came to designate most of the current land mass of Costa Rica.<sup>299</sup> Two years later, Nicuesa led a conquest expedition which turned out to be a miserable failure. After failing to establish a settlement, Nicuesa and his men lived on the province’s Caribbean Coast until they could no longer sustain themselves in that location due to the risk of death by starvation.<sup>300</sup> In 1511, Nicuesa’s vessel became shipwrecked in the Escudo of Veragua where he disappeared and was presumed dead. This was the first of many setbacks the Spanish would experience in their colonisation efforts on the Caribbean side of Costa Rica.

The Pacific Coast of the country would produce rather different historical conditions and events. In the early 1520s, Gil Gonzalez de Dávila travelled along the Pacific Coast of what is now Puntarenas on his journey from Panama to Nicaragua. Dávila also

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<sup>297</sup> Caroline Hall, *Costa Rica: A Geographical Interpretation in Historical Perspective* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1985), 60; Kent Flannery and Joyce Marcus, *The Creation of Inequality: How Our Prehistoric Ancestors Set the Stage for Monarchy, Slavery, and Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).

<sup>298</sup> Ferguson and Whitehead, ‘The Violent Edge of Empire,’ 13.

<sup>299</sup> Segismundo Moret and Vicente Santamaría de Paredes, *Costa Rica-Panama Arbitration: Opinion Concerning the Question of Boundaries Between the Republics of Costa Rica and Panama. Examined with Respect to the Spanish Law and Given at the Request of the Government of Costa Rica by Their Excellencies* (Washington, Gibson Bros. Incorporate, 1913), 18.

<sup>300</sup> León Fernández, *Historia de Costa Rica Durante La Dominación Española, 1502-1821* (Madrid: Impresor de la Real Casa, 1889), 15.



helped initiate the colonisation of Nicoya which was part of Nicaragua at that stage. In a 1524 appeal to King Charles V, Dávila noted that in comparison to the deaths and robberies of Amerindians in other lands he noticed a difference with regards to Costa Rica in terms of the “discovery and pacification of the land” and the ‘conversion’ of its Indigenous peoples. Captain Dávila commented on what he considered to be the “good treatment that until now has been made to the indians.”<sup>301</sup> It is possible that this was an example of whitewashing. However, given that Costa Rica had not been conquered and colonisation efforts had barely begun at that time, it is reasonable to assume that there was some truth to his observation. Most Europeans that entered that territory up until that point had been either explorers or *conquistadores* who were remarkably unsuccessful.

The next person to visit Nicoya was the official historian of the Spanish Crown, Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo in 1529. In comparison to the inhabitants of Guatemala, whom he described as warlike and cannibals, Oviedo praised the Chorotega Amerindians in Nicoya.<sup>302</sup> Oviedo wrote that the Chorotegas were “very well-disposed people.”<sup>303</sup> Also, in Oviedo’s estimation, the Nicoyan females were the “most beautiful” he had “seen in these parts.”<sup>304</sup> Oviedo’s most intriguing observation was his description of the region’s Indigenous inhabitants as “people of good stature and *whiter than parrots*.”<sup>305</sup> Although it is unlikely that these natives were white like a Caucasian, it is possible that the Chorotegas had light enough skin colour that they could reasonably be considered ‘white.’

Another explanation for Oviedo’s statement is that he had witnessed albinos like some other explorers who have travelled in Lower Central America. This characterisation of extremely white Amerindians is like that of a Welsh doctor named Lionel Wafer who travelled to Darien where he lived amongst the Kuna people in the seventeenth century. Wafer characterised these Kuna members as follows:

There is one Complexion so singular, among a sort of People of this Country, that I never saw nor heard of any like them in any part of the World. The Account will seem strange, but any Privateers who have gone over the *Isthmus* must have seen them, and can attest the main of what I am going to relate... They are White, and there of them of both Sexes... Their Skins are not of such a White as those of fair

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<sup>301</sup> Gil Gonzalez de Dávila, ‘Las Cosas que el Capitan Gil Gonzalez Dávila Suplica a Nuestra Magestad que le Haga Merced,’ *Complementario Colonial* - No. 5016, ANCR, 1524, 2-3.

<sup>302</sup> Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo, *Historia General y Natural de las Indias: Tomo IV* (Madrid: Imprenta de la Real Academia de la Historia, 1855), 33.

<sup>303</sup> Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo, *Historia General y Natural de las Indias: Tomo II* (Madrid: Imprenta de la Real Academia de la Historia, 1853), 109.

<sup>304</sup> Oviedo, *Historia General y Natural de las Indias: Tomo IV*, 99.

<sup>305</sup> *Ibid.*, 38, emphasis added.

People among *Europeans*, with some tincture of a Blush or Sanguine Complexion; neither yet is their Complexion like that of our paler People, but 'tis rather a Milkwhite, lighter than the Colour of any *Europeans*, and much like that of a white Horse.<sup>306</sup>

These Amerindians are now widely believed to be albinos which is apparently an unusually dominant trait amongst the Kuna peoples.<sup>307</sup> According to Richard Marsh however, the white Amerindians he witnessed in Darien were “not albinos in the ordinary sense of the word” but were similar to people from the Nordic countries.<sup>308</sup>

Regardless of whether they were albinos, it is important to note that the majority of reports of '*Indios blancos*' come from either Costa Rica or Panama. The *conquistadores*' descriptions of Indigenous peoples in Panama were similar to their counterparts' attitudes towards Amerindians in Costa Rica in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. For instance, in a 1639 letter to the King, the Council of Cartago described the Indigenous peoples of Puertobelo as the “best and most capable people in these Indies.”<sup>309</sup> Ferdinand Columbus also wrote of the Amerindians in Panama: “The people of this country were the best favored Indians the Christians had yet seen, being tall and spare, not potbellied, and handsome of face.”<sup>310</sup> However, there were some extremely negative character assessments as well. The *conquistador* Vasco Núñez de Balboa, for instance, stated in 1513 that the Indigenous peoples of Panama were “worthless” and a “very evil race.”<sup>311</sup>

Although the pseudo-science regarding race flourished in the nineteenth century, it is evident that the Spanish demonstrated prejudice towards minority groups (especially Jews) during the Middle Ages. Whilst groups were often targeted due their religious affiliation, there was an increasing focus placed on the purity of blood since the fourteenth century.<sup>312</sup> After the Reconquest succeeded in 1492 former *Moriscos* (converted Moors) were treated with suspicion despite officially converting from Islam to Christianity. The

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<sup>306</sup> Lionel Wafer, 'Wafer's Voyages,' in L. E. Eliot Joyce (Ed.) *A New Voyage and Description of the Isthmus of America, By Lionel Wafer* (New York: Ashgate Publishing, 2016), 80.

<sup>307</sup> For instance, *The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health* medical journal recently estimated the incidence of albinism amongst the Kuna peoples to be between 5 to 10 people in every 100 individuals; The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health Editorial Board, 'Albinism: Myths and Reality' [Editorial], *The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health*, Vol. 3, No. 8, 2019, 511.

<sup>308</sup> Marsh, *White Indians of Darien*, 209, 199.

<sup>309</sup> Council of Cartago cited in Fernández, *Historia de Costa Rica Durante La Dominación Española*, 196.

<sup>310</sup> Columbus, *The Life of the Admiral Christopher Columbus*, 245.

<sup>311</sup> Cited in Clements Markham, 'Introduction,' in Clements Markham (Ed.), Pascual de Andagoya, *Narrative of the proceedings of Pedrarias Dávila in the provinces of Tierra Firme or Catilla del Oro: and of the discovery of the South sea and the coasts of Peru and Nicaragua* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1865), xv.

<sup>312</sup> Max Sebastián Hering Torres, 'Purity of Blood: Problems of Interpretation,' in María Elena Martínez, Max-Sebastián Hering Torres and David Nirenberg (Eds.), *Race and Blood in the Iberian World* (2012), 15.

persecution of *Moriscos* as well as Africans, *Gitanos* (Gypsies), Jews and Amerindians increased with the expansion of the Inquisition and Conquest of the Americas.<sup>313</sup> As early as the sixteenth century, settlers in Spanish America were perpetuating the racist trope that Indigenous people are lazy. For instance, in 1554, Archbishop of Mexico Alonso de Montúfar claimed that the Amerindians would not even “work for themselves” because they were “such loafers.”<sup>314</sup> Africans in Latin America were discriminated against and often portrayed as violent thieves. In 1590, the Viceroy of New Spain Álvaro Manrique de Zúñiga wrote that mulattoes and ‘free’ Afro-Latinos were “damaging and pernicious” because they wandered around as vagrants committing assaults and robberies.<sup>315</sup>

Even though these kinds of negative character assessments were not common from the historical accounts in Costa Rica, this was not the case in nearby Nicaragua. The *conquistadores* stationed in Nicaragua generally employed rather negative terminology to describe the Indigenous peoples of that province. For example, the Spanish reportedly described the *Chontal* Amerindians who lived near the north-eastern part of Lake Nicaragua as the “most brutal people.”<sup>316</sup> Even more harshly, in 1529, Francisco de Casteñada described the Chorotegas living in Nicaragua as the “most evil people in the world” and claimed, “they are so vicious from eating human meat.”<sup>317</sup> It is not clear whether Casteñada actually witnessed the Chorotegas eat human flesh. Nevertheless, the charge of cannibalism is typically employed in dehumanising descriptions of certain Indigenous peoples. This negative assessment of the Chorotegas in Nicaragua stands in stark contrast to that of Oviedo’s description of their counterparts in Nicoya.

At this stage, Costa Rica was still being explored piecemeal by various Spaniards who were mostly attempting to secure gold and other riches. In 1536 and 1537, the Governor of Veragua whose name was Felipe Gutierrez, attempted to create settlements on the northern Caribbean coast which were all unsuccessful due to Indigenous resistance. The territory of Veragua was shortened to include the coast from the Belén River in Panama to

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<sup>313</sup> Teun Adrianus van Dijk, *Racism and Discourse in Spain and Latin America* (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2005), 13.

<sup>314</sup> Cited in Laura Lewis, ‘Between “Casta” and “Raza:” The Example of Colonial Mexico,’ in María Elena Martínez, Max Sebastián Hering Torres and David Nirenberg (Eds.), *Race and Blood in the Iberian World* (2012), 111.

<sup>315</sup> Cited in Thomas, *World Without End*, 234.

<sup>316</sup> Cited in Eugenia Ibarra Rojas, *Fronteras Étnicas en la Conquista de Nicaragua y Nicoya: Entre la Solidaridad y el Conflict 800 D.C. – 1544* (San José: Editorial UCR, 2011), 21.

<sup>317</sup> Francisco de Castañeda, ‘El Licenciado Francisco de Castañeda a S.M. sobre el estado en que encontró a Nicaragua y las disposiciones que tomó en virtud de órdenes del Capitán general Pedrarias Dávila,’ Leon de Nicaragua, 30 de marzo de 1529 – Primera Carta’ in Manuel Maria Peralá (Ed.), *Costa Rica Nicaragua and Panama en el Siglo XVI: Su Historia y Sus Limites* (Madrid: Librería de M. Murillo, 1883), 49.

Cape Gracias a Dios.<sup>318</sup> In 1539, an expedition was launched from Nicaragua under the command of Diego Machuca and Alonso Calero who entered San Carlos before travelling along the San Juan River. Around this time, there was a contest between Nicaraguan and Panamanian authorities over who had the right to colonise the land that separated their colonies. In 1540, there was an expedition on the Caribbean side on what is now the border with Panama that was led by Hermán Sánchez de Badajoz who established a settlement that he named after himself. However, Nicaraguan governor Rodrigo de Contreras expelled Badajoz and his men with superior force in the following year in order to colonise the region himself. The Amerindians subsequently burnt down the fort of the incipient town of Badajoz, delaying once again the conquest of the region.<sup>319</sup>

Another unsuccessful effort was led by Felipe Gutierrez's brother Diego who was appointed Governor of New Cartago in 1540. In his account of Diego Gutierrez's expedition, the Italian conquistador Jerónimo Benzoni praised the Amerindians of north-eastern Costa Rica in comparison to those he saw in Nombre de Dios, Panama: "As for the customs of the natives of the province of Suerre, they are almost like the aforementioned except that they do not eat human meat." Benzoni added that "their language is very good to learn."<sup>320</sup> The Amerindians also displayed great generosity by providing Gutierrez with an equivalent of 7000 ducats of gold when he first arrived.<sup>321</sup> However, he reportedly started to become frustrated with a lack of resources and food procurement started to become precarious. One day during the year of 1540 "Gutierrez asked an Indian which was the nearest way to a village," but had the latter's "head immediately cut off" after he concluded that the man was feigning ignorance of this information.<sup>322</sup> It is of course entirely possible that the Indigenous man either could not understand Gutierrez or did not in fact know where the nearest village was located. In 1543, Gutierrez was killed by Amerindians, delaying the next major attempt to colonise the area for 17 years.

The Spanish colonisers employed various terms to describe Amerindians depending on their willingness to comply with Spanish commands and interests throughout the colonial period. The pejorative terms they used included '*indios de guerra*' (Indians of war), '*indios inquietos*' (restless Indians), '*indios malos*' (bad Indians) and '*indios infieles*'

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<sup>318</sup> Moret and Paredes, *Costa Rica-Panama Arbitration*, 22.

<sup>319</sup> Solórzano, 'La Rebelión de los Indígenas Bajo la Dirección de Pablo Presbere,' 129.

<sup>320</sup> Jerónimo Benzoni cited in Fernández, *Historia de Costa Rica Durante La Dominación Española*, 92-93.

<sup>321</sup> Anonymous, *Diego Gutierrez: His Expedition*, Complementario Colonial - No. 5338, ANCR, 1540, 1-2. This document was already translated into English.

<sup>322</sup> Ibid., 2, 4.

(unfaithful Indians) which were used to describe Indigenous peoples who disobeyed Spanish authorities. The positive terms used were '*indios de paz*' (Indians of peace) and '*indios amigos*' (Indian friends) which were monikers applied to Indigenous groups that complied with or at least did not challenge Spanish authorities. As a means of bringing the population to submission, the traditional methods of force were used by the colonial authorities. The primary strategy involved gathering people into communities known as '*reducciones*' which were under the control of the *cabildo* (council). These *cabildos* were administered by the governor of Costa Rica which was itself under the authority of the Kingdom of Guatemala. The 'reduction' or concentration of the Indigenous population also had a doctrinal component that was conducted by the missionaries. In 1556, one *conquistador* wrote, "if they are divided, try to gather them in villages so that they can dwell together, for the better they can be indoctrinated."<sup>323</sup> Before the Amerindians had learnt Spanish, indoctrination was made more difficult which is why authorities tended to rely on force to control the Amerindian population.

With its scattered tribes and relatively few chiefdoms, Spanish colonists in Costa Rica had a more difficult time centralising political power than their counterparts in the other Central America colonies. However, the fact that the Amerindians were small in number and widely dispersed at the time filled King Phillip II and his royal representatives in Costa Rica with confidence that subjugation of the Indigenous population would be an easy task.<sup>324</sup> Spanish colonists later learnt that this confidence was misguided. A great deal of Central America was conquered comparatively quickly from 1519 to 1525.<sup>325</sup> However, colonisation efforts in Costa Rica took several decades until significant progress was made by *conquistadores* entering from both Panama and Nicaragua. Although the first Spanish attempt to colonise Costa Rica was in 1510, the area was still under Indigenous control some fifty years later.

## **The Conquest of Costa Rica**

In 1560, Juan Cavallón was given royal permission to take control of New Cartago and Costa Rica, as it was known at the time. Cavallón launched one expeditionary force to the Central Valley and another to the Caribbean coast. The Central Valley was occupied at

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<sup>323</sup> Aniceto de la Higuera, *Complementario Colonial* - No. 3389, ANCR, 1556, 7.

<sup>324</sup> Rey Felipe II, 'Cédula del Rey de España dirigida á la Real Audiencia de los Confines,' 159.

<sup>325</sup> Molina and Palmer, *The History of Costa Rica*, 20.

the time by the Huetar Amerindians who lived under several chiefdoms. The first to be conquered was the Guarco chiefdom which was located in what became the province of Cartago. The Huetares were the most powerful or centralised Indigenous group on the eve of the Conquest.<sup>326</sup> The political organisation of the Huetares were most likely simple chiefdoms with the possible exception of the Guarco chiefdom which appears to have been the most complex political unit in the region prior to the arrival of the Spanish. This would explain why the Guarco chiefdom was the first to be conquered in accordance with the tendency that the more centralised political units were easier to conquer.

As part of their strategy, the Spanish forged alliances with various Huetar chiefdoms in the Central Valley including those in Chomes and Quepos.<sup>327</sup> Although it was surely not the Huetar chief's intentions, this actually aided the colonisation process because it prevented Indigenous alliances and instead helped the Spanish to divide and conquer. The Bishop of Nicaragua wrote in February 1561 that the Huetares were the "first Indians of war, who were invited with peace."<sup>328</sup> In April of that same year, Juan Cavallón noted that the inhabitants of Chomes had peaceful relations with the Huetares in the Central Valley. Cavallón wrote that the Huetares have shown themselves to "want peace and to be Christians."<sup>329</sup> According to official documents written at the time, the Huetares had acquired large quantities of gold. In a 1560 letter by the *Audiencia* in Guatemala, Chomes was a "rich land" inhabited by Huetares who "wore earmuffs and [neck] plates of gold."<sup>330</sup> Whilst the expedition to the Caribbean coast failed, the second force managed to successfully establish the first permanent settlement called Castillo de Garci-Muñoz in 1561.

Juan Vázquez de Coronado was subsequently appointed as the first mayor of this province. He subsequently founded the Town Council of Castillo de Garci-Muñoz in order to administer the new colony. The Town Council provided a rich description of New Cartago and Costa Rica and its native inhabitants in 1562:

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<sup>326</sup> Miguel Ángel Quesada Pacheco, 'Toponimia Indígena de Costa Rica,' *Filología y Lingüística*, Vol. 32, No. 2, 2006, 212.

<sup>327</sup> Fernández Guardia, *Cartilla Histórica de Costa Rica*, 36; Solórzano, 'La Población Indígena de Costa Rica en el Siglo XVI al Momento del Contacto con los Europeos,' 326.

<sup>328</sup> El Obispo de Nicaragua cited in Fernández, *Historia de Costa Rica Durante La Dominación Española*, 586 [Note 71].

<sup>329</sup> Juan Cavallón cited in *Ibid.*, 587.

<sup>330</sup> *Audiencia* de Guatemala, 'Probanza Hecha en la Real Audiencia de Guatemala á Pedimento de Pedro Ordoñez de Villaquirán de la Calidad de su Persona Y Méritos y Servicios que ha hecho á su Magestad, Año de 1560,' in León Fernández (Ed.) *Colección de Documentos para la Historia de Costa Rica: Tomo I* (San José: Imprenta Nacional, 1881), 152. Examples of these gold artefacts can be viewed in the Pre-Columbian Gold Museum at the Central Bank of Costa Rica in San José.

According to what has been seen so far, this province offers great wealth, with fertile soil and abounding with good and delicate airs and waters, good sky and land, with temperatures more cool than hot. It has oaks, alfalfa and plantain and verbena and other trees of Spain, and oranges and lemons, and we believe it will produce other fruits. The people are rich, of a good disposition; they closely resemble those of Peru in their clothes, customs, and service; their faces are lovely, sharp and wise, and they can have our Spanish language introduced to them and, through God, our law and Christian faith. All wear gold locket, and it is believed that they have among them a great quantity of very rich mines of this metal, although up to now we have not searched for them due to the demanding tasks that have presented themselves.<sup>331</sup>

It is possible that the letter contained some exaggerations of the potential riches in order to impress the King. Yet there are many historical accounts which all present a similar image of Costa Rica as a wealthy region which contains Amerindians with good dispositions. A decade later, Juan de Estrada Ravago observed that the “people of this province are very well disposed, clean and of very good disposition.”<sup>332</sup> His account also mentions the great wealth of the Indigenous peoples including their clothes, golden jewelry and other pieces of gold.<sup>333</sup>

The main criticism of the Amerindians levelled by the Spanish was their disobedience to colonial authorities. The documents written by Vázquez de Coronado from his time as mayor (1561-1565) contain many references to the failure of the Indians to demonstrate ‘due obedience’ to the Crown.<sup>334</sup> In 1562, the council wrote a letter to King Phillip II in which its members complained that they faced challenges “because of the rebellion and stubborn disobedience of the natives who are set in their many ancient rites and sacrifices.”<sup>335</sup> The greatest affront that a subordinate can display in any authority system is that of disobedience to their ‘superiors.’ For Vázquez de Coronado, the “greatest obstacle to the pacification of this province is a cacique called Garabito.”<sup>336</sup> He was a

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<sup>331</sup> Town Council of Castillo de Garci-Muñoz, ‘A Conqueror Looks on the Bright Side,’ in Steven Palmer and Iván Molina (Eds.), *The Costa Rica Reader: History, Culture, Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 15.

<sup>332</sup> Juan de Estrada Ravago, ‘Descripción de la Provincia de Costa-Rica, hecha por el licenciado Juan de Estrada Ravago, drigida á Madrid al M.R.P. fray Diego Guillén, comisario de la province de Cartago y Costa-Rica. – Año de 1572,’ in León Fernández (Ed.) *Coleccion de Documentos para la Historia de Costa Rica: Tomo III* (San José: Imprenta Nacional, 1883), 2.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid., 2-3.

<sup>334</sup> Juan Vázquez de Coronado, *Cartas De Juan Vázquez de Coronado, Conquistador de Costa Rica* (Barcelona: Imprenta de la Vda, 1908).

<sup>335</sup> Town Council of Castillo de Garci-Munez, ‘A Conqueror Looks on the Bright Side,’ 14.

<sup>336</sup> Juan Vázquez de Coronado, ‘A S. M. el Rey D. Felipe II - Nueva Cartago, 11 de Diciembre de 1562,’ *Cartas De Juan Vázquez de Coronado*, 14.

Huetare leader who had urged others in his chiefdom to refuse obedience to the Spaniards. For his great ‘crime,’ Garabito was sentenced to death by Coronado and war was waged “upon him as if he had rebelled.”<sup>337</sup> Although Garabito’s execution was a victory for the newly appointed mayor, the ‘Indians of war’ would continue to pose problems for the rulers of Costa Rica.

Whilst the Indigenous peoples of Costa Rica were mostly organised into tribes, there were a few chiefdoms to the west of the Central Valley which is today part of the Puntarenas province. Carlos Meléndez noted that Vázquez de Coronado appeared to “have had a more fortuitous tactic than Cavallón in dealing with the natives of this land... and with the support of the friendly Indians, he began new expeditions” in the country’s south pacific region.<sup>338</sup> Vázquez de Coronado’s letters from his 1563 visit to Quepos recount a dispute between two rival chiefdoms (the Coctús and the Quepos). According to the mayor, the Quepo Amerindians were the “cleanest and most reasonable people” he had ever observed. He noted that the Quepos had plenty of “all kinds of Indian food in great abundance.”<sup>339</sup> There was also great quantities of gold in this town which he had not acquired “because they do not give it without discomfort”<sup>340</sup> All the riches he saw there led Vázquez de Coronado to conclude the “natives are very rich.”<sup>341</sup> In a letter to King Phillip II dated July 1563, Vázquez de Coronado reported that he rescued Princess Dulcehe who was the daughter of chief Corrohere from the Quepos chiefdom. In one of his letters, Vázquez de Coronado explains that he gave several valuables including axes to the Coctú chief in exchange for seven prisoners, one of whom was the princess.<sup>342</sup>

In 1563, the colonial capital was moved from Garci-Muñoz to Cartago which would serve as the capital for the remainder of the colonial era. Today Cartago is known within the country as having a population that is particularly Spanish in appearance. This is an indication of the greater displacement or destruction of the Indigenous population in

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<sup>337</sup> Ibid.

<sup>338</sup> Carlos Meléndez, *Historia de Costa Rica* (San José: Editorial Universidad Estatal a Distancia, 2013), 46. Fernández Guardia also made a similar observation regarding the friendliness of the Amerindians groups who “gave obedience” to the *conquistadores* during Vasquez de Coronado’s expeditions in the southwest region of Costa Rica; Ricardo Fernández Guardia, *Historia de Costa Rica: El Descubrimiento y la Conquista* (Cuarta Edición) (San José: Librería Lehmann & Cía., 1941), 130.

<sup>339</sup> Juan Vázquez de Coronado, ‘Al muy ilustre señor Licenciado Juan Martínez Landecho, Presidente de la Audencia de los Confines - De Quepo, 15 de Febrero de 1563,’ *Cartas De Juan Vázquez de Coronado*, 25.

<sup>340</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>341</sup> Juan Vázquez de Coronado, ‘A S. M. el Rey D. Felipe II - De Cartago, 11 de Diciembre de 1562,’ *Cartas De Juan Vázquez de Coronado*, 50.

<sup>342</sup> Ibid., 49. In his painting *Rescate de Dulcehe* (Rescue of Dulcehe), Spanish painter Tomás Povedano portrays the princess with distinctly lighter skin than the other members of the Coctu chiefdom. However, there are no descriptions of the skin colour of either the Coctus or Quepos in the historical documents.



the Central Valley compared to the members of the Costa Rican population on the outer parts of the country who tend to appear more Indigenous in their physical composition. Apart from their death due to violence and diseases, it is also true that there was a substantial incorporation of the Amerindians into the dominant society. Although it is highly likely that female partners accompanied the *conquistadores* to the New World to help establish the colony, the documentary record indicates dearth of Spanish females in the early colonial era. Considering this situation, Spanish men naturally pursued Indigenous women which led to considerable miscegenation between the Europeans and Amerindians.<sup>343</sup> As the economist Luis Demetrio Tinoco observed, “The Spanish never felt any resistance to uniting with Indian women.”<sup>344</sup> When humans are grouped into the same geographical location, sexual selection plays its natural course.<sup>345</sup>

In the Americas and elsewhere, the codification as white conferred upon individuals certain legal privileges including the right to marry and the exemption from slave labour.<sup>346</sup> In order to extend political rights to their wives, it was sometimes necessary to classify Indigenous peoples as ‘white.’ As forensic scientist Bernal Morera-Brenes and biologist Ramiro Barrantes observed, “For a variety of reasons, light-colored individuals were considered ‘whites’ in the full social sense of the term and consequently their election as parties to an acceptable marriage was legitimized.”<sup>347</sup> Skin pigmentation levels amongst the Indigenous population would have affected the ease with which ‘*mestizos*’ (the offspring of Spaniards and Amerindians) were classified as ‘white.’ Individuals who were classified as ‘*castizos*’ were more easily accepted as white as they were three-quarters Spanish and one-quarter Amerindian. The lighter the skin, the easier it most likely was to be codified in the highest of racial classifications. It is highly likely that the children of powerful men such as Juan Vasquez de Coronado would have been given full rights, regardless of whether one of their parents was Amerindian or not.

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<sup>343</sup> Carlos Meléndez, *Juan Vasquez de Coronado: Conquistador y Fundador de Costa Rica* (San José: Editorial Costa Rica, 1972), 36.

<sup>344</sup> Luis Demetrio Tinoco, *Población de Costa Rica y Orígenes de los Costarricenses* (San José: Editorial Costa Rica, 1977), 11.

<sup>345</sup> There are some references to the rape of Indigenous women by Spaniards in Lower Central America from the sixteenth century which was undoubtedly a factor in miscegenation. For instance, when he was stationed in Darién (eastern Panama) in 1514, Oviedo wrote, “Rape of the infidel women was but one of the outrages committed” in the colony at the time; Gonzalo Fernandez de Oviedo, *Writing from the Edge of the World: The Memoirs of Darién, 1514-1527* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2006), 68. However, it is likely that sexual selection played a larger role in the miscegenation process.

<sup>346</sup> Sean Harvey, ‘Ideas of Race in Early America,’ *Oxford Research Encyclopaedia* (USA: Oxford University Press, 2016), 15.

<sup>347</sup> Bernal Morera-Brenes y Ramiro Barrantes, ‘Genes e Historia: El Mestizaje en Costa Rica,’ *Revista de Historia*, No. 32, 2012, 47.

After establishing the colonial government in the centre of the country, Vasquez de Coronado travelled to the southeast region of the new colony. In March 1564, he arrived in a place called Tariaca which was north of Cariay. Vasquez de Coronado's notary Cristóbal Madrigal wrote that Tariaca was a "region which they say does not have a chief." The letter noted that they did not employ force but rather "received the obedience of the natives and took possession of that town peacefully."<sup>348</sup> The historical record indicates that the mayor did not attempt to conquer the southern part of the country at that stage on account of its remote location and a lack of resources. In 1565, the colony's name was changed to Costa Rica. After the death of Juan Vázquez de Coronado in that same year, the attempts to conquer the unexplored parts of the province were largely successful with the major exception of the region that would become known as Greater Talamanca.

In 1605, Diego de Sojo founded the settlement named Santiago de Talamanca after the region of Madrid in which he was born. Only five years after its establishment, Santiago de Talamanca would be destroyed. On the morning of 29<sup>th</sup> of July 1610, the native population revolted by killing Spanish soldiers and setting fires. Sojo, who was in Tariaca at the time, organised an expedition to restore order in the region but it failed to materialise, and his soldiers deserted. According to historian León Fernández, the expedition failed because of Sojo's cowardice who was "brave enough to cut the ears of defenseless Indians, but who had not forgotten that the Indians also knew how to defend their freedom and punish the tyrants."<sup>349</sup> However, this does not mean that Indigenous groups in Talamanca won every battle. In 1619, Governor Alonso de Castilla and Guzman reportedly crushed the Aoyaque Amerindians when they rebelled in their territory which was to the east of the Talamancan mountain range.<sup>350</sup> However, Murdo Macleod has questioned whether this event actually transpired. As evidence for this argument, he cited a 1626 report from the Kingdom of Guatemala which accused Guzman of fabricating the event in order to provide justification for incorporating the Aoyaques into the *repartimiento* system.<sup>351</sup>

The ability of the Amerindians in Greater Talamanca to defend their territory would be a lesson that Spanish authorities would learn in the coming century. Despite their resistance to Spanish colonisation, the Indigenous peoples who were living in Talamanca

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<sup>348</sup> Juan Vázquez de Coronado y Cristóbal Madrigal, 'Tariaca,' March 1564, *Complementario Colonial - No. 5004*, ANCR, 1564, 21.

<sup>349</sup> Fernández, *Historia de Costa Rica Durante La Dominación Española*, 151.

<sup>350</sup> Alonso de Castilla y Guzman, 'Relación del Castigo que el Gobernador D. Alonso de Castilla y Guzmán Hizo á los Indios Aoyaques, Cureros y Hebenas en 1619.-Año de 1620,' in León Fernández, (Ed.), *Colección de documentos para la historia de Costa-Rica: Tomo VIII* (Barcelona: Imprenta Viuda de Luis Tasso, 1907).

<sup>351</sup> Guatemala, No. 58, ANCR cited in Macleod, *Spanish Central America*, 451 [note 32].

were often portrayed by the Spanish in positive ways. For instance, in March 1610, the friar Augustin de Ceballos who had lived amongst the Amerindians of Talamanca for twenty-two years, wrote of the “intelligence of three languages of the natives.” He also deemed them to be “people of reason, *well-disposed and white* who wear very well-styled cotton clothes.”<sup>352</sup> This is the earliest recorded reference of ‘*Indios blancos*’ from Talamanca. It is difficult to know exactly which tribes the friar was referring to, but it was likely the Bribri and Cabécar along with the Teribes whose territory Ceballos mentions in his report to King Phillip III.<sup>353</sup> In some accounts, the name Blancos was used to refer only to the Bribri and on other occasions only the Cabécar, but usually they were grouped together.<sup>354</sup>

## Conclusion

This period is, in some ways, the most important in Costa Rican history as it laid the foundations for the country’s less authoritarian political institutions during its colonial era. This chapter has made the argument that Costa Rica’s environmental and structural conditions were the ultimate cause in terms of producing the country’s exceptional status. One of the most important implications of its geographical location was the comparatively egalitarian political structures that existed in the area prior to arrival of Columbus and his men in 1502. The Amerindian population in Cariay demonstrated remarkable generosity towards their visitors in terms of providing them with food and friendly hospitality. This factor most likely contributed to the European explorer’s surprisingly positive descriptions of the Amerindians in Cariay in comparison to the people in Cape Gracias a Dios who they dismissed as cannibals. The Amerindians in Costa Rica also appeared not to engage in long distance trade with their counterparts in Panama and Mesoamerica. Costa Rica’s structural differences during the pre-Hispanic period had major implications for the political development of the province which was conquered later due to the intransigence of its Indigenous population. The Amerindian group which would later demonstrate the most

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<sup>352</sup> Augustin de Ceballos, ‘Provincial de la orden de San Francisco, a S.M. el Rey D. Felipe III, Enviándole Relacion de la Descripcion y Calidades de la Provincia de Costa Rica – Granada, 10 de Marzo de 1610,’ in Manuel Peralta (Ed.), *Costa Rica y Colombia de 1573 a 1881* (Madrid: Libreria de M. Murillo, 1886), 24-25, emphasis added.

<sup>353</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>354</sup> Pittier de Fábrega, ‘Folklore of the Bribri and Brunka Indians in Costa Rica,’ 1; Alejandra Boza Villarreal, ‘La Población Indígena de la Gran Talamanca: Tamaño y Ubicación - Costa Rica, 1840-1927,’ *Revista de Historia*, No. 51-52, 2005,’ 21.

disobedience was the Talamancans, the reasons for which will be explored in the next chapter.

### **Chapter 3 – Successful Indigenous Resistance in Greater Talamanca from the Great Uprising of 1709 to the Changuina Rebellions (1709-1788)**

**Talamanca is one of the most picturesque and richest natural regions of Costa Rica, without a doubt the one that plays the most dramatic role in the colonial history of the country.**

Ricardo Fernández Guardia, *Reseña Histórica de Talamanca*, 1918.<sup>355</sup>

Although analysis of the entire colonial era is beyond the scope of this thesis, this region during the eighteenth century is one of the most important periods in Costa Rican history in terms of social control. This chapter examines the successful resistance by the Talamancan Amerindians in what was known as Greater Talamanca prior to 1837 between 1709 and 1788.<sup>356</sup> Greater Talamanca comprised most of the country's southern section, stretching from the Caribbean coast in Limón to the Pacific Coast in Puntarenas.<sup>357</sup> The region represented the southern limits of the buffer zone between the indigenous groups that were influencing Central America from South and Mesoamerica. Despite repeated attempts since the sixteenth century, the Spanish never managed to conquer Talamanca. The various Indigenous groups of Talamanca demonstrated remarkable cooperation amongst themselves, unlike with the chiefdoms of the Central Valley in the sixteenth century. This was clearly demonstrated during the 'Great Uprising' of 1709 when the Talamancans and Teribes joined forces to resist Spanish colonisation.<sup>358</sup> Although not much has been written about the Changuina rebellions of 1787 and 1788, they are significant in that they were the last significant uprisings in Greater Talamanca. This chapter maintains that the major reason why the Spanish failed to properly colonise Greater Talamanca was a set of unique characteristics that stemmed from the region's natural environment. These included a lack of centralisation which was most likely a result of the absence of circumscribed lands such as those in the Central Valley. The chapter will outline the early attempts to colonise the region, the 1709 uprising as well as the colony's poverty

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<sup>355</sup> Fernández Guardia, *Reseña Histórica de Talamanca*, 6.

<sup>356</sup> Even though the term 'Talamancans' is sometimes used to collectively describe the Indigenous population in Greater Talamanca, it has more recently been employed to describe only the Bribri and Cabécar tribes; Azofeifa and Barrantes, 'Genetic Variation of the Bribri and Cabécar Amerindians from Talamanca,' 249.

<sup>357</sup> Today the canton of Talamanca consists of only the southern part of Limón province.

<sup>358</sup> In 1889, León Fernández was the first to use the term 'great uprising' (*gran sublevación*) to describe the events of 1709; Fernández, *Historia de Costa Rica Durante La Dominación Española*, 293.

at the time. It will end with a discussion of why Spain abandoned its attempts to conquer Greater Talamanca.

### **The Amerindians in Colonial Talamanca**

Descriptions of colonial Talamanca are consistent with the generally positive image that European explorers had of Costa Rica. Aside from criticisms of their disobedience, the historical documents from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries reveal positive references with regards to the dispositions of the Amerindians in the region. In 1662, Martín Cárlos de Mencos, for instance, wrote about the “good disposition that had been recognised in the Talamancan Indians.”<sup>359</sup> Comments such as these of course did not prevent the Spanish from mistreating the Amerindians in their efforts to colonise a region that was filled with a plethora of natural resources including gold. Rodrigo Arias Maldonado, the Governor of Costa Rica, described Talamanca in 1663 as “abundant with gold” and “one of the wealthiest [regions] that has been discovered in the Indies.”<sup>360</sup> In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Spanish believed that resource extraction would be relatively easy because they considered Talamanca’s Indigenous population to be ‘docile.’ In 1675, friar Juan de Matamoros, wrote of the “docility of its natives.”<sup>361</sup> Similarly, the Bishop of Nicaragua described the original inhabitants of Talamanca in 1692 as “docile, friendly and well inclined natives.”<sup>362</sup> Such perceptions may have led the Spanish to misjudge the difficulty of colonising the region.

Spanish authorities initially underestimated the resolve of the Indigenous inhabitants of Talamanca to resist colonisation. The governor of Costa Rica Juan Francisco Saenz stated in the late sixteenth century that the province of Talamanca will be an “easy conquest” with “little risk and cost.”<sup>363</sup> The confidence of the colonisers in Talamanca, however, would diminish in the next century. One factor that started affecting Spanish

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<sup>359</sup> Martín Cárlos de Mencos, ‘Auto acordado de la Audencia de Guatemala dando poderes á Rodrigo Arias Maldonado, Gobernador de Costa Rica, para la conquista y poblacion de Talamanca,’ Guatemala, 16 de Octubre de 1662,’ in Peralta (Ed.), *Costa Rica y Colombia de 1573 a 1881*, 57.

<sup>360</sup> Rodrigo Arias Maldonado cited in Fernández, *Historia de Costa Rica Durante La Dominación Española*, 221.

<sup>361</sup> Juan de Matamoros, ‘Reduccion de Talamanca. – Certificacion de Fray Juan de Matamoros, Cartago, 4 de Mayo de 1675,’ in Peralta (Ed.), *Costa Rica y Colombia de 1573 a 1881*, 66.

<sup>362</sup> Fray Nicolás, ‘Informe del obispo de Nicaragua sobre las misiones franciscanas de Talamnaca. - Año de 1692,’ in León Fernández (Ed.), *Colección de documentos para la historia de Costa-Rica*: Tomo IX (Barcelona: Imprenta Viuda de Luis Tasso, 1907), 23.

<sup>363</sup> Juan Francisco Saenz, ‘Descripcion de esta provincia’ Cartago, 20 de Mayo de 1575,’ in Peralta (Ed.), *Costa Rica y Colombia de 1573 a 1881*, 63.

colonial efforts in the late seventeenth century was the foreign interventions carried out by Mosquito Amerindians and British filibusters. In 1693, they launched a number of incursions into Talamanca which threatened the efficacy of missionary work in the region.<sup>364</sup> Another problem was the lack of *doctrineros*, who were the parish priests in Latin America charged with teaching Amerindians the principles of Christianity. In the following year, Costa Rica's Governor Manuel de Bustamante requested authorities for more "*doctrineros* to be transited to Boruca."<sup>365</sup> The latter proved to be one of the areas where the Spanish failed to conquer completely which explains why there is still an Indigenous reservation in the area today.

As was the case with the majority of Costa Rica's Indigenous communities during the colonial era, the social structures of the Talamanca Amerindians appear to have been comparatively egalitarian and democratic. As the Franciscan friar Saint Joseph explained in October 1697 with regards to the Cabécares: "They have no government or obedience to chiefs, or mayors; they just do what they want and what is good for them."<sup>366</sup> He further commented that the Cabécares are "more rational, of better build" as well as brave.<sup>367</sup> Apart from Rousseauian-type liberals is unusual to hear such a positive assessment about people living in stateless societies. Another account also concluded that the "Indians that inhabit [Boruca] are without a person to administer justice and maintain them in the good education and politics they should observe."<sup>368</sup> Understandably, there were no legal systems in the Indigenous political systems of Greater Talamanca.

A corollary of the above observations is that the Indigenous Talamancans also did not concentrate resources amongst a privileged elite. The Franciscan friars Melchor López and Antonio Margil observed, "The natives of all these nations, are usually docile and very affectionate: their way of living among themselves is very peaceful and charitable, because

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<sup>364</sup> Fernández Guardia, *History of the Discovery and Conquest of Costa Rica*, 372. Conflict between the two sides continued until 1763 when Costa Rica's governor accepted the Mosquito Amerindians' peace offer; Daniel Mendiola, 'The Founding and Fracturing of the Mosquito Confederation: Zambos, Tawiras, and New Archival Evidence, 1711–1791,' *Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 99, No. 4, 2019, 638.

<sup>365</sup> Manuel de Bustamante y Vivero cited in Fernández, *Historia de Costa Rica Durante La Dominación Española*, 278-279.

<sup>366</sup> Francisco de San Joseph, 'Informe de Fray Francisco de San Joseph, misionero apostólico, al Señor Presidente de la Audencia de Guatemala, sobre las reducciones de Talamanca,' Guatemala, 18 de Octubre de 1697,' in Peralta (Ed.), *Costa Rica y Colombia de 1573 a 1881*, 87.

<sup>367</sup> *Ibid.*, 88-89.

<sup>368</sup> Diego de Herrera Campuzano, 'Nombramiento de Teniente de Gobernador de Boruca. - Año de 1704,' in León Fernández (Ed.) *Colección de documentos para la historia de Costa-Rica*: Tomo V (Paris: Imprenta Viuda de Luis Tasso, 1886), 428.

the little they have everything belongs to everyone.”<sup>369</sup> Even when some Spanish observers were attempting to criticise the Indigenous Talamancans, they inadvertently praise through condemnation. For instance, the former acting governor of Costa Rica Luis Diez Navarro wrote of “the great freedom with which they have always lived, the evil inclinations that they have” such as their “disgust of domestic subordination” as well as with the “regular and Christian doctrine and life, which they have always demonstrated.”<sup>370</sup> Such criticism actually places the Amerindians in a positive light by portraying them as demonstrating a disdain for authoritarianism. Diez Navarro’s statement is common of the criticism levelled against Indigenous Talamancans which primarily focused on their lack of obedience to Spanish statesmen.

The region of Talamanca could be described as having the most democratic or egalitarian political units in Costa Rica during the colonial era. Although the term ‘democracy’ is not typically associated with Indigenous political systems, there are social scientists who maintain that democracy existed in such societies. Anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski has argued, it is “clear from the facts briefly surveyed that the cultural constitution of humanity in its early stages of development was founded on principles closely akin to what we call cultural democracy.” He added that centralised social “control hardly occurs under those conditions of life.”<sup>371</sup> There are also political scientists who maintain that some Indigenous societies were proto-democratic which they refer to as ‘indigenous democracies.’<sup>372</sup> In this view, the development of representative democracy during the nineteenth century could be said to have been a re-democratisation after centuries of authoritarianism imposed after the destruction of Indigenous democracy in Costa Rica.

Perhaps the area where this can be most aptly demonstrated is military affairs given that it is typically the most authoritarian political institution in the modern state structure. The military structure of the Indigenous Talamancans most likely functioned in a similar way to the anarchist militias during the Spanish Civil War in the sense that they were spontaneously created as opposed to being institutionalised militaries. There appeared

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<sup>369</sup> Melchor López y Antonio Margil, ‘Carta de fray Melchor López y fray Antonio Margil á D. Antonio de Barrios.-Año de 1690,’ in Fernández (Ed.), *Colección de documentos para la historia de Costa-Rica*: Tomo IX, 15.

<sup>370</sup> Luis Diez Navarro, ‘Misiones de Talamanca.- Informe del ingeniero Don Luis Diez Navarro - Audencia de Guatemala,’ Guatemala, 4 de Abril de 1771,’ in Peralta (Ed.), *Costa Rica y Colombia de 1573 a 1881*, 193, emphasis added.

<sup>371</sup> Bronislaw Malinowski, *Freedom and Civilization* (New York: Roy Publishers, 1944), 231-232.

<sup>372</sup> Jeanet Bentzen et al., ‘Power and Persistence: The Indigenous Roots of Representative Democracy,’ *The Economic Journal*, Vol. 129, 2017.



to have been no military discipline amongst the Talamancans according to the Governor of Nicaragua, Torivio de Cosío, who observed: “These barbarians are not well versed in military rules, they fearlessly throw themselves confident in the crowd.”<sup>373</sup> This is not surprising given what we know about the nature of the political systems of Talamanca at that time.<sup>374</sup> In 1688, a friar named Francisco Vázquez argued that Costa Rica is a province where the Amerindians “have defended and rejected the Spaniards and conquerors with more valour than any other nation in the Indies.”<sup>375</sup> This would become especially true in the early eighteenth century.

### **The Great Uprising of 1709 and its Aftermath**

In the early eighteenth century, the colonisation of Talamanca mission entered a new phase which intensified the spiritual conquest after earlier attempts to control the region failed. In order to protect the individuals who were on the front line of this spiritual mission, the Spanish developed a strategy of establishing a city complete with a garrison, federal funding and the establishment of families for the colonial project. The clergy even learned Indigenous languages in order to better spread the Gospel. In January 1709, the Franciscan friar Pablo de Rebullida and a fellow religious cleric commented that “they have indoctrinated the Indians in their own languages.”<sup>376</sup> On July 20<sup>th</sup>, 1709, King Phillip V (1700-1746) passed a royal decree that missionary protection would be of paramount importance in the colonies. In response to the decree, it was decided by the local authorities that, in order for the Franciscans to properly conduct their missionary work, it was necessary to forcibly ‘reduce’ the Indigenous population of Talamanca. This policy understandably created resentment and resistance amongst the Amerindians. The final spark which launched a rebellion was the discovery of several letters being sent to Cartago

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<sup>373</sup> Toribio de Cosío, ‘Fragmentos de autos hechos con motivo de la sublevacion de la Talamanca y de su castigo. - Años de 1709 y 1710,’ in Fernández, (Ed.), *Colección de documentos para la historia de Costa-Rica*: Tomo IX, 73.

<sup>374</sup> Perhaps the closest modern example to a military structure similar to that of the Indigenous Talamancans. George Orwell, who was made a corporal in the Spanish militias, was initially irritated about the “fact you often had to argue for five minutes before you could get an order obeyed,” but soon came to admire the structure of these militias. He reasoned that “it also takes time to drill a man into an automaton on the barrack-square;” George Orwell, ‘Homage to Catalonia,’ in Peter Davidson (Ed.), *Orwell in Spain* (London: Penguin, 2001), 49-51.

<sup>375</sup> Cited in Fernández Guardia, *Reseña Histórica de Talamanca*, 7.

<sup>376</sup> Antonio de Andrade y Pablo de Rebullida, ‘Informe de Fray Antonio de Andrade y Pablo de Rebullida sobre los progresos de las misiones. – Descripción é itinerario de Talamanca, Cartago de Enero de 1709,’ in Peralta (Ed.), *Costa Rica y Colombia de 1573 a 1881*, 106.

by a member of the Bribri tribe named Pablo Presbere. These letters reportedly contained plans by the Spanish to relocate the Talamancans. However, the letters no longer exist so it is difficult to prove this claim. In any case, the official documents reveal that this incident led to a widespread belief amongst Talamancans that the Spanish would soon arrive to take tribal members from their communities.<sup>377</sup>

On the 28<sup>th</sup> of September 1709 the Talamancans and Teribes initiated the largest Indigenous rebellion in Costa Rican history in response to the ‘reduction’ of their people. The rebels killed 10 soldiers as well as the friars Pablo de Rebullida and Antonio de Zamora. The wife of one of the soldiers was also killed during the rebellion.<sup>378</sup> The rebels proceeded to burn down the municipal building, the convents and fourteen of the churches. The territory of the Bribri contained the only two churches which were not destroyed.<sup>379</sup> Although the Bribri and Cabécar tribes were the principal combatants in the uprising, there are some accounts which state that the Teribe peoples were also involved in the Great Uprising.<sup>380</sup> In any case, there was clearly greater cooperation between the Indigenous tribes of Talamanca than the Huetar chiefdoms in the early 1560s.

Colonial authorities prepared to punish those who participated in the rebellion. The Governor of Costa Rica, Lorenzo Antonio de Granda y Balbín, ordered 75 firearms, 4000 bullets, gunpowder, 100 knives, along with 4000 pesos worth of money. In February 1710, an entourage of 120 men led by the governor left for Talamanca to punish the Indigenous rebels.<sup>381</sup> Of particular concern was the apprehension of two individuals. The first was Pedro Comesala who was a rebel leader of the Cabécar tribe who absconded into the mountains before the Spanish arrived. The other was Pablo Presbere from the Bribri tribe who was ultimately captured. In official trial documents, Presbere was called the ‘cacique of Suinse.’<sup>382</sup> Although this description of Presbere is repeated in accounts of the Great Uprising, there is no evidence to suggest that he was actually a chief. When the

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<sup>377</sup> Lorenzo Antonio de Granda y Balbín, ‘Causa criminal contra Pablo Presbere, cacique de Suinse, y otros indios de la Talamanca, por la muerte de fray Pablo de Rebullida, fray Juan Antonio de Zamora, diez soldados, una mujer, y un niño.-Año de 1710,’ in Fernández (Ed.) *Colección de documentos para la historia de Costa-Rica*: Tomo IX, 130.

<sup>378</sup> Lorenzo Antonio de Granda y Balbín, ‘Fragmentos de autos hechos con motivo de la sublevacion de la Talamanca y de su castigo. – Años de 1709 y 1710,’ in Fernández (Ed.), *Colección de documentos para la historia de Costa-Rica*: Tomo IX, 76.

<sup>379</sup> Fernández Guardia, *History of the Discovery and Conquest of Costa Rica*, 381.

<sup>380</sup> Antonio de Andrade, ‘Fray Antonio de Andrade, Misionero Apostólico, á la Real Audencia de Guatemala, dá Cuenta de la Rebelion desde los Urianamas Hasta la Isla de Tójar (Isla de Colon) - Cartago, 21 de Octubre de 1709,’ in Peralta (Ed.), *Costa Rica y Colombia de 1573 a 1881*, 119.

<sup>381</sup> Ibid., 295.

<sup>382</sup> Antonio de Granda y Balbín, ‘Causa criminal contra Pablo Presbere.’

Spanish used the term ‘cacique,’ they were not always referring to a chief in the sense it is typically used in contemporary anthropology.<sup>383</sup> Sometimes they were describing the leaders who merely had charismatic authority. However, given that the Spanish did not come from a society in which leaders had no political authority, they understandably sought to identify leaders in tribes for analytical and strategic purposes. Indeed, research from recent decades has indicated that Presbere was actually a shaman and not a warrior.<sup>384</sup>

Presbere was subsequently taken to Cartago and told he was subject to God’s ‘royal justice’ which rewards goodness and punishes evil. In light of this, he was asked how he could commit the “grave and awful crime of conspiring with the Indians of the nations that were reduced to the yoke of our saintly Catholic faith by way of evangelist ministers.”<sup>385</sup> It is not clear whether Pablo Presbere perpetrated any violence personally. Nevertheless, according to the Spanish administrators, Presbere was guilty of encouraging rebellion which led to the death of the friars and soldiers. The same applied to his alleged ‘co-conspirators’ Melchor Daparí, Pedro Bettuquí, Balthasar, Antonio Iruscara and Pedro Bocrí. The Master of Arms José Casasola and several of the officials who had travelled to Talamanca after the rebellion had been quelled, concluded that Presbere was primarily responsible for the uprising.

As part of Presbere’s punishment, the Costa Rican government ordered the capture of approximately 700 Amerindians who were forced to march the two-week journey from Talamanca to Cartago with only an estimated 500 of them actually making the journey to the capital alive.<sup>386</sup> The greatest punishment was naturally reserved for Presbere himself. On 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1710, Presbere was sentenced to the following gruesome punishment by the governor:

I do hereby condemn, the said Pablo Presbere for that which has been proven against him despite the denial contained in his confession, to be taken from the room where I have him prisoner and placed on a pack mule and led through the streets of this city while a crier declares and describes his crimes. Outside the walls of this city [Cartago], he shall be tied to a post and have his eyes gouged out, in military mode and then shot by crossbow, since we are without an executioner who knows how to apply the garrote. Upon his death, he shall have his head cut off and placed high upon the post so that all might see it.<sup>387</sup>

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<sup>383</sup> Francisco Corrales Ulloa, ‘Arqueología y Etnohistoria de los Grupos Indígenas del Sureste de Costa Rica,’ *Revista del Archivo Nacional*, Vol. 70, 2006, 159.

<sup>384</sup> Solórzano, ‘La Rebelión de los Indígenas Bajo la Dirección de Pablo Presbere,’ 141.

<sup>385</sup> Antonio de Granda y Balbín, ‘Causa criminal contra Pablo Presbere,’ 130.

<sup>386</sup> Fernández, *Historia de Costa Rica Durante La Dominación Española*, 295.

<sup>387</sup> Antonio de Granda y Balbín, ‘Causa criminal contra Pablo Presbere,’ 138.

In the eyes of the colonial authorities, it was clearly important that at least one Indigenous leader be made an example of in order to demonstrate the consequences for disobedience.

The tenacity of the Amerindians was not the only problem facing the central government in Cartago. Another issue that was facing the government was a lack of funds in the state's coffers. According to Governor Granda y Balbín, his province was facing fiscal problems one month before the Great Uprising. In August 1709, he wrote that the province was in "such a calamitous state that ... "[m]any times I do not have money to buy meat."<sup>388</sup> A decade later, Costa Rican Governor Diego de la Haya Fernandez provided an assessment of the province which he described as the "poorest and most miserable of all of the Americas." He wrote that he was not "able to discover where the derivation and title of Costa Rica" had come from, given it was "so extremely poor."<sup>389</sup> Costa Rica (Rich Coast) was named as such because the *conquistadores* mistakenly believed it to be a Central American *El Dorado*. The province's name was the source of much ironic humour during the colonial period along the lines that it should have been called *Costa Pobre* (Poor Coast) instead.

Poverty during the colonial era affected the way in which slavery developed in the province. The purchase of slaves in Costa Rica reached its zenith in 1710 in the country before it reduced by approximately one third over the following three decades. After consulting the official records, historian Russell Lohse found there were officially only 1620 chattel slaves purchased in Costa Rica between 1607 and 1750.<sup>390</sup> The largest estimate was given by Alvarado Solar and ranged somewhere between 2500 and 3000 (based on the unlikely assumption that every Spaniard owned slaves).<sup>391</sup> Colonists in the relatively poor province often struggled to afford slaves, especially when competing with wealthy Peruvians who could outbid Costa Ricans due to their considerable mineral wealth. Despite the fact that "most Spaniards did not possess the capital to procure large numbers of African slaves," those who could afford them utilised them in "virtually all the economic activities they undertook in Costa Rica." Nevertheless, the "variable labor requirements of the small-scale Costa Rican economy created a slaveholding system markedly different from those

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<sup>388</sup> Antonio de Granda y Balbín cited in Fernández, *Historia de Costa Rica Durante La Dominación Española*, 293.

<sup>389</sup> Diego de la Haya Fernández cited in *Ibid.*, 317.

<sup>390</sup> Russell Lohse, *Africans into Creoles: Slavery, Ethnicity, and Identity in Colonial Costa Rica* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2014), 138, 51.

<sup>391</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

in other New World colonies.”<sup>392</sup> Given that cacao production did not require a great deal of manual labour, slaves were primarily purchased for domestic labour which did not require the same level of social control as large plantations.<sup>393</sup> Evidently, poverty would have also affected the capacity of individuals to keep chattel slaves in bondage.

A lack of economic capital also affected the colonial government’s ability to conquer the Talamancan region via force. For the first time, the Spanish appeared to demonstrate apprehension with regards to expanding their settlements in Talamanca. In 1710, Torivio de Cosío wrote with regards to the Indigenous inhabitants of Boruca: “We must fear that it will be glorious for them to triumph and shake the yoke of the religion that is so heavy” and return to the “barbarities of their pagan world that they love so much.”<sup>394</sup> Nevertheless, the desires on the part of the Spanish authorities to conquer Talamanca continued and several atrocities were committed following the events of 1709. In 1711, the Bishop of Nicaragua named Benito Garret and Arlobi wrote that the Spanish were responsible for committing ‘unspeakable’ cruelties in the region.<sup>395</sup> Shortly after the Great Uprising, Governor Granda y Balbín wrote of the “desire that I have in the conclusion of this conquest.”<sup>396</sup> Similarly, a 1714 report to the King on the Guaymí (or Ngäbe) Amerindians explained “how very important it is to reduce these Indians to a rational life.”<sup>397</sup> The report concluded that the Guaymis are “docile and inclined to the Spaniards and who will be easy to reduce.” The task was made somewhat difficult by the fact that “on the occasion of the slightest punishment or reprehension of the priests and justices, they flee to the mountain.”<sup>398</sup> The Guaymí peoples were separated by the Costa Rican-Panama border but today primarily live in Panama.

There is no doubt that the Great Uprising impressed on the Spanish the difficulty of their task ahead in terms of colonising Talamanca. The efforts of Spanish authorities were not only hampered by Indigenous resistance, harsh terrain and insufficient funds but also by British interference. In 1736, Don Pedro de Rivera, the President of the Kingdom of

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<sup>392</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>393</sup> Tatiana Lobo, *Parientes en Venta: La Esclavitud en la Colonia* (San José: Editorial Costa Rica, 2016).

<sup>394</sup> Toribio de Cosío, ‘Fragmentos de autos hechos con motivo de la sublevacion de la Talamanca y de su castigo,’ 72.

<sup>395</sup> Benito Garret y Arlobi, ‘Causas del Descontento y de la rebellion de los indios,’ Leon de Nicaragua, 1 de Noviembre de 1711, in Peralta (Ed.), *Costa Rica y Colombia de 1573 a 1881*, 127.

<sup>396</sup> Antonio de Granda y Balbín, ‘Fragmentos de autos hechos con motivo de la sublevacion de la Talamanca y de su castigo,’ 107.

<sup>397</sup> Bernado Venaguera de la Escalera, ‘Indios del Guaymí,’ *Complementario Colonial - No. 4964*, ANCR, Julio 5 de 1714, 13. The Ngäbe Amerindians or Guaymíes as the Spanish dubbed them, are an Indigenous group which currently reside on the surrounding border areas of Costa Rica and Panama.

<sup>398</sup> Ibid.

Guatemala wrote a report about the inconvenience of reducing Talamanca through force due to the uprising of newly converted Amerindians to the Christian faith.<sup>399</sup> Rivera commented that there are “nations of Mediterranean Gentiles that can be reduced with less fatigue” than the tribes of Talamanca.<sup>400</sup> It is clear that the Spanish had previously underestimated the determination of the Indigenous groups in the region. The administrators also had to deal with the English who were sent by Governor of Jamaica Edward Trawney in order instigate a policy of “stirring up the Indians” against the Spanish on the Caribbean coast.<sup>401</sup> In a later memoir, English military officer Robert Hodgson observed that the Mosquito Amerindians, who were under “complete submission to the English,” had an “inveterate hatred of the Spanish.”<sup>402</sup> In a 1740 letter, Hodgson wrote that there are seven tribes he was aware of including “the Blancos, the Sienobos, Tribees, Sangunas, Telaskees, and Cocos” as well as the ‘Valientes.’ The last of these tribe means ‘brave’ in Spanish which was Hodgson’s exact assessment of the character of the Amerindians living on Costa Rica’s Caribbean coast.<sup>403</sup>

By the mid-eighteenth century, the disobedience of the Indigenous Talamancans were continuing to pose problems for the Spanish. In 1749, Friar Francisco Javier Ortiz, the Apostolic Commissar of Missions at the Colleges of the Propagation of the Faith, complained about the Amerindians’ “fatal vices that prevent the achievement of their reduction.”<sup>404</sup> After noticing their reluctance to move to “comfortable places for congregation in villages,” the authorities responded by sending soldiers into the mountains and forcibly removing hundreds of Amerindians from their mountain dwellings.<sup>405</sup> Such refusal to willingly accept the teachings of the Christians led the King of Spain Carlos III to comment: “The Gospel could spread *without* armed force,” but “the Church often resorted to the arms of the Catholic princes to oblige the heathens to hear the word of

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<sup>399</sup> Pedro de Rivera, ‘Don Pedro de Rivera, Presidente de la Audencia de Guatemala, á S. M. Rey sobre la situación de Talamanca é inconveniencia de reducirla por las armas, como lo pretenden los misioneros,’ Guatemala, 10 de Septiembre de 1736, in Peralta (Ed.), *Costa Rica y Colombia de 1573 a 1881*, 134.

<sup>400</sup> Ibid., 136-137.

<sup>401</sup> Cited in Ephraim George Squier, *The States of Central America: Their Geography, Topography, Climate, Population, Resources, Productions, Commerce, Political Organization, Aborigines Etc., Etc.*, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1858), 747.

<sup>402</sup> Robert Hodgson, ‘La Costa de Mosquitos. – Memoria del Coronel Roberto Hodgson al Virrey de Santa Fé,’ Cartagena de Indias, 6 de Marzo de 1787, in Peralta (Ed.), *Costa Rica y Colombia de 1573 a 1881*, 222.

<sup>403</sup> Cited in Squier, *The States of Central America*, 746.

<sup>404</sup> Francisco Javier Ortiz, ‘Memorial de Fray Francisco Javier Ortiz de Fray Salvador de Cavanillas – No. 4,’ *Complementario Colonial - No. 5034*, ANCR, 1749, 9.

<sup>405</sup> Ibid.

God.”<sup>406</sup> However indoctrination techniques were quite unsophisticated at that stage. Therefore, violence was employed as the standard method of social control at the time.

Another problem for the Spanish was the mixture of the Zambos and the Mosquito Amerindians who created what became known as the Zambos Mosquitos. Fernández Guardia later dismissed the Zambos Mosquitos as a “perverse and fierce race that became the scourge of the small Spanish estates of the Atlantic coast of the kingdom of Guatemala.”<sup>407</sup> Javier Ortiz surmised that the Zambos Mosquitos had been feeling anxiety due to the presence of the English on the Mosquito Coast. Therefore, they decided to move south where they caused considerable damages to the Spaniards in Talamanca.<sup>408</sup> The missionaries believed that it was necessary to separate the disobedient tribes with those that were more submissive in order to conduct their religious education more easily.<sup>409</sup> Nevertheless, missionary work proved to be a difficult task in Greater Talamanca in general.

In 1761, there was another uprising in the town of Cabagra which is located in the south-central area of the country near Buenos Aires. The subsequent destruction of this Spanish settlement represents another example of successful Indigenous resistance in Talamanca. Nonetheless, this resistance did not deter Spanish efforts to extract resources in the region. The collection of gold continued to be a priority for the Spanish authorities. As a 1775 government report on Talamanca noted, there is “so much gold, without the necessity of working in mines.”<sup>410</sup> The author of the report was referring to placer gold which was obtained by sifting through the soil of the province’s rivers.

By the late eighteenth century, Spanish military strategists began to demonstrate considerable caution in Talamanca. In a 1786 letter written in London to the Count of Floridablanca, the Marquis of the Field recommended that, along with the “ports that are occupied and populations that are being formed,” it would be advisable to “travel along the coast from cape to cape on competent warships” in order to repel any adventurers wishing to settle in the region. However, it is important that “everything is executed without causing annoyance or giving distrust to the Indians.”<sup>411</sup> In the letter, we find another list of the seven

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<sup>406</sup> Cited in David Weber, *Bárbaros: Spaniards and Their Savages in the Age of Enlightenment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 95, emphasis in original.

<sup>407</sup> Fernández Guardia, *Reseña Histórica de Talamanca*, 98-99.

<sup>408</sup> Francisco Javier Ortiz, ‘Memorial de Fray Francisco Javier Ortiz de Fray Salvador de Cavanillas – No. 2,’ *Complementario Colonial* - No. 5034, ANCR, 1754, 3.

<sup>409</sup> Fernández Guardia, *History of the Discovery and Conquest of Costa Rica*, 373.

<sup>410</sup> Felix Francisco Befarau, ‘Informe del gob. de Veragua, D. Felix Fran. Befarau - Sobre Talamanca – No. 1,’ *Complementario Colonial* - No. 5034, ANCR, 1775, 1.

<sup>411</sup> Marqués del Campo, ‘El Marqués del Campo, Ministro de S.M.C. en Londres, al Conde de Floridablanca,’ Londres, 24 de Octubre de 1786, in Peralta (Ed.), *Costa Rica y Colombia de 1573 a 1881*, 235.

Indigenous tribes of the region which stretched “from Punta Blanca to Escudo de Veragua, which are even more numerous and are called the *Blancos*, *Shanganas*, *Shalabas*, *Teluskies*, *Teribes*, *Bocatores* and *Wymeas* or *Valientes*.” The author added, “Six of these tribes live in a state of barbarity” however, the author does not mention which were the six tribes that were barbarous in his estimation.<sup>412</sup> In the following year, an anonymous observer who travelled Central America’s Atlantic coast from Panama to Honduras provided another reference to ‘*Indios blancos*:’ “There are 16 leagues from the *Laguna de Chiriquí Viejo* until *Punta de Carret*, to the Rumbo of the North. At this point there is a nation that they call *White Indians*, which are the Talamancans.”<sup>413</sup> Analysis of this language is important as it often has often had serious political implications due to Spanish attitudes on race.

In comparison to the surprisingly positive language that is generally used to describe the Blancos, the language becomes decidedly negative when it comes to their descriptions of people with darker skin pigmentation. Along with Spaniards, this point also applied to other Europeans who entered Central America for colonisation purposes. Take for example, Robert Hodgson’s 1787 comment that the coastal lands of Talamanca are surrounded by water that “abounds in fish and especially turtles, whose interest attracts people of bad note, who go from Jamaica in small boats.”<sup>414</sup> One may wonder why these Jamaicans, who were most likely former slaves attempting to make a living selling turtle eggs, were considered to be of such ‘bad note.’ At that time, many well-educated Europeans employed pseudo-science surrounding race in order to justify a hierarchal division of labour. In comparison to the work advocated by the Amerindians, some Europeans argued that Africans were better workers than Europeans in tropical climates and advocated they provide the labour due to the sensitivity of light-skinned individuals in such environments.<sup>415</sup>

Others believed that Europeans were superior workers to Amerindians. For instance, in 1653, the Jesuit Priest Bernabé Cobo claimed that Amerindians were “phlegmatic by nature, and since natural phlegm makes the substance of one’s limbs soft and moist, their flesh is very soft and delicate. As consequence, they tire easily and are

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<sup>412</sup> Ibid., 237-238.

<sup>413</sup> Anonymous, ‘Relación de la Costa Desde Portobelo Hasta Omoa – Año de ¿1787?’ in León Fernández (Ed.) *Colección de Documentos para la Historia de Costa Rica: Tomo X* (Barcelona: Imprenta Viuda de Luis Tasso, 1907), 235, emphasis in original.

<sup>414</sup> Hodgson, ‘La Costa de Mosquitos. – Memoria del Coronel Roberto Hodgson al Virrey de Santa Fé,’ 220.

<sup>415</sup> In the words of the Marquis of the Field with regards to the Mosquito region of Costa Rica’s Caribbean coast: “It will be necessary to do important works such as preparing suitable grounds in which forts would have to be erected and they must be executed by blacks, because that climate does not favor Europeans for fatigue;” Marqués del Campo, ‘El Marqués del Campo,’ 236.



incapable of working as hard as the Europeans. In Spain a single man does more work in his fields than four Indians will do here.”<sup>416</sup> As this example shows, racist justifications are notoriously flexible in order to fit with desired political goals. Whilst there is some truth to the notion that Caucasians can be sensitive to warm climates in accordance with the theory of natural selection, this does not provide a justification for burdening those with more pigment in their skin with the most arduous forms of labour. Contrary to any biological advantages, a socially constructed hierarchy helps account for the more coercive methods of control used by Europeans towards descendants on the Caribbean of Central America in comparison to Talamanca’s Indigenous population.

It appears that by this time the techniques of social control towards the Talamancan Amerindians were becoming more sophisticated. This was demonstrated on March 19th, 1787, when the governor “ordered two intelligence spies to watch their movements.” Two months later, on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of May, there was a major uprising in Talamanca led by the Changuina Amerindians in retaliation to the encroachment of their territory by the Spanish.<sup>417</sup> In the following year, the Changuinas launched another rebellion in the town of Bugava which also occurred in response to their attempted reduction.<sup>418</sup> The Governor of Veragua documented the deaths of colonists from the ‘sacrilegious executions’ that were perpetrated by the Indigenous population in Bugava during the uprising.<sup>419</sup> The Changuina rebellions of 1787 and 1788, which were eventually squashed by Spanish authorities, represented the last major uprisings in Greater Talamanca. After that time, the documents do not reveal any major conflicts in the region. Given the obdurate nature of the Amerindians living there, the authorities largely abandoned the attempts to subjugate the Indigenous inhabitants of Talamanca.

### **‘Hearts and Minds’**

The attempts at conquest were gradually replaced by a greater attempt to win the ‘hearts and minds’ of the Indigenous Talamancans. As the Marquis of the Field explained,

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<sup>416</sup> Bernabé Cobo, *History of the Inca Empire: An Account of the Indians’ Customs and Their Origin, Together with a Treatise on Inca Legends, History, and Social Institutions* (Translated and edited by Roland Hamilton) (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979), 17.

<sup>417</sup> José Perié y Barros, ‘Sobre la Sublevación de los Indios Changuinas,’ 22 Mayo 1787, *Complementario Colonial - No. 5145*, ANCR, 1787, 2.

<sup>418</sup> Juan Dominguez de la Escoba, ‘Sobre la Sublevación de los Indios Changuinas contra el pueblo de Bugava y lo que se ha pacificado en servicio del Rey,’ 8 de Septiembre de 1788, *Complementario Colonial - No. 5146*, San José, ANCR, 1788.

<sup>419</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

“Through the education of their children, the officer who directs them can cultivate them for whatever purpose” and “as the elderly Indians die, it will become increasingly practicable to keep them in peace and quiet.”<sup>420</sup> William Gabb was astonished with what he observed in Talamanca regarding the parental training of youth. Gabb recalls an incident of a young boy who flagrantly disobeyed “some trifling command of his mother, and she seemed to have no power to enforce order.”<sup>421</sup> The educational efforts of Spanish authorities also extended military indoctrination. The Board of the Fortifications of the Indies wrote in September 1803 that the “love for military service will be forged in those natives for when the time comes, they can form proportionate militias in their neighborhood.”<sup>422</sup> This argument is consistent with the argument regarding the necessity of indoctrination in inculcating military discipline in individuals.

In the early nineteenth century, Spanish authorities continued to advocate using force to subjugate the Amerindians in Talamanca. In October 1803, the Board of the Fortifications wrote of the need to “domesticate and exterminate the brave Indians.”<sup>423</sup> At the same time, they also advocated a policy of

great softness to win the hearts of the wandering savages, without whose prior disposition they should not be tried to convert to our true religion, as dictated by human and Christian prudence; and so that these first settlers do not experience opposition on the part of the Indians in the establishments that they are forming, it is convenient that there is no troop guard that alarms and alters them, and discovers that they will be established by the disposition of the Government.<sup>424</sup>

The country was clearly entering a new phase in its history in which the old colonial project of conquest and subjugation of Indigenous peoples could no longer be politically justified. Spain’s failure to colonise Talamanca represents the greatest victory for Costa Rica’s Indigenous population during the colonial period. Even though they were often mistreated, the Amerindians in Costa Rica were left alone to a larger extent and not subjected to the same level of violence as their counterparts experienced elsewhere in Central America. After centuries of uprisings and failed conquests, the new Costa Rican state began to

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<sup>420</sup> Marqués del Campo, ‘El Marqués del Campo,’ 238-239.

<sup>421</sup> Gabb, *On the Indian Tribes and Languages of Costa Rica*, 495.

<sup>422</sup> Junta de Fortificaciones de Indias, ‘Informes que la Junta de Fortificaciones de Indias dá al Rey sobre las representaciones del Gobernador de San Andrés, Don Tomás O’Neill, sobre la costa de Mosquitos y agregacion al Virreinato de Santa Fé,’ Madrid, 2 de Septiembre de 1803 in Peralta (Ed.), *Costa Rica y Colombia de 1573 a 1881*, 267.

<sup>423</sup> Junta de Fortificaciones de Indias, ‘Segundo informe de la Junta de Fortificaciones sobre el mismo asunto,’ Madrid, 21 de Octubre de 1803, *Costa Rica y Colombia de 1573 a 1881*, 274.

<sup>424</sup> *Ibid.*, 276-277.

recognise the Indigenous communal ownership of Talamanca. Nevertheless, there was a later attempt to centralise power by creating the position of the King of Talamanca which the Costa Rican government established via executive decree on July 25<sup>th</sup>, 1867 and lasted a little over four decades. This position, however, appears to have been ceremonial as it did not fundamentally change the organisation of the political groups in the region.

It was not until the development of the banana industry in Limón during the 1870s that the Talamancans would begin to lose major sections of their land. A new, more informal approach towards gaining more control in Talamanca was the promotion of popular education. The transition to less blatant methods to control via education undermined the region's Indigenous political systems to a certain extent. Despite this reality, the tribes of Talamanca in the region have essentially continued to maintain their traditional way of life. As Fernández Guardia observed in the early twentieth century, "The descendants of the dreaded warriors of former times have become inoffensive Costa Rican citizens. But in spite of every effort they are still rebellious in spirit, as are all indomitable races that refuse to accept civilization."<sup>425</sup> Even as late as 1970, the majority of Greater Talamanca was still not occupied by non-Indigenous peoples.<sup>426</sup>

Due to his role in the Great Uprising of 1709, Pablo Presbere is still a highly revered martyr by contemporary Indigenous Talamancans. During a commemorative discussion regarding the death of the Presbere which was organised by the country's Legislative Assembly in 1997, one Indigenous representative named Reynaldo González said that the modern Indigenous inhabitants of Talamanca can say "with great pride" that the region was "never conquered."<sup>427</sup> Gonzalez considered Pablo Presbere to be their hero and the "defender of the freedom of the original peoples."<sup>428</sup> Dulcelina Páez Mayorga, another representative of the Indigenous community stated: "We, the indigenous people, within our communities have always had freedom and wish to maintain that freedom for the rest of our lives."<sup>429</sup> Pablo Presbere is still revered to this day, even outside the Indigenous communities. For instance, the President of the Costa Rican Legislative Assembly Walter

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<sup>425</sup> Fernández Guardia, *History of the Discovery and Conquest of Costa Rica*, 401.

<sup>426</sup> Silvia Elena Molina Vargas y Eduardo González Ayala, *Historia de Costa Rica* (San José: Editorial Universidad de Costa Rica, 2015), page 3 of appendix.

<sup>427</sup> Reynaldo González cited in Asamblea Legislativa de la República de Costa Rica, *Conmemoración del fallecimiento de Pablo Presbere*, 9.

<sup>428</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>429</sup> Dulcelina Páez Mayorga cited in Ibid., 19.

Coto Molina praised the “libertarian spirit” displayed by Presbere.<sup>430</sup> The Indigenous peoples of the current era continue to demonstrate such a spirit to this day.

### **Accounting for Spain’s Failure in Talamanca**

Environmental factors and the determined resistance of the Amerindians are usually cited by historians as the explanation of Spain’s failure in Talamanca. From Puerto Limón to San José province has been described by Gabb as a swamp, the majority of which is “under water to the point where the rail-road crosses the Matina river.”<sup>431</sup> This description was evidently made during the rainy season which lasts for approximately two thirds of the year. Gabb noted that the “heavy rains of the Atlantic seaboard produce a luxuriance of vegetation that may well nigh be called unconquerable.” For this reason, the Talamancans had a “powerful ally in the forces of nature, in resisting the civilizing efforts of the Spanish invaders.”<sup>432</sup> On a general level, Darwin made a similar argument: “When civilized nations come into contact with barbarians the struggle is short, except where a deadly climate gives it aid to the native race.”<sup>433</sup> Anyone who has travelled to Talamanca cannot fail to observe the jungle-like terrain that still exists in much of the region.

Whilst some authors have connected the Talamancans comparatively resistance with region’s environmental conditions, they usually do not analyse these factors beyond the first level of approximation. Fernández Guardia identified the primary reasons for failure in Talamanca as harsh environmental conditions, the ‘tenacious resistance’ of the Indigenous Talamancans as well as bad luck.<sup>434</sup> He also contended that the military was the “least suitable” institution for colonising the region in the “spirit of self-denial, kind patience and great disinterestedness” which were necessary conditions “so as not to become tyrants and exploiters.”<sup>435</sup> Manuel Peralta astutely observed that the Talamancans successful resistance is reminiscent of the Auracans in Chile.<sup>436</sup> Also known as the Mapuches, these Indigenous peoples fought a protracted war against the Spanish in the sixteenth century which delayed colonisation of the region for more than a century. It is

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<sup>430</sup> Wálter Coto Molina cited in *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>431</sup> William Gabb, ‘On the Geology of the Republic of Costa Rica,’ *Revista Geológica de América Central*, Vol. 37, 2007, 112.

<sup>432</sup> Gabb, *On the Indian Tribes and Languages of Costa Rica*, 486.

<sup>433</sup> Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex (Revised and Augmented Edition)* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1876), 182.

<sup>434</sup> Fernandez Guardia, *Reseña Histórica de Talamanca*, 6.

<sup>435</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

<sup>436</sup> Peralta, *Costa Rica*, 3.

noteworthy that in southern Chile there are also reports of '*Indios blancos*.' In the latter part of the nineteenth century, a Jesuit priest named Juan Ignacio Molina visited the town of Boroa where he encountered Indigenous individuals who were "white and blond without being mixed."<sup>437</sup> Further down from Araucania, there are more reports of '*Indios blancos*' stretching back to the seventeenth century. Diego de Rosales for instance, one of the early chroniclers of the Arauco War, wrote in 1674 that in the colder parts of Chile "there are white Indians." Rosales also personally viewed Indigenous peoples in the Chonos "so white, that they looked Spanish."<sup>438</sup>

Biological determinists may suggest that the white Amerindians were simply better at preventing Spanish colonisation. However, a more plausible explanation is that both Auracans and Talamancans happen to be living in particularly mountainous regions in which its native inhabitants could escape Spanish attacks. These Indigenous populations were also absorbed more easily by the invading European population. The Jamaican American author Joel Rogers observed that Chileans are "white, with much mixture of Indian" blood.<sup>439</sup> Similarly, he described *Ticos* as "mostly white, some of whom have an Indian strain."<sup>440</sup> The fact that there were '*Indios blancos*' in these regions means it would be less noticeable when they mixed with Spaniards and other Europeans compared to Afro-Latinos or the comparatively darker-skinned Indigenous peoples.

Along with greater absorption into the dominant society, another explanation is dehumanisation of those who looked differently to the Spanish. As with all imperial conquests, the *conquistadores* did dehumanise Amerindians during the colonisation process. The case of the Talamancans would be on the lower end of the continuum in terms of the use of dehumanising language. Whilst the Indigenous Talamancans were regularly criticised by Spanish authorities, it was largely due to their refusal to obey orders as opposed to personal attacks based on their immutable characteristics. What is absent from the historical record is the kind of dehumanising language that has often been used to describe Indigenous peoples in other parts of the world. Even though Spanish officials sometimes referred to Talamancans as 'barbarians,' this was a standard term used to

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<sup>437</sup> Juan Ignacio Molina, *Compendio de la Historia Civil del Reyno de Chile* (Traducida al Español por Nicolas de la Cruz y Bahamonde) (Madrid, Imprenta de la Cruz, 1795), 4.

<sup>438</sup> Diego de Rosales, *Historia General del Reino de Chile, Flandes Indiano* (Valparaiso: Imprenta del Mercurio, 1877), 16.

<sup>439</sup> Rogers added that Chileans are "probably even more mestizo than white" with "some Indians;" Joel Rogers, *Sex and Race: A History of White, Negro, and Indian Miscegenation in the Two Americas – Volume II: The New World* (St. Petersburg: Helga M. Rogers, 1942), 150.

<sup>440</sup> Rogers also wrote that out of all the Central American republics, Costa Rica "comes nearest to being a white country;" *Ibid.*, 149-150.

describe Indigenous peoples that was not necessarily used in a pejorative sense. The same applies to the term 'savage' which can be found in the writings of individuals such as Rousseau who took an incredibly sympathetic position towards aboriginal peoples.<sup>441</sup>

Europeans demonstrated much greater prejudice towards Indigenous peoples in other parts of Central America. This is clearly demonstrated with regards to the perceived intelligence of the Indigenous peoples in Nicaragua and Costa Rica. For instance, Francisco Vásquez described the Amerindians the *Pipil Corrupta* in Nicaragua as having the "language of children or that spoken by those of little intelligence."<sup>442</sup> By comparison, Diego de Porras wrote that the Amerindians he saw in Cariay were "very clever."<sup>443</sup> Some three centuries later, an English businessman named John Hale commented on the skin colour of the Amerindians in south-east Talamanca. After visiting the region shortly after Central America gained independence, Hale wrote: "To the east, on the Veragua border, there is a nation of Indians called Blancos. They inhabit the highest and coldest places, which is why they are believed to have a light-colored complexion."<sup>444</sup> He explained that the Blancos "show themselves to be *far superior to other Indians in intellectual ability* and natural gifts."<sup>445</sup> Hale does not say exactly how he arrived at this conclusion, but it is reasonable to presume that skin colour was a factor in his assessment given his previous statement about the Blancos' complexions. Rainfall, cloud cover, lower temperatures and high altitudes could also help account for a lighter pigmentation of the Indigenous inhabitants of this area. In 1751, Bishop Pedro Agustín Morel de Santa Cruz visited several towns in the high, mountainous terrain of Talamanca, the climate of which he described as "very cold."<sup>446</sup> A survey of the geography of Greater Talamanca indicates that a combination of particular environmental conditions could account for the moniker Blancos that was given to the Talamancans by Spanish colonists.

Environmental conditions also help account for the difficulty Spanish colonists faced in Talamancan during the eighteenth century. The region's harsh conditions were recognised by the *conquistadores* in the sixteenth century as hindering their ability to explore and conquer the region. Take for instance Juan Dávila's observation following the

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<sup>441</sup> Even though it is often associated with his name, Rousseau in fact never used the term 'noble savage.'

<sup>442</sup> Cited in Linda Newson, *Indian Survival in Colonial Nicaragua* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 30.

<sup>443</sup> Diego de Porras, 'Relacion Hecha por Diego de Porras,' 44.

<sup>444</sup> John Hale, 'Seis Meses de Residencia y Viajes en Central America etcétera,' in Ricardo Fernández Guardia (Ed.) *Costa Rica en el Siglo XIX: Antología de Viajeros* (San José: EUNED, 2002), 17.

<sup>445</sup> Ibid., emphasis added.

<sup>446</sup> Pedro Agustín Morel de Santa Cruz cited in Fernández, *Historia de Costa Rica Durante La Dominación Española*, 599.

first official survey of Talamanca during the reign of Vazquez de Coronado. Dávila wrote that due to the difficulty of riding over mountainous terrain on horseback, Spaniards must sometimes travel by foot which is one in which the Amerindians “have a great advantage over us.”<sup>447</sup> The largest mountains exist in the Talamancan Mountain Range which stretches from San José to the Panamanian border. These mountains essentially separate Limón from the provinces of San José and Puntarenas. Another set of mountains splits the south-east border between Cartago and Limón provinces.

One of the goals of geographical determinists is to provide better explanations than those of biological determinists regarding the notion that some ‘races’ are inherently superior at warfare compared to others. Geographical determinism can help to undermine the latter argument through comparisons of the Talamancans and the Guatusos or Malekus who, according to some accounts, were also ‘white.’ On day fourteenth of his February 1783 trip to San Carlos, the Bishop of Costa Rica and Nicaragua Esteban Lorenzo de Tristán witnessed “three good sized, *white*, but entirely nude guatuso indians.”<sup>448</sup> Relatively recent biological analysis of the country’s Indigenous groups revealed that there is a genetic variation that is found only amongst the Talamancans and the Guatusos.<sup>449</sup> It is possible that either the Guatusos or the Talamancans moved south or north respectively, which would account for similarities in their psychical descriptions. A comparison of the fate of the Guatusos with that of the Talamancans further undermines the arguments of biological determinists. The English author Frederick Boyle noted that the Talamancans “are said to be numerous, and the people of Costa Rica declare them to be allied in race with the Guatusos” who are “not nearly as ferocious.”<sup>450</sup>

Unfortunately for the Malekus, the region of Guatuso is near the Nicaraguan border which put the tribe in contact with individuals who sought to exploit their land and its resources. Anthropologist Marc Edelman contends that the Malekus were victims of genocide by the *huleros* (rubber extractors) who invaded their territory during the nineteenth century.<sup>451</sup> This example demonstrates that not all of the so-called ‘*Indios blancos*’ were as successful as the Auracans and Talamancans. Therefore, it is not possible

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<sup>447</sup> Dávila, ‘Relación circunstanciada de la provincia de Costa-Rica, que envió Juan Dávila,’ 43.

<sup>448</sup> Esteban Lorenzo de Tristán cited in Fernández, *Historia de Costa Rica Durante La Dominación Española*, 625, emphasis added.

<sup>449</sup> Azofeifa and Barrantes, ‘Genetic Variation of the Bribri and Cabécar Amerindians from Talamanca,’ 251-252.

<sup>450</sup> Frederick Boyle, *A Ride Across Central America: A Personal Narrative of Wanderings Through Nicaragua and Costa Rica* (London: Richard Bentley, 1868), xii.

<sup>451</sup> Marc Edelman, ‘A Central American Genocide: Rubber, Slavery, Nationalism, and the Destruction of the Guatusos-Malekus,’ *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 40, No. 2, 1998.

to draw a correlation between a person's so-called race or skin colour and proficiency at warfare. The only real biological advantage that lightly skinned individuals are known to have is a greater ability to absorb vitamin D through sunlight. Conversely, people with darker-pigmented skin have an advantage in blocking the harmful effects of the sun. This difference can lead to diseases such as rickets for the latter and skin cancer for the former depending on lifestyle factors and the climate in which an individual lives.<sup>452</sup> Contrary to biological determinist assumptions, it is clear that geo-political considerations and how human beings interact with their natural environment continue to be important factors with regards to success in human conflicts.

## **Conclusion**

This epoch is important to study given how crucial it was in the preservation of Costa Rica's Indigenous population and the country's political development in the nineteenth century. The main contention of this chapter has been that environmental conditions in Greater Talamanca are the primary reason why its Indigenous inhabitants successfully resisted Spanish colonisation. These characteristics included a lack of centralisation which was a result of its location at the furthest edge from more centralised political units in South and Mesoamerica as well as lacking circumscribed lands. The region's thick tropical forest and mountainous ranges also provided areas in which the Talamancans could escape from Spanish attacks. This natural environment may account for the descriptions of Bribri and Cabécar as the Blancos. A lighter complexion arguably helped lead to an unusual humanisation and lack of brutality towards the Indigenous Talamancans in comparison to Amerindians in other regions who were explicitly dehumanised. This explanation also accounts for all the unusually positive descriptions of the Talamancans by Spanish and various foreign visitors.

The years between 1709 and 1788 in Greater Talamanca represent the most successful in Costa Rica history in terms of Indigenous resistance. Instead of being thoroughly defeated like in other parts of Central America, the Amerindians in the region were either absorbed to a certain extent into the dominant society or have maintained their traditional way of life. From 1709 uprising to the Changuina rebellions of 1787 and 1788, the Talamancans demonstrated remarkably successful resistance to Spanish colonisation.

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<sup>452</sup> Caradee Wright et al., 'Solar Ultraviolet Radiation Exposure and Human Health in South Africa: Finding a Balance' [Editorial], *South African Medical Journal*, Vol. 102, No. 8, 2012.



The Great Uprising was so significant because it dispelled Spanish illusions regarding the ease with which Talamanca could be conquered. In general, more organised political units tend to be superior at warfare. However, the Costa Rican state was hindered due to the poverty experienced by the province in the eighteenth century. The resistance was strong and sustained enough that the Amerindians could largely retain their freedom until the early nineteenth century, at which point the preoccupations of Costa Rica's leaders shifted to the struggle for their own autonomy.

#### **Chapter 4 – Post-Independence ‘Anarchy’ and the National Campaign (1821-1859)**

**Central America, in general, would gain a lot with the union of the five republics but Costa Rica would lose everything: its tranquillity, its habits of order and work, and even its blood that would need to be spilled from stifling revolutions and seeking an impossible agreement, given the huge differences between my native country and the other fourth groupings of the Centre. Differences of race, customs and aspirations separate us in a radical way: there are more points of connection and homogeneity between Colombia and Costa Rica than between the latter and Nicaragua, the closest neighbour of the four.**

Juan Rafael Mora, ‘Declined Offer of the President of the United States,’ 1859.<sup>453</sup>

Even though the period after Central American independence is called the ‘conservative era,’ liberal ideas influenced many of the policies that were enacted during this time, especially in Costa Rica. As the region’s colonial backwater, the province avoided Central America’s post-independence conflicts to the largest extent. The major exception to this was the National Campaign of 1856 against the US filibuster William Walker which was instrumental in forging the country’s national identity. Costa Rica’s comparative lack of conflict or ‘anarchy’ helped it to move ahead of its neighbours and become the first country in Central America to truly liberalise its economy and political system. This chapter argues that the country’s early adoption of liberal institutions and policies gave the country advantages in terms of superior economic, political and human development. This meant that the country’s development was not suppressed like in the rest of the region which prevented the kind of brutal violence that helped create the popular image of Costa Rica as the ‘Switzerland of Central America.’ The chapter will lay out the region’s pre-independence and post-independence struggles, the liberal reforms that occurred in Costa Rica during the ‘conservative era’ as well as the National Campaign and its implications for the development of the country’s political institutions.

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<sup>453</sup> Juan Rafael Mora, ‘Declina Oferta del Presidente de Estados Unidos,’ in Raúl Aguilar Piedra and Armando Vargas (Eds.), *Palabra Viva del Libertador: Legado Ideológico y Patriótico del Presidente Juan Rafael Mora para la Costa Rica en Devenir* (San José: Eduvisión, 2014), 396.

## Central America's Struggle for Independence

Enlightenment ideas were becoming increasingly popular in Spain by the first half of the eighteenth century through the writings of intellectuals such as the Galician priest Benito Feijóo who propounded classical liberal ideas.<sup>454</sup> The ascension of Fernando VI (1746-1759) signaled an embrace of the scientific and moral progress that the Enlightenment represented. This development continued under the reign of Carlos III (1759-1788), a proponent of so-called 'enlightened absolutism.' Despite Charles III's restrictions of the right of beggars and vagrants, the new king pronounced to the President of the Council of Castile that he wanted to "apply the law so far as possible to favor the poor."<sup>455</sup> King Charles III also continued to implement the Bourbon Reforms which had strengthened mercantilism throughout Spain's colonies during the eighteenth century. In Central America, economic reforms resulted in greater exploitation of the region's resources. For instance, the Royal Alcohol Board in Guatemala that was created in 1753, monopolised alcohol production under the authority of the Crown.

By the early nineteenth century, Central American liberals were becoming a formidable force in opposition to the mercantilism and various regulations which primarily benefitted Spain at the expense of the region. Towards the end of the colonial period, there was considerable animosity between the Central American liberals and the conservative authorities in the Kingdom of Guatemala. One major point of contention was the restrictions in terms of trade and commerce which were the source of much complaint throughout Central America. In 1782, the *Factoria de Tobacco* monopolised the tobacco industry and banned production of tobacco in El Salvador and Nicaragua whilst promoting it in Costa Rica, Honduras and Guatemala. In the latter country, politicians petitioned to permit trade with other countries outside the empire in order to "foment industry, agriculture, and commerce that is in a miserable state because of the inability to export indigo."<sup>456</sup> Another area of contention was the issue of taxes such as the *acabala* (royal sales tax).

Spain also imposed a system of forced 'donations' from the Amerindian population in order to help replenish the imperial war coffers during the Spanish War of Independence

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<sup>454</sup> See for example, Benito Feijóo, 'An Essay on Women or the Physiological and Historical Defence of the Fair Sex,' *Teatro Critico Universal: Vol 1* (Barcelona: Icaria, 1997).

<sup>455</sup> Cited in Charles Petrie, *King Charles III: An Enlightened Despot* (London: Constable, 1971), 229.

<sup>456</sup> Cited in Miles Wortman, *Government, Society in Central America, 1640-1840* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 216.

(1808-1814). José de Bustamante, President of the Kingdom of Guatemala (1811-1817), reversed the decision of the Spanish liberals to abolish the tribute system. He also depleted the funds earmarked for Amerindians which was to be repaid at a future date. The Indigenous population was expected to provide what “they voluntarily want for the expenses of the present war so that in this manner they can prove that they are good children.”<sup>457</sup> Consequently, malnutrition reportedly increased amongst the Amerindian population who were forced to pay tribute to fund Spain’s military. One clergyman noted, the quota of two pesos was unreasonable given the poverty of the Indigenous peoples.<sup>458</sup>

There was considerable political instability in Latin America after Napoleon overthrew King Charles IV in 1808. This instability led to the Mexican War of Independence (1810-1821). The traditional order was not properly restored until 1820, when a liberal revolution occurred in order to reinstate the 1812 Constitution of Cadiz. In the following year, Central American elites seized on the opportunity represented by the political instability in Spain and Mexico to push for independence. As the war was drawing to a close, authorities in Guatemala declared Central America independent one day prior to Mexico. On the 15<sup>th</sup> of September 1821, Central America achieved independence from Spain. However, it would take approximately one month for this news to reach Costa Rica by mule due to its distance from Guatemala. Whilst colonial independence was unanimously supported, liberals and conservative disagreed on the issue of annexation to Mexico. The conservatives advocated annexation to México, whereas liberals supported an independent republic. The conservatives’ victory was short lived as the region was only part of Mexico for just under two years. In July 1823, *Las Provincias Unidas del Centro de América* (The United Provinces of Central America) was formed, combining the provinces of Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua and Costa Rica into a single state.

### **The United Provinces of Central America (1823-1838)**

The post-independence period, characterised by violence and civil war, is often described as a period of ‘anarchy’ in the region. If one takes the literal meaning of anarchy as a lack of central authority, then this term seems somewhat inappropriate. In reality, the

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<sup>457</sup> Cited in Ibid., 209.

<sup>458</sup> Ibid., 210.

violence and disorder were less severe in the less centralised areas of Central America. Costa Rica experienced fewer post-independence wars than its neighbours on the isthmus. The country was involved in 5 external battles which was clearly fewer than that of Honduras with 27, El Salvador with 40 and Guatemala with 51.<sup>459</sup> Between 1821 and 1857, Costa Rica also only experienced 5 civil wars compared to 8 in Guatemala, 7 in Honduras, 6 in El Salvador and 9 in Nicaragua.<sup>460</sup> Furthermore, its civil wars were generally smaller in duration and ferocity than in the rest of the region. Thus, there was a correlation between the strength of central authority and the number of wars and disorder that existed.

Costa Rica's first civil war, known as the *Batalla de Ochomogo* (Battle of Ochomogo), occurred in April 1823 over the question of annexation to Mexico. In the one camp were those from Cartago who supported annexation and the San José camp who favoured independence. The latter camp won the war and immediately moved to decrease the size of the military, closed the garrisons in San José and established a citizen's militia. The Costa Rican historian José Luis Vega Carballo observed, "With this action a process of military ascendancy ended that, had it continued, would have ... opened the doors to an early establishment of *caudillismo*" (warlordism).<sup>461</sup> It is facts such as this that traverse Costa Rican history that have led many commentators to speculate as to why the country has experienced less political violence. Some authors have invoked the White Legend. For instance, Dana Munro believed that the situation in Costa Rica was so different because the "early extinction of the aborigines made possible the development of a compact, homogeneous community of white peasants, among whom it was comparatively easy to establish stable political institutions."<sup>462</sup> To his credit, Munro does not explicitly blame Amerindians in the other four Central American countries, who, "are responsible for the revolutions only in the sense that they are unable to prevent them."<sup>463</sup> Indigenous peoples were certainly not in positions of power in which to prevent these revolutions and therefore it makes little sense to blame them.

Although conservatives were in power, the increasing influence of powerful liberals was demonstrated shortly after the establishment of the United Provinces of Central

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<sup>459</sup> Héctor Lindo Fuentes, 'The Economy of Central America: From Bourbon Reforms to Liberal Reforms,' in Lowell Gudmundson and Héctor Lindo-Fuentes, *Central America, 1821-1871: Liberalism Before Liberal Reform* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1995), 30.

<sup>460</sup> Hall and Brignoli, *Historical Atlas of Central America*, 170, 186.

<sup>461</sup> Cited in Robert Holden, *Armies Without Nations: Public Violence and State Formation in Central America 1821-1960* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 97.

<sup>462</sup> Munro, *The Five Republics of Central America*, 199.

<sup>463</sup> *Ibid.*, 198.

America. Classical liberal language was certainly present in the rhetoric, if not necessarily in the practices of Central American politics at the time. In 1824, the National Assembly of the United Provinces of Central America stressed the importance of liberal principles:

The National Constituent Assembly of the United Provinces of Central America, bearing in mind that the system of government adopted in each Assembly does not differ from the old peninsular if it does not develop the principles of equality, freedom, justice and charity in which all must be constituted, the citizens who form these states also considering that it would be very offensive to the righteousness of a 'liberal government' not to turn their eyes to the portion of men who lie in slavery, nor to procure for them the establishment of their natural dignity, the possession of their inestimable endowment with its primitive freedom, and the protection of its true joys by means of laws, and wishing to continue as far as possible with the freedom of those who have fallen in that sad situation.<sup>464</sup>

Chattel slavery was clearly a blatant violation of classical liberal principles and thus was one institution that the Central American Union sought to abolish. In 1824, the United Provinces of Central America officially outlawed chattel slavery in the region. Article 2 of the 1824 Constitution states: "No person born or naturalized in this state, may have another in bondage for any title; nor traffic with a slave inside." For first-time offense there is no punishment, but on the second time, the offender loses their citizenship rights.<sup>465</sup>

Abolition of the most authoritarian political institutions of the old colonial order was a significant step towards liberalisation of Central America. This was a rather progressive move at the time given that slavery was not abolished throughout the whole of the British Empire until 1833 and not until 1865 and 1888 in the United States and Brazil respectively. The use of more coercive types of labour started to decline in Costa Rica during the mid-eighteenth century as an increasing number of chattel slaves bought their freedom. From 1648 until 1824, there were 430 slaves manumitted in Costa Rica, although this number may be underestimated.<sup>466</sup> The decreased use of coercive labour was a dominant liberal trend that was taking place globally during the nineteenth century. By the late eighteenth-century, it was becoming increasingly popular position amongst liberal intellectuals that wage labour was cheaper and more efficient than chattel slavery.<sup>467</sup> As John

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<sup>464</sup> Asamblea Nacional de las Provincias Unidas de Centroamérica, *Congreso - No. 20 912*, ANCR, 1824, 1.

<sup>465</sup> Ibid.

<sup>466</sup> Molina and Palmer, *The History of Costa Rica*, 37.

<sup>467</sup> Smith is reported as delivering the following argument during a lecture in 1763: "A free man who works for a day's wages will work far more in proportion than a slave in proportion to the expense that is necessary for maintaining and bringing him up;" Adam Smith, *Lectures on Justice, Police, Revenue and Arms Delivered in the University of Glasgow by Adam Smith Reported by a Student in 1763* (edited by Edwin Cannan) (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1896), 99. However, Smith also criticised wage labour on the grounds that

Stuart Mill put it, “Hired labour is generally so much more efficient than slave labour, that the employer can pay a considerable greater value in wages, than the maintenance of his slaves cost him, and yet be a gainer by the change.”<sup>468</sup> Although moral concerns was a certainly a factor for abolitionists such as William Wilberforce to oppose the owning of slaves, it is likely that its inefficiency and higher costs were also factors in the eventual abolition of the practise. Besides the cost of purchasing and maintaining human beings, chattel slaves needed to be constantly observed and controlled by force so that they did not rebel.

Consistent with the proliferation of liberal ideas, wage labour was becoming the preferred way of structuring work in Costa Rica. Prior to the development of the coffee industry and the modern corporation, cottage industries initially operated in Costa Rica, especially in the country’s capital. For instance, in 1824, there was 110 *fabricas* (house workshops) in San José which employed a total of 142 workers who engaged in cotton spinning.<sup>469</sup> There is a dearth of knowledge about exactly how these cottage industries actually functioned. However, it is likely that the working conditions were not ideal. There is no doubt that these home workshops operated under a hierarchical division of labour, they were most likely not as authoritarian as those in other parts of Central America. As Costa Rican historian Iván Molina noted: “The craftspeople of the Central Valley may have lacked a guild tradition, but they did not lack hierarchy that went from the master down to the journeyman and the apprentice.”<sup>470</sup> Increased wealth accumulation through the more productive wage labour system created new private concentrations of power which had an impact on land distribution.

Privatisation of previously public-owned land led to the removal of *campesinos* (peasants) from their homes in the Central valley. Cartago officials Jose Santos Lombardo and Manuel Garcia Escalante observed in 1813 that “many individuals from the *barrios* [neighbourhoods] are without grounds on which to live and build houses, because the little land of the *ejido* [commons] of this city is enclosed by various individuals who are using this land as pasture.” Consequently, the “poorest residents do not have a place to raise

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there is a “sort of voluntary slavery when an indigent citizen sells himself to be the slave of another person,” Ibid., 102. Given that this text is based on the lecture notes taken by a student, these words cannot be guaranteed to be exactly those of Adam Smith.

<sup>468</sup> John Stuart Mill, *Principles of Political Economy with Some of Their Applications to Political Philosophy* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1885), 253.

<sup>469</sup> *Provincial Independiente*, No. 939, ANCR, 1824, 11 cited in Gudmundson, *Costa Rica Before Coffee*, 40 [note 23].

<sup>470</sup> Molina, *Costa Rica (1800-1850)*, 35.

animals or to plant, and so they have to emigrate to other places.”<sup>471</sup> In 1824, essentially idle, state-owned plots known as *baldios* were sold-off in San José by the government. Increasing land privatisation would also create conflict in Heredia a decade later. A warning from the townspeople in opposition to an *ejido* land privatisation proposal stated: “The draft decree could be ruinous to the towns” in two ways. Firstly, a “proprietor for denouncement becomes lord of most of the lands of common use to take advantage selling part by part to others at the price he wants.” Secondly, those individuals who had insufficient resources “would be left without a foot of land to be able to cultivate.”<sup>472</sup> The major land privatisation measures that occurred during this time led to the development of dependency on wage labour as a means for survival.

In the early 1830s, there were food shortages reported throughout Central America as lands previously dedicated to food production were replaced with agro-export production. A hunger epidemic was barely averted through the adoption of ‘extraordinary measures’ in 1831 and 1832. In 1837 there were further reports of widespread hunger, demonstrating the dangers of an overproduction of agro-export commodities.<sup>473</sup> A few decades later, there was a petition in Pavas signed by some local *Ticos* who protested the land privatisation that had been expanding in their area since the 1840s. The petition contained the following criticism:

As in all things relating to the public good, despite the beneficent desires that generally animate the Head of State, these kinds of machinations leading to private benefit can always be seen... the landowners with their valuable haciendas on the outskirts of the most important population of the centre of the Republic [i.e. San José], have acquired uncommon advantages, but the people of Pavas have been reduced to indigence for they have nowhere to provide for themselves, and have no access even to firewood. What an adverse effect has come from reducing to private domain the common lands upon which we live.<sup>474</sup>

Despite the fact that land ownership was not as highly concentrated in Costa Rica compared to the rest of Central America, some *Ticos* faced similar problems to its neighbours, albeit to a lesser degree.

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<sup>471</sup> Cited in Ibid., 31.

<sup>472</sup> Cited in Silvia Castro Sanchez, ‘Los Campesinos y la Política Agraria en la Década de 1850,’ en Iván Molina Jiménez (Ed.) *Industriosa y Sobria: Costa Rica en los Días de la Campaña Nacional (1856-1857)* (South Woodstock: Plumstock Mesoamerican Studies, 2007), 56-57.

<sup>473</sup> Wortman, *Government, Society in Central America*, 260.

<sup>474</sup> Cited in Silvia Castro Sanchez, ‘Estado, Privatización de la Tierra y Conflictos Agrarios,’ *Revista de Historia* (Costa Rica) (21-22, 1990), 215-216.



During the 1830s, there were major changes in Costa Rica's political landscape due to several important international and domestic developments. Major land privatisation and the introduction of a competitive labour market in Costa Rica became the basis of the agricultural capitalist economic system that would dramatically transform the country as it did in other parts of the world. Polanyi argues that at this time 'great transformation' was taking place in terms of the wage labour system and the proliferation of land privatisation.<sup>475</sup> In Polanyi's view, it was "not until 1834 was a competitive labour market established in England, hence industrial capitalism as a social system cannot be said to have existed before that date."<sup>476</sup> Employing this definition Costa Rica could be said to have become capitalist around the same time. In his book on this topic, Molina situated the origins of capitalism in Costa Rica in the first half of the nineteenth century.<sup>477</sup> Market capitalism would create great wealth in the country during this period, especially for the *cafetaleros* (coffee elites).

Despite its advantages in terms of the creation of economic growth, the system also produced social inequality which can lead to conflict. On the other hand, the simultaneous promotion of classical liberal ideas had a civilising effect on the old colonial order in Costa Rican society. Such ideas had certainly spread to Costa Rican intellectuals by the first half of the 1800s. Liberals soon introduced progressive measures such as universal education, the expansion of suffrage and the increase in civil liberties. In 1830, the first printing press was imported into the country. In the following decade, the University of Santo Tomás was established which facilitated the circulation of works by classical liberals such as Jeremy Bentham and Adam Smith. The popularity of liberal ideas helped lead to liberal reforms such as the 1832 decree from the Costa Rican Congress which decreed that freedom of thought is a right of citizenship.<sup>478</sup> Although there was shared elite commitment of stated liberal principles, the United Provinces of Central America most likely did not become consolidated due to the civil wars and general in-fighting between liberals and conservatives. Costa Ricans voiced the greatest opposition to unification which only lasted until 1838 after Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Honduras left the union and a series of civil wars erupted throughout the region.

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<sup>475</sup> Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*.

<sup>476</sup> Ibid., 83. Although the beginnings of capitalism are most commonly dated to the nineteenth century, perhaps the most popular counterclaim to this argument comes from Marx who maintained that its origins lie in the sixteenth century, long before the Industrial Revolution; Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy (Volume I)* (London: Penguin, 1976), 876.

<sup>477</sup> Molina, *Costa Rica (1800-1850)*.

<sup>478</sup> Congreso Federal de la República de Centroamérica, *Sección Federal - No. 949*, ANCR, 1832, 38.

In order to account for Costa Rica's opposition to the Central American union, some have suggested that *Ticos* are inherently more peaceful than their neighbours. For instance, the former United States Agency for International Development (USAID) director Lawrence Harrison claimed that had "Central America been peopled exclusively by Costa Ricans in 1824, the federation would have stood a much better chance holding together."<sup>479</sup> The assumption that political violence is a result of the dispositions or national character of a particular population is a weak explanation in comparison to structural factors. In the view of former US charge d'affaires to Central America Ephraim George Squier, Costa Rica's revolutions were typically less violent than those in Nicaragua and Guatemala most likely because of the "concentration and homogeneousness of its population than to high morality or a more tolerant spirit."<sup>480</sup> As part of his explanation, Squier made a case for the biological determinist version of the White Legend:

The people of Costa Rica have a larger proportion of pure Spanish blood, less intermixed with that of the negro and Indian, than those of any other Central American state; and if they have attained a greater prosperity, and evinced a greater degree of activity and enterprise, materially and otherwise, it may be fairly attributed to this circumstance.<sup>481</sup>

Although a whiter population meant the country has appeared to have experienced less institutionalised racism, it is important not to underestimate the extent to which liberal policies have benefited the country since the early nineteenth century.

In 1824, a three-tiered system of indirect voting was established which involved voting for electors who would then vote for representatives in the Congress. This was first step in developing Costa Rica's representative democratic system in the latter part of the century. In the same year, Costa Rica had become the first country in Central America to establish a credit system which facilitated the development of the coffee industry by the late 1830s. Also, in 1824, the country's capital was transferred from Cartago to San José. This transfer partially led to Costa Rica's second civil war known as the *Guerra de la Liga* (League War), which lasted 41 days in 1835. The war began when dissident forces in Cartago, Heredia and Alajuela attempted to impose a president to which Braulio Carrillo opposed. Carrillo was the head of the San José army and leader of the province from 1835

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<sup>479</sup> Lawrence Harrison, *Underdevelopment Is a State of Mind: The Latin American Case* (Updated ed.) (Lanham: Madison Books, 2000), 56.

<sup>480</sup> Squier, *The States of Central America*, 466.

<sup>481</sup> *Ibid.*, 465.

to 1837. He wanted San José to remain the nucleus of power in the country and thus was opposed to transferring the capital again. After being deposed briefly, Carrillo seized power again via a coup d'état in 1838 when there was another attempt to transfer the capital from San José.

### **The Free State of Costa Rica (1838-1847)**

Despite its name, there was definite continuation of authoritarian techniques of control throughout the period when the country was called *El Estado Libre de Costa Rica* (The Free State of Costa Rica). Within Central America, Costa Rica was the first newly independent country to really reform its economy and state in a more liberal direction. In 1838, Carrillo became the country's first independent Head of State, a position which was later changed to President. Despite his liberal tendencies, Carrillo was still an authoritarian leader who also controlled the national military. Nevertheless, he was not as brutal as some of the *caudillos* (strongmen) who were common in the region at the time. In 1841, Carrillo enacted legislation which increased the power of rural and urban police forces but reduced the strength of the army in other parts of the country with the exception of San José.<sup>482</sup>

The conditions were as such that Costa Rica emerged as a comparatively liberal state from its birth as an independent nation. According to Mahoney, the 'liberal reform' era began in Costa Rica at the time of independence in comparison to the other Central American states which did not enter their liberal phase until at least the 1870s (or in 1893 in the case of Nicaragua).<sup>483</sup> One important way in which Costa Rica's more liberal character was demonstrated was President Jose Maria Alfaro's advocacy of universal popular education for both males and females as early as the 1840s.<sup>484</sup> Around that time, Costa Rican officials began to take an increasing account of public opinion. An early reference to the importance of public opinion was expressed by Costa Rica's Head of State Francisco Morazán in 1842:

The advantageous position in which we place the resources we have and the public opinion that supports our efforts, are sufficient reasons for these honest citizens to be persuaded of the sincerity with which we extend our arms and offer our friendship ... But if unhappily our votes were disregarded: if we did not find in the bosom of friendship, or in the interest of a frank reconciliation, the means of saving

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<sup>482</sup> Mahoney, *The Legacies of Liberalism*, 147.

<sup>483</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>484</sup> José María Alfaro, 'Costariccenses,' *Gobernación* - No. 23 426, ANCR, 1846, 34.

it; the irresistible power of public opinion will know how to trace to our arms the path that will lead us to victory, and to provide the Central Americans with a government of laws that will give them peace, freedom and civilisation.<sup>485</sup>

In reality, public opinion did not determine government policy as the population was largely excluded from influencing public affairs. Most significantly, women's inability to vote meant that half the population was disenfranchised.

The lack of women's suffrage and other rights meant that paternal authority over women could be abused relatively easily. This was especially true in the domestic arena. For instance, in March 1843, a man from Heredia took his wife to court for "having ignored his authority that he rightfully" exercised over her. The judge hearing the case ruled in favour of the husband noting that a "woman is obligated to respect, and to be submissive and obedient to her husband." He explained that females are to "observe the duties imposed on her by Article 133 of the civil code, which gives the husband the right to govern her and what concerns his home."<sup>486</sup> This kind of social injustice would decrease as the practice of restricting women's access to education was gradually reversed in the mid-nineteenth century.

In 1847, José Mariá Castro became Costa Rica's first leader to be given the title of President. In August of the following year, he officially declared the country to be an independent republic and implemented a new constitution which awarded citizens fundamental civil rights consistent with liberal states at the time. The 1848 constitution also abolished the military, but it was established once again after a military coup in November 1849.<sup>487</sup> Before he was deposed, President Mariá Castro commented on the changing progress of his country:

It has not been long since Costa Rica was the most insignificant section of Central America and that in the eyes of the traveler did not offer, but the sad spectacle of an isolated people wrapped in ignorance and misery. The exploitation of its gold mines and the extraction of its wood began to improve its status and the cultivation of coffee came to change it entirely. Today, then, Costa Rica participates in the

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<sup>485</sup> Francisco Morazán, 'El General Gefe Supremo Provisorio de Estado de Costarrica Francisco Morazan, por sip or el Ejèrcito de su mando, á los habitatantes de Centro-américa,' *Gobernación - No. 23 426*, ANCR, 1842, 18.

<sup>486</sup> Cited in Eugenia Rodriguez, 'Civilizing Domestic Life in the Central Valley of Costa Rica, 1750-1850,' in Elizabeth Dore and Maxine Molyneux (Eds.), *Hidden Histories of Gender and the State in Latin America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 98-99.

<sup>487</sup> Frederick Ehrenreich, 'National Security,' in Harold Nelson (Ed.), *Costa Rica: A Country Study* (Washington: Foreign Area Studies, 1983), 258.

commercial movement of the world, and put in contact with the richest and most powerful nations of the globe, has come to tread the steps of progress.<sup>488</sup>

President Mariá Castro was not underestimating the significance of coffee for the country. In the mid-nineteenth century, coffee constituted 90% of the country's total exports.<sup>489</sup>

Coffee has occasionally been described as the 'golden bean' given the great wealth it has brought to the country.<sup>490</sup> Its production is well-suited for the hilly terrain of the Central Valley that includes the country's most populated centres of San José, Heredia, Alajuela and Cartago. In the 1850s, Costa Rica became the first country in the region to establish a railroad system which facilitated the expansion of coffee production. In 1864, the region's first bank was established in the country, allowing for an increase in capital investment. The ability for the Costa Rican government to raise taxes from coffee sales appeared to have spill over effects which benefited the general populace, at least in comparison to the other Central American states. Unlike with the subsequent development of the banana boom in the 1870s, coffee production developed as an enterprise that was primarily run by the *cafetaleros* who had amassed considerable power in Costa Rican society since the 1830s. Fortunately for the coffee elites, imperial powers such as Britain were not significantly interfering in the country at that stage.<sup>491</sup> This allowed the domestic coffee industry to develop several decades before the United States emerged as the clear dominant superpower in the Western Hemisphere.

### **The National Campaign (1856-1857)**

In the mid-nineteenth century, some sectors of Central America were concerned about the rise of the United States as a superpower. Fears of a US intervention were realised when the 'Colossus of the North' first sent marines into the territory of Nicaragua in 1853 to subdue political unrest in that country.<sup>492</sup> Two years later, the Tennessean filibuster

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<sup>488</sup> José María Castro, 'El General Presidente del Estado de Costarica a sus Habitantes,' *Gobernación - No. 23* 426, ANCR, 1848, 45.

<sup>489</sup> Lindo Fuentes, 'The Economy of Central America,' 42.

<sup>490</sup> Deborah Sick, *Farmers of the Golden Bean: Costa Rican Households, Global Coffee, and Fair Trade* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2008).

<sup>491</sup> Mahoney, *The Legacies of Liberalism*, 152.

<sup>492</sup> Barbara Salazar Torreon, *Instances of Use of United States Armed Forces Abroad, 1798-2017* (Washington: Congressional Research Service, 2017), 4. The United States also intervened in Nicaragua in the following years during the nineteenth century: 1854, 1857, 1867, 1894, 1896, 1898 and 1899; *Ibid.*, 4-7. Panama was also invaded by the US in the following years during the same century: 1856, 1865 and 1885; *Ibid.*, 4-6.

William Walker overthrew the government of Nicaragua, declared himself to be president in 1856 and reinstituted slavery in violation of the 1824 legislation prohibiting the practise. In his condemnation of his critics, Walker justified his actions in the following manner:

That which you ignorantly call ‘Filibusterism’ is not the offspring of hasty passion or ill-regulated desire; it is the fruit of the sure, unerring instincts which act in accordance with law as old as the creation. They are but drivellers who speak of establishing fixed relations between the pure white American race, as it exists in the United States, and the mixed Hispano-Indian race, as it is exists in Mexico and Central America, without the employment of force. The history of the world presents no such Utopian vision as that of an inferior race yielding meekly and peacefully to the controlling influence of a superior people.<sup>493</sup>

For Walker, violence was necessary to control what he viewed as an inferior ‘race’ of people.

Given their lighter skin colour, it is possible that Costa Ricans would not have been held in quite as low regard by Walker as were Nicaraguans.

Foreigners who visited the country in the post-independence period would tend to display positive assessments when commenting on the complexion of *Ticos*. The Scotsman Robert Glasgow Dunlop, for instance, observed in 1844: “The inhabitants of the state of Costa Rica are nearly all white, not having mixed with the Indians as in other parts of Spanish America.” He described *Ticos* as “industrious” and their character as “very different from all other parts of Central America.”<sup>494</sup> One cannot help but wonder whether this perceived large difference in their characters had much to do with their comparatively lighter skin tone. Dunlop also claimed that he did not observe a “single pure Indian” in all his time in Costa Rica.<sup>495</sup> This point can help explain why *Nicas* were held in such low esteem compared to *Ticos*. If you factor in the poverty of Nicaragua, then it is easier to account for the United States’ historic interventionism in the country.

In addition to the hostility of US political actors such as Walker, there also appears to have been little sympathy demonstrated towards Nicaragua by the Costa Rican government at the time. The latter’s position regarding the former country was demonstrated by the Costa Rican Minister in Washington Luis Molina who wrote in March 1855: “A country delivered, like that of Nicaragua, to such frequent and disastrous

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<sup>493</sup> William Walker, *The War in Nicaragua* (S.H. Goetzel and Company, 1860), 429-430.

<sup>494</sup> Robert Glasgow Dunlop, *Travels in Central America: Being a Journal of Nearly Three Years’ Residence in the Country: Together with a Sketch of the History of the Republic, and an Account of Its Climate, Productions, Commerce, etc.* (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1847), 45.

<sup>495</sup> *Ibid.*, 334.

revolutions loses sympathy ... and is open to being treated as a tribe of savages.”<sup>496</sup> Feelings of antipathy towards Nicaragua intensified after General of the army and President of the republic Juan Rafael Mora Porras (1849-1859) learnt of Walker’s intentions to conquer Central America. Walker’s immediate goal of securing the northern part of Costa Rica was especially important as there were initial plans to build a canal on the San Juan River before the one in Panama was constructed. Walker later confirmed that his ultimate goal was to turn Central America into a slave state, a situation that all the other nations in the region fought to prevent.<sup>497</sup>

On March 1<sup>st</sup>, 1856, Mora Porras announced war against Walker with the following declaration that paraphrased the opening lines of French national anthem: "Countrymen, take your weapons, the time that I have been warning you has arrived."<sup>498</sup> On March 20<sup>th</sup>, 1856, the Costa Rican military fought Walker’s army in the Battle of Santa Rosa which took place in the town of Santa Rosa, Guanacaste. The battle resulted in a victory for Costa Rica as Walker’s forces were driven north into Nicaragua. On April 11<sup>th</sup>, 1856, the Costa Rican military fought Walker’s army in what is known as the Second Battle of Rivas. After only one day of fighting, General Mora’s men emerged victorious. The war is often known in Costa Rica as the *Campaña Nacional* (National Campaign) or *Guerra Patria* (Homeland War). Given that there was no war waged against the Spanish in Central America as occurred in Mexico and South America, the region had no liberator such as Simon Bolivar. However, the individual that comes closest is Mora Porras who was henceforth called the ‘*Libertador*’ (Liberator). The Second Battle of Rivas also led to the creation of Costa Rica’s national legend of the little drummer boy Juan Santamaria who was instrumental in achieving victory by burning down the stronghold of Walkers’ forces. Santamaria, who lost his life in the process, has become a national hero despite the belief amongst some *Ticos* that he never existed.<sup>499</sup>

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<sup>496</sup> Luis Molina, *Documentos Relativos a la Guerra Nacional de 1856 y 57 con sus Antecedents* (San José: Tipografía Nacional, 1914), 20.

<sup>497</sup> Iván Molina Jiménez, ‘La Campaña Nacional (1856-1857): investigación histórica y producción literaria,’ in Iván Molina Jiménez and David Díaz Arias, *La Campaña Nacional (1856-1857): historiografía, literatura y memoria* (San José: Editorial Universidad de Costa Rica, 2008), 1.

<sup>498</sup> Juan Rafael Mora, ‘¡A Las Armas!’ *Palabra Viva del Libertador*, 236.

<sup>499</sup> For a good summary of the evidence for Juan Santamaria’s existence, see, Guillermo Brenes Tencio, ‘Y se hizo la imagen del héroe nacional costarricense... Iconografía emblemática de Juan Santamaría,’ *Historia Crítica*, No. 37, 2009.

## The Aftermath of the National Campaign

The victorious National Campaign was employed by Costa Rican elites to promote national pride within the country's education system. This was facilitated by the spread of the classical liberal ideas whose proponents regarded public education as being fundamental to human development. On the other hand, there was also the countervailing force of utilising education as method of social control via indoctrination. This was especially true with regards to the military. Along with strength of military force, Mora Porras recognised the importance of the education or indoctrination of his soldiers. As he noted in 1858, the "doctrinal exercises of the soldier continue being effectively practiced, and the organization of the army is improved in every way."<sup>500</sup> Such language indicates that there was an increasing concern amongst elites regarding public opinion and popular education at the time. This National Campaign forged some of the most aspects of Costa Rican national identity which persist to this day in spite of the country's peaceful image.

Although the war certainly expanded national pride, the National Campaign had some negative consequences for Costa Rican society besides the deaths of the soldiers who fought in the conflict. After the soldiers returned home from Nicaragua, they brought with them cholera which led to an outbreak that killed an estimated 10 000 citizens out of a population of 112 000.<sup>501</sup> Another important consequence of the war was the legacy it had on the country's military, which according to Costa Rican historian David Diaz Arias "became a widely popular institution for the only time in its history."<sup>502</sup> He argued that the war "proved the strength of the army was one of the best organized and strongest institutions of the Costa Rican State."<sup>503</sup> There is reason to confirm this position given that the strength of the Costa Rican military stood at 9000 men strong during the National Campaign.<sup>504</sup> However, the strength of the army was largely a response to the threat of William Walker and its power would later decrease after the country transitioned to a liberal democracy.

Despite his reverence for the military, General Mora was rather liberal in comparison to other Central American leaders such as the *caudillo* President Rafael Carrera

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<sup>500</sup> Ibid.

<sup>501</sup> Fernández Guardia, *Cartilla Historica de Costa Rica*, 98.

<sup>502</sup> Ehrenreich, 'National Security,' 258.

<sup>503</sup> David Díaz Arias, *La Era de la Centralización: Estado, Sociedad e Institucionalidad en Costa Rica, 1848-1870* (San José: Editorial Universidad de Costa Rica, 2015), 42.

<sup>504</sup> Juan Rafael Mora, 'Honorable Representantes,' *Gobernación - No. 23 426*, ANCR, 1858, 93.



who dominated Guatemalan politics during the 1850s.<sup>505</sup> This point was observed in a weekly German newspaper *Die Gartenlaube* which reported how curious this little Central American country was in terms of its president's behaviour and the public's attitudes towards him. The newspaper noted that Mora Porras was not "merely the President but also follows a normal trade. He owns some large coffee plantations and in the capital San José he has a [textile] retail shop... The traffic on those market days abolishes the differences in rank."<sup>506</sup> The newspaper also commented on how interesting it was that *Ticos* do not call their president "His Excellency" but instead they "simply address him as Don Juanito." The newspaper's author concluded that the "welfare of the Republic does not suffer and Costa Rica is marching into a prosperous future."<sup>507</sup> This passage illustrates the comparatively egalitarian nature of Costa Rica society at the time.

One implication of the National Campaign was that it resulted in greater exploration of northern Costa Rica. In December 1857, the *Cronica de Costa Rica* reported on the 'white' Guatusos which were believed to have descended from the British filibusters who had ransacked and burnt down the city of Esparza in Puntarenas in the late seventeenth century.<sup>508</sup> In the following year, the future Acting Territorial Governor of Montana whose name was Thomas Francis Meagher, recorded his observations after visiting the country. Using rather emotionally evocative language, Meagher described the death of a woman who was found murdered by bow and arrow in the mountains of San Carlos. Soldiers relayed to him that they had found "the almost naked body of a beautiful woman of perfect whiteness and exquisite shape." The woman "had been mortally wounded" and the "red spring that gushed from her chest ran swiftly and abundantly."<sup>509</sup> Meagher did not make clear whether the woman was of Indigenous or European stock.

It therefore appears that the legend of 'white Indians' in northern Alajuela was largely formed shortly after the National Campaign. In the decade following the conflict, Frederick Boyle repeated the legend which "declares the Guatuso race to be distinguished

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<sup>505</sup> Ralph Lee Woodward Jr., *Rafael Carrera and the Emergence of the Republic of Guatemala, 1821–1871* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1993).

<sup>506</sup> *Die Gartenlaube*, No. 32, 1855, 380 (Translated from the original German by Heidi Zoghbaum).

<sup>507</sup> Ibid.

<sup>508</sup> The pertinent passage read as follows: "It is said that this tribe comes from the settlers who fled Esparza when the former filibusters burned it, and those who have come to see them, assure others that they are white, bearded, and that they gather in numerous bodies in which a certain military organization is observed;" *Cronica de Costa Rica*, Numero 71, 9 de Diciembre de 1857, 2.

<sup>509</sup> Thomas Francis Meagher, *Vacaciones en Costa Rica* (San José: Trejos Hnos., 1923), 130.

by fair hair and blue eyes.”<sup>510</sup> Boyle added that he did “not believe the Guatusos are white, in our sense of the word; at least at the present day.”<sup>511</sup> Others from that time also did not consider Amerindians white and therefore excluded them from the White Legend. The Primary Education Inspector Franciso Alfonzo Cinelli wrote that “except for an insignificant part of indigenous or mixed race, almost all [*Ticos*] are white and form a homogeneous, laborious and active population.” In Cinelli’s view, Costa Rica was perhaps the “only Spanish-American republic that enjoys this indisputable advantage.”<sup>512</sup> Chile, Uruguay and Argentina are other Latin American countries which have developed similar ethnic compositions to Costa Rica and also largely avoided the structural disadvantage that is associated with institutionalised racism.

Given the differences between Costa Rica and the other Central American republics, statesmen from the former have often attempted to distance themselves from the troubles of their northern neighbours. This was once again shown with President Rafael Mora’s response to an invitation from the US President James Buchanan to reunite the United Provinces of Central America. In November 1859, Mora Porras declined the offer, highlighting the disadvantages that would face Costa Rica from unification given the unique characteristics of his country. His statement that “Costa Rica would lose everything” helps explain why there had been no Central American successful attempts at unification since the five states separated in 1838.<sup>513</sup> Costa Rica has always been the most resistant to this proposal.

In what was a strange coincidence, the two enemies of the National Campaign had similar fates after they had both lost their positions as president. After losing the Second Battle of Rivas, Walker returned to his home in 1857 after surrendering to the US Navy. In 1859, Mora Porras was ousted via a coup by José Maria Montealegre. In the following year, the ex-president fled to Guatemala but was informed by the Costa Rican government that he and his family could return to Costa Rica if he promised “not to influence in any way the destiny of [his] homeland.”<sup>514</sup> After attempting to take power of the country which he

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<sup>510</sup> Boyle, *A Ride Across Central America*, xxi. There are also reports stretching back to the eighteenth century that some Indigenous Talamancans had blue eyes. Lobo has suggested that the origins of such reports was an incident in 1710 involving a boatload of Danish prisoners who landed in a place called Gandoca before escaping into the Talamancan hills after being chased by Costa Rican authorities; Tatiana Lobo, *Parientes en Venta: La Esclavitud en la Colonia*, 23.

<sup>511</sup> Ibid.

<sup>512</sup> Franciso Alfonzo Cinelli, *Compendio de Geografía para Uso de las Escuelas de Enseñanza Primaria en la Republic de Costa Rica* (San José: Imprenta Nacional, 1866), 111.

<sup>513</sup> Mora, ‘Declina Oferta del Presidente de Estados Unidos,’ *Palabra Viva del Libertador*, 396.

<sup>514</sup> Ibid., 402.

had previously ruled, the former president was executed by firing squad in September 1860. Incidentally, William Walker was shot in the same month and year by the Honduran government for attempting to achieve the same goal in Nicaragua.

## **Conclusion**

The post-independence era was crucial for Costa Rica's subsequent political development as it established the foundations of the liberal state that would bring the country considerable wealth and individual political rights. Whilst the political reforms that were introduced by the Bourbon monarchs brought economic benefits to the Spanish at the expense of Central America, they also led to increased tension with its Central American colonies. After the collapse of the Central American union, Costa Rica further developed its exceptional position in the region. It was the first Central American state to implement liberal reforms after independence from Spain was achieved in 1821. There were several developments which led Costa Rica to develop liberal policies before its northern neighbours. The country largely escaped the post-independence conflicts in the region given that it was the furthest away from the Kingdom of Guatemala. The country also developed its coffee industry earlier than the rest of the region and largely remained in domestic hands. A lack of external enemies also meant Costa Rica's coercive institutions were less authoritarian and did not expand to the size of its neighbours. The major exception was the National Campaign against William Walker which spawned the country's legend about the drummer boy Juan Santamaria. By the 1850s, Costa Rican leaders shifted away from militarism to a greater elite concern for public opinion. The gradual embrace of popular education in the mid-nineteenth century represented the shift towards a liberal democracy. However, it was not until a military officer by the name of Tomás Guardia took power in 1871 that the country truly became a modern liberal state.

## **Chapter 5 - Authoritarianism During the Liberal Reform Era (1871-1919)**

**Public education, with specialisation in the primary education of both sexes, has called my attention preferentially, convinced as it is that it constitutes the first element of the democratic Republic, and the most powerful element of social happiness.**

President Tomás Guardia Gutierrez, 'Honorable Deputies,' 1872.<sup>515</sup>

By the time the liberal reform era commenced in 1870, classical liberal ideas were already popular with Costa Rica's political class. After President Tomás Guardia took state power via a coup in 1870, he professionalised the armed forces, expanded universal education, promulgated the 1871 constitution and signed into law guarantees of certain individual rights. Despite the country's liberal trajectory, the Guardia regime operated within an authoritarian political framework. Costa Rica's state structure however, had started to change by the late nineteenth century when the country developed representative democratic institutions with the emergence of the 'Generation of 1889.' Analysis of the liberal reform period is important because it was a critical juncture that significantly influenced the outcome of the respective regime types in Central America that emerged in the mid twentieth century. Costa Rica was the only country where liberal policies were entrenched enough to produce an enduring liberal democracy.<sup>516</sup> This chapter argues that the continued expansion of classical liberal policies such as universal education led the country to move away from violence as the primary form of social control towards a greater focus on influencing public opinion. The chapter will explain Costa Rica's transition to a representative democracy during the liberal reform era which flourished after country's last authoritarian regime was overthrown in 1919. It will also trace the development of the White Legend in the latter part of the nineteenth century.

### **The Regime of Tomás Guardia (1870-1882)**

The presidents who ruled during the liberal reform era were still generally military leaders who employed authoritarian methods of control. The first of the authoritarian liberal

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<sup>515</sup> Tomás Guardia, 'Mensaje del Presidente de la República de Costa Rica al Congreso Nacional,' 1<sup>st</sup> de Mayo, 1872, *Gobernación - No. 23 426*, ANCR, 1872, 188.

<sup>516</sup> Mahoney, *The Legacies of Liberalism*, 12.

leaders from this era was President Bruno Carranza who believed that his liberal policies would receive strong support in his country. In April 1870, Carranza wrote that the “liberal dispositions of the people should favor me and be led by the right, intellectual, republican and national spirit” which constituted Costa Rican public opinion.<sup>517</sup> Carranza was only in power for a few months before he was replaced by the military officer Tomás Guardia who became the most influential leader of this era. After seizing power in August 1870, President Guardia introduced various liberal reforms. One of his most significant changes were his military reforms which increased spending for the army, but they also ‘depoliticised’ and professionalised the institution.

The regime of Tomás Guardia represented the ascent of a particular brand of liberalism as the dominant orthodoxy in Costa Rica. This was part of a trend that was taking place across the world. An aspect of this trend was a shift to some extent in terms of more modern methods of control with a greater focus on psychological elements and indoctrination. To be sure, Guardia’s government employed coercion and violence to crush its political opponents. On December 10<sup>th</sup>, 1870, Guardia’s Secretary of the Interior José Pinto explained the thinking behind the regime’s law and order strategy in Alajuela:

[T]he Government is determined to change the system of leniency and indulgence to that of a just and deserved severity against the eternal enemies of the order, so it is ordered to persecute those who in this miserable way spread the seed of disorder abusing the simplicity and ignorance of our people ... enough to answer two declarations of people of good behaviour so that they can be captured and cleared with due security to the prisons of this city.<sup>518</sup>

There were 45 recorded incidents of violent intimidation during the period of Guardia’s regime which, although not the worst repression in the region, was severe enough.<sup>519</sup> Despite the violence, the government of Tomás Guardia did modernise Costa Rica’s state structures in a more liberal direction.

The Guardia regime demonstrated a commitment to the liberal idea of equal access to primary education for males and females. In May 1872, President Guardia stated that public education is the “most powerful element of social happiness.”<sup>520</sup> This commitment to popular education would lead to the country developing the best education system in

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<sup>517</sup> Bruno Carranza, ‘El Jefe Provisorio de la República a Sus Habitantes,’ *Gobernación - No. 23 426*, ANCR, 1870, 175.

<sup>518</sup> José Pinto, ‘Carta al Gobnor de la Provincia de Alajuela, Diciembre 10 de 1870,’ *Gobernación - No. 28 721*, ANCR, 1870, 155.

<sup>519</sup> Pérez Zumbado, *El Control y la Dominación Política en el Regimen de Tomás Guardia*, 122.

<sup>520</sup> Guardia, ‘Mensaje del Presidente de la República de Costa Rica al Congreso Nacional,’ 188.

Central America. Despite this commitment, a contemptuous attitude remained prevalent towards the general populace amongst liberal elites at the time. This is reflected in the language of Guardia who attempted to present an image of a harmonious country without social antagonism. In his estimation, the “principle of authority is profoundly respected by all social classes despite the immense distances established by the subjects, the great inequalities in rank and fortune, balanced by wise institutions.”<sup>521</sup> By respect for the principle of authority, Guardia probably meant the level of obedience shown towards his regime. It is likely that there was a certain degree of popular discontent amongst the lower class as a result of land reforms that benefitted wealthy elites. In the late nineteenth century, there were many *ejido* or communal lands were sold off which contributed to the expansion of agro-export production in the country. For instance, President Guardia signed a 1871 decree authorising the transfer *ejido* lands in Guanacaste to private ownership.<sup>522</sup> By enacting such legislation, Guardia wanted to remove “those habits of inveterate feudalism, teach the people to be the Lord and not the slave in a prodigal territory in riches, and under the *ejido* liberal laws that make all men equal before the august altar of law.”<sup>523</sup> These laws inevitably led to a great increase in private land ownership including large estates known as *haciendas* and *latifundios*.

### **Banana Production and Authoritarianism in Limón**

One of the regions where land use would change most dramatically under the Guardia regime was Talamanca. This was where the second of the two great periods of expansion of agro-export production during the nineteenth century occurred. After the success of the coffee industry in the 1830s, bananas became the country’s next major agro-export product. President Guardia commissioned Henry Meiggs to build a railroad from the Central Valley to the newly established Caribbean coastal city of Puerto Limón. Meiggs’ nephew was a man by the name of Minor Keith who subsequently took control of the banana trade in Costa Rica due to his position as the vice president of the UFC. In an 1886 letter Keith wrote: “When I first arrived in Costa Rica, in the year 1872, Limón and all the

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<sup>521</sup> Tomás Guardia, ‘Illustres Representantes Municipales y Señores,’ *Gobernación* - No. 23 426, ANCR, 1877, 237.

<sup>522</sup> Tomás Guardia, *Coleccion de los Decretos y Ordenes Expedidos por los Supremos Podres Legislativo y Ejecutivo de Costa Rica en el Año de 1871: Tomo XX* (San José: Imprenta de la Paz, 1874), 97.

<sup>523</sup> Tomás Guardia, ‘Sr. D. Salvador Gonzalez: Primer Designado, Encargado del Poder Ejectivo de la República,’ *Gobernación* - No. 23 426, ANCR, 1873, 211.

country between it and the cultivated portions of the interior was a dense wilderness. With the exception of the little village of Mantina, which contained 50 and 60 inhabitants, not one individual was settled anywhere on the line.”<sup>524</sup> Keith deemed the region to be unsettled which was only true if one ignored the Indigenous peoples living there. The railway was set to be built in order to connect the Central Valley with Puerto Limón as well as to develop the country’s trade network.

In 1872, the Costa Rican government allowed workers from Jamaica to enter Limón in order to help build the railroad. Dissatisfactory remuneration and working conditions led to the subsequent development of country’s union movement which came to be especially strong in Limón. These conditions also played a role in the crime and disorder that Costa Rican officials expressed concern about at the time. In a May 1873 letter to the Minister of War in San José, Federico Fernández, the *Plaza* Commander in Limón complained of the “difficulty in the maintenance of discipline.”<sup>525</sup> He went on to explain that he had often seen the “imposition of severe punishments perhaps to the point of being cruel.”<sup>526</sup> Commander Fernández did not explain which individuals or groups had been severely punished but it is reasonable to assume that he meant the so-called ‘criminal class.’ The Commander added, “To dominate such a class of people in Limón,” he relied on one lieutenant who was “honest, energetic, submissive and of proper character who gets respected and obeyed, and who maintains the honor and rigidity of discipline.”<sup>527</sup> The letter does not give any indication whether there was differentiation in terms of the methods of control employed against certain ethnic communities who confronted the criminal justice system.

An examination of the historical record reveals a pattern of intense agro-export production, authoritarian political institutions and large Indigenous or Afro-Latino populations. However, the degree of authoritarianism also depended on the level of control directed towards the labourers who worked in the agricultural sector. As Lindo Fuentes observed, “Where a greater Indian population and a tradition of coercion in labor recruiting existed, the growth of exports resulted in more authoritarian political systems.”<sup>528</sup> Within Central America, Guatemala was the most extreme in this regard due to its coercive labour relations which were like those of the *repartimiento* system from the colonial era. This

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<sup>524</sup> Minor Keith, *Mr Keith's Letter to the Costa Rica Bondholders* (London: self-published, 1886), 8.

<sup>525</sup> Federico Fernández, ‘Del Comandante de la Plaza,’ *Guerra y Marina* - No. 8385, ANCR, 1873, 73.

<sup>526</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>527</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>528</sup> Lindo Fuentes, ‘The Economy of Central America,’ 59.

system remained until the old 'liberal' order was replaced by the progressive government of Juan José Arevalo in 1944.<sup>529</sup> Creating economic growth under such an inefficient system required low wages and strong social control.<sup>530</sup> In Costa Rica, the coffee industry was more lucrative for the country's general population than with banana production given that the latter industry was largely foreign owned. It was this industry that produced the pejorative image of Central America as a region of so-called 'banana republics' which are characterised as underdeveloped countries ruled by corrupt elites who benefited economically from specialisation in the production of a small number of agro-export commodities.

Although Costa Rica also produced bananas for the UFC like its neighbours, given that it was relatively developed and less authoritarian during the liberal reform era, it did not quite fit the description of a banana republic in comparison to its neighbours. Within regards to poverty, Costa Rica was unique in the region, "only in degree, not in kind."<sup>531</sup> Limón was the most underdeveloped province in the country partly because of institutionalised racist policies such as a lack of suffrage rights and the inability to travel to the Central Valley where the greatest economic opportunities existed. Along with Afro-Costa Ricans, these policies were also applied to Amerindians but did not affect them to the same extent as they generally did not seek to participate in the country's electoral system. Unfortunately for the former Jamaican immigrants, they arrived at their new home at a time when social Darwinism was spreading throughout Europe and other parts of the world.

### **The White Legend in the Late Nineteenth Century**

There is no doubt that the concept of 'race' has been an important element with regards to social control in Latin America as it has been throughout the world. Skin colour has historically been the primary determinant of an individual's position in the hierarchical labour systems that developed in the Americas since the sixteenth century. After traveling extensively throughout Spanish America, the naturalist Alexander von Humboldt observed,

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<sup>529</sup> Hall and Brignoli, *Historical Atlas of Central America*, 193.

<sup>530</sup> Ciro Cardoso, 'Central America: The Liberal Era, c.1870-1930,' in Leslie Bethell (Ed.) *Central America Since Independence* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 63.

<sup>531</sup> Meg Mitchell and Scott Pentzer, *Costa Rica: Global Studies Handbook* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2008), 230.



“skin more or less white, decides a man’s rank in society.”<sup>532</sup> Although skin pigmentation is a biological factor, it is also environmentally influenced in the sense that human phenotypes are affected by factors such as climate. Many scientists believe that phenotypic variation amongst human beings is primarily due to the part of the world in which their ancestors lived. Those individuals who lived for millennia closer to the equator developed darker pigmented skin to those who lived in colder climates that exist closer to earth’s North and South Poles.<sup>533</sup> Ignorance of this process of natural selection, led white Europeans to conclude that earth was divided into many different ‘races,’ of which they were the self-described ‘superiors.’

On the socially constructed racial hierarchy, Africans were deemed to be the lowest in rank of their abilities. Nowhere has this belief been more damaging than the with the pseudo-science regarding the connection between ‘race’ and intelligence. According to Darwin, Europeans, Africans and Amerindians differ “from each other in mind as any three races that can be named.”<sup>534</sup> Some modern studies on intelligence still claim that some ethnicities are inherently more intelligent than others.<sup>535</sup> Harvard Palaeontologist Stephen Jay Gould criticised the notion that something as complex and abstract as intelligence can possibly be reduced to a singular number i.e., the intelligence quotient (IQ).<sup>536</sup> In some sense, the debate over IQ sometimes misses the point as class differences have prevented a genuine equality of opportunity which would be necessary to fairly compare intelligence between individuals. As Darwin eloquently put it, “Man accumulates property and bequeaths it to his children, so that the children of the rich have an advantage over the poor in the race for success, independently of bodily or mental superiority.”<sup>537</sup> Given the self-

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<sup>532</sup> Alexander Von Humboldt, *Essai politique sur le Royaume de la Nouvelle-Espagne* (Paris: Chez F. Schoell, 1811), 51.

<sup>533</sup> Nina Jablonski, *Living Color: The Biological and Social Meaning of Skin Color* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

<sup>534</sup> Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, 178.

<sup>535</sup> See, for instance, Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray, *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life* (New York: Free Press, 1996). Although Herrnstein and Murray were sharply criticised for their position on innate cognitive ability, they did not discount the effects of environment on intelligence: “That a trait is genetically transmitted in individuals does not mean that group differences in that trait are also genetic in origin. Anyone who doubts this assertion may take two handfuls of genetically identical seed corn and plant one handful in Iowa, the other in the Mojave Desert, and let nature (i.e., the environment) take its course. The seeds will grow in Iowa, not in the Mojave, and the result will have nothing to do with genetic differences;” Ibid., 298, emphasis in original.

<sup>536</sup> Specifically, Gould argued against “the abstraction of intelligence as a single entity, ... its quantification as one number for each individual, and the use of these numbers to rank people in a single series of worthiness, invariably to find that oppressed and disadvantaged groups—races, classes, or sexes—are innately inferior and deserve their status;” Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man* (Revised and Expanded) (W. W. Norton and Company, 2012),

<sup>537</sup> Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, 134.

evident institutionalised racism that existed prior to the twentieth century, structural disadvantage certainly had a racial element to it.

In what is perhaps not a coincidence, the very two Indigenous groups in Costa Rica that have most often been described as white have also been deemed by foreign observers to have comparatively higher intelligence. Aside from the Blancos, the Amerindians in Costa Rica that have been most often described as white are those of the Guatuso tribe. The German geologist Julius Froebel wrote, these Amerindians are “said to be of very fair complexion, a statement which has caused the appellation of ‘*Indios blancos*,’ or *Guatusos*.”<sup>538</sup> Squier also observed that the Guatusos are “reputed to be above the ordinary stature, with comparatively light complexions and red hair; and tales are told of some of their women having been seen by hunters and others, as fair and beautiful as the fairest Europeans.”<sup>539</sup> The Guatuso Amerindians were reportedly named after the gautuso animal (also known as a gout) which is found in Costa Rica and other parts of Central America. After surveying Nicaragua and northern Costa Rica, the English naturalist Thomas Belt heard reports that the Guatusos had “red or light-coloured hair and European features.”<sup>540</sup> Although he did not consider the Guatusos to be white, it “struck [him] that *they appeared more intelligent than the generality of Indians*.”<sup>541</sup> Most of the claims of higher intelligence, however, are in reference to Indigenous Talamancans.

After travelling to the Galapagos Islands, Chile and other parts of Latin America, Darwin observed that hairiness and skin colour amongst the Amerindians varied significantly.<sup>542</sup> This is clear from the many colonial era references to Amerindians as ranging from ‘almost black’ to ‘white.’ Most references of the Guatusos as ‘*Indios blancos*’ come from the late nineteenth century. In 1875, William Gabb addressed the reports of white Amerindians in Guatuso and San Carlos. He was personally informed by locals that the Guatusos ranged “from a rather light Indian colour, to nearly white, the same as ourselves” [i.e., *Ticos*].<sup>543</sup> One Costa Rican man even reported being attacked by a young female Amerindian who was “as blonde as an Englishwoman.”<sup>544</sup> In the following decade,

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<sup>538</sup> Julius Froebel, *Seven Years' Travel in Central America, Northern Mexico, and the Far West of the United States* (London: Richard Bentley, 1859), 24.

<sup>539</sup> Ephraim George Squier, ‘The Unexplored Regions of Central America,’ *The Historical Magazine*, Vol. 4, No. 3, 1860, 65.

<sup>540</sup> Thomas Belt, *The Naturalist in Nicaragua* (London: John Murray, 1874), 37.

<sup>541</sup> *Ibid.*, emphasis added.

<sup>542</sup> Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, 174.

<sup>543</sup> Gabb, *On the Indian Tribes and Languages of Costa Rica*, 484.

<sup>544</sup> Gabb originally wrote “as white as an Englishwoman.” However, this quote is translated from the Spanish translation provided in brackets which reads “*tan rubia como una Inglesa*,” *Ibid.*

León Fernández wrote the following description of the Guatusos after visiting the region seven years later: “They are robust, agile, well formed, and of good character. They are pure Indians and not white, as has been claimed, although in some cases was noticed a trace of white or negro blood.”<sup>545</sup> It is difficult to find similar rejections regarding the whiteness of Talamancans’ which strengthens such claims in that particular case.

Gabb’s account of the lifestyle and language of the Indigenous peoples of Costa Rica, provides many important contributions, especially his observations on Talamanca. Although he does not describe the Amerindians living in the region as ‘white,’ Gabb gives a detailed description of the Indigenous Talamancans:

Physically, the people of all the tribes bear a strong resemblance to each other. They are of short stature, broad shouldered, heavily built, full in the chest, with well-formed limbs, and well muscled throughout. Their color is similar to that of the North American Indians, or if anything different, perhaps a little lighter. There seems to be but little, if any admixture of foreign blood among them. Their history would hardly lead us to expect it. They have lived very exclusively, and it has hardly been half a century since they have ceased to live in a state of open war with all intruders from the coast side. The Spanish occupation closed so disastrously over a century and a half ago, was of too short duration, and the whites were too few, to make a permanent impression on a then populous country.<sup>546</sup>

John Hale also observed that the Blancos “do not mix with either the lightly coloured inhabitants or the other Indians.”<sup>547</sup> These observations undermine the popular notion that the lighter complexion of *Ticos* can merely be accounted for through a greater percentage of European blood owing to a smaller Indigenous population during the colonial period. It is, however, difficult to determine exactly the extent to which miscegenation has occurred between different peoples in the region. It was not until the 1870s that there were major changes with regards to the demography of Limón due to the arrival of the Jamaican émigrés. Their gradual assimilation to Costa Rican society would have important implications for the country after its political system was slowly liberalised during the liberal reform era by Tomás Guardia and his successors.

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<sup>545</sup> León Fernández, ‘The Guatuso Indians of Costa Rica,’ in *United States Congress, Index to the Miscellaneous Documents of the House of Representatives for the Second Session of the Forty Seventh Congress, 1882-’83* (Washington, Government Printing Office, 1883), 677.

<sup>546</sup> Gabb, *On the Indian Tribes and Languages of Costa Rica*, 493. In 1885, the Swedish biologist Carl Bovallius also visited Talamanca and described the skin colour of the Amerindians living there as “lightly-tanned brown;” Carl Bovallius, ‘Una Visita a Los Indios de Talamanca,’ in *Los Aborígenes de Costa Rica: Textos Históricos, Periodísticos y Etnográficos* (Compilador: Elias Zeledón Cartín) (San José: Editorial Universidad Estatal a Distancia, 2017), 103.

<sup>547</sup> Hale, ‘Seis Meses de Residencia,’ 17.

## The Regime of Bernardo Soto (1885-1889)

In 1876, Tomás Guardia was replaced after the election of Anciето Esquivel Sáenz before he was overthrown via a coup d'état. The provisional President Vincent Herrera Zeledón was in power until Guardia returned to the presidency in September 1877. In that same year, the government passed *El Ley de Derechos Individuales* (The Law on Individual Rights) which granted citizens a range of civil rights. For instance, Article 8 of the law stated that citizens shall not be “persecuted for holding political opinions unless a person commits or conspires to commit criminal acts.”<sup>548</sup> Thus, free speech was held up as principle of the regime, in theory at least. Despite its authoritarian elements, Costa Rica's political system was becoming comparatively liberal by the late nineteenth century as demonstrated by the abolition of the death penalty in 1882.<sup>549</sup>

After Tomás Guardia died in 1882, he was replaced by Saturnino Lizano Gutiérrez and then by Próspero Fernández Oreamuno (1882-1885). The latter introduced some important reforms such as divorce legalisation and civil marriages which undermined the power of the Catholic Church. These reforms accelerated the continued divergence of state and ecclesiastical authority. During the 1880s education ended religious teachings in schools in favour of a more secular education which was consistent with the shift towards a modern liberal state. In 1885, the presidency was next occupied by Bernardo Soto Alfaro who had brokered a deal with Minor Keith in 1883 on behalf of his predecessor. This deal was reached after the Oreamuno regime was unable to finance the construction of the railroad. The Soto-Keith contract granted generous concessions to British banks and the UFC which was given ownership of the railroad for 99 years. Article 22 of the contract stated that United Fruit was granted 800, 000 acres of land adjacent to the “railroad or at any other place in the national territory of the company's choice, including all natural resources within.”<sup>550</sup> Moreover, this land could not be taxed by the Costa Rican government for 20 years.<sup>551</sup> Soto's decision to allow the UFC to own so much land contributed to some of the anti-‘Yankee’ sentiments that existed in some sectors of Costa Rican society during the early twentieth century.

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<sup>548</sup> Tomás Guardia, ‘Law on Individual Rights, 1877,’ in Marc Edelman and Joanne Kenen (Eds), *The Costa Rica Reader* (New York: Grove Weidenfield, 1989), 59.

<sup>549</sup> Reding, ‘Costa Rica,’ 301.

<sup>550</sup> Bernardo Soto Alfaro and Minor Keith, ‘The Soto-Keith Contract on Foreign Debt and the Railroad, 1883,’ in Marc Edelman and Joanne Kenen (Eds), *The Costa Rica Reader* (New York: Grove Weidenfield, 1989), 61.

<sup>551</sup> *Ibid.*, 62

Much like Tomás Guardia, President Soto did not hesitate to use the coercive institutions of the state apparatus. As with all states at the time, the police were the primary institution responsible for maintaining public order. In 1886, Soto observed that “the police are the authority that is most in touch with the individuals, about whose actions they exercise a healthy vigilance, either to prevent and impede the crimes; already for the immediate conservation of order.”<sup>552</sup> Bernardo Soto also held similar views to Tomás Guardia with regards to secondary education. The first school in Talamanca was established in 1886 which opened the way for teaching Costa Rican culture. President Soto also proclaimed in 1888 that education should be provided “under equal conditions to the two sexes.”<sup>553</sup> He believed that any woman with sufficient opportunities to develop her knowledge and skills would “soon be elevated morally and intellectually to the category that corresponds to her by the nature of her high social mission.”<sup>554</sup> This position was consistent with the central thesis of Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* which argued that women would show themselves to be equal to men in cognitive capacity if given the educational opportunities.<sup>555</sup> The extension of popular education during the 1870s and 1880s laid the basis for establishment of representative democracy in the country in the late nineteenth century.

### **The Origins of Representative Democracy in Costa Rica**

By the late 1880s elite support for representative democracy in Costa Rica increased substantially. In 1890, President José Rodríguez Zeledón recognised there was great popular support for representative democracy which has “promoted the moral and material progress of the nation” by placing “power in the hands of the person who freely designates popular suffrage.”<sup>556</sup> President Rodríguez assessed the character of *Ticos* as displaying a “love of order,” as well as “respect for the law and authority.”<sup>557</sup> This kind of language is indicative of the country’s more liberal political system and lack of rebellions rather a love for order and authority. President Rodríguez and other liberal leaders who supported him

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<sup>552</sup> Bernardo Soto, ‘Presidente de la República Benemérito General Don Bernardo Soto Dirige al Congreso Constitucional de Costa Rica, 1<sup>st</sup> de Mayo de 1886,’ *Gobernación - No. 23 426*, ANCR, 1886, 253-254.

<sup>553</sup> Bernardo Soto, ‘Mensaje del Presidente de la República Congreso Constitucional, 1<sup>st</sup> de Mayo de 1888,’ *Gobernación - No. 23 426*, ANCR, 1888, 265.

<sup>554</sup> Ibid.

<sup>555</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (London: Penguin, 2004).

<sup>556</sup> José Joaquín Rodríguez Zeledón, *Gobernación - No. 23 426*, ANCR, 1890, 269.

<sup>557</sup> Ibid.

became known as the ‘Generation of 1889.’ Even though Rodriguez acted in a rather dictatorial manner with his decision to dissolve Congress in 1892, this period is commonly given by many *Ticos* as the beginning of representative democracy in their country.

It is true that the Costa Rica state became more representative during the early twentieth century as suffrage expanded to a greater percentage of the male population. In 1902, suffrage was extended to all men living in the country, with exceptions for certain racial minorities. Thus, despite its progressive advances in voting and other areas, vulnerable sectors of Costa Rican society still faced serious problems associated with structural disadvantage and discrimination. Afro-*Ticos* appeared to face greater discrimination than the Indigenous population in Limón for two reasons. Firstly, this was because Amerindians were still sometimes being described as ‘white.’ For instance, after arriving in the country in the first half of the 1890s, Salvadoran intellectual Alberto Masferrer was surprised by a European woman he met who stated that, in Costa Rica “all Indians are white.”<sup>558</sup> Secondly, there is little reason to suggest that Amerindians actually wanted to participate in the country’s political system. It was more likely the leaders of the Amerindians to be reproached than the average Indigenous person. Take for example, the King of Talamanca Antonio Saldaña, who was criticised by the Governor of Limón in 1900 as a “pernicious individual in Talamanca for his vices and depraved customs” who was also “greedy, ignorant and perverse to the extreme.”<sup>559</sup> Unsurprisingly, it was not the Amerindians, but the former Jamaican nationals in Limón who would drive union activism in the first half of the twentieth century.

At the turn of the century, Costa Rica’s labour movement began a process of significant expansion. From the late nineteenth century to the start of World War I, a new generation of intellectuals had been influenced by anarchist or left-wing libertarian ideas. Consequently, the country’s union movement was quite libertarian in character which influenced the nature of political organisation at that time.<sup>560</sup> During the period from 1874 to 1914, the country’s unions organised a total of 12 strikes, none of which were deemed legal by the government.<sup>561</sup> European immigrants were often involved in conducting these

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<sup>558</sup> Alberto Masferrer, *En Costa Rica: Notas Rápidas* (San José: Grupo Nación, 2012), 11.

<sup>559</sup> ANCR. Cajas de Límites Costa Rica-Panamá, Caja 12, Tomo III, fol. 589 cited in Alejandra Boza Villarreal, ‘Política en la Talamanca Indígena,’ 128. King Saldaña mysteriously died of poisoning a decade later, thus ending the 43 year experiment that was the Talamancan Monarchy.

<sup>560</sup> David Díaz Arias, ‘From Radicals to Heroes of the Republic: Anarchism and National Identity in Costa Rica, 1900–1977,’ in Geoffrey de Laforcade and Kirwin Shafer (Eds.) in *Defiance of Boundaries: Anarchism in Latin American History* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2015), 219.

<sup>561</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.

strikes. For instance, Italian émigrés were heavily involved in the *huelga de los Tútiles* (Tútiles strike) in 1888.<sup>562</sup> There was also the Spanish anarchist Juan Vera who helped the Costa Rican bakers union launch a strike in 1903 that demanded better pay and working conditions. This union was targeted by the regime of Asención Esquivel (1902-1906) leading to its disbandment.<sup>563</sup>

In the early twentieth century there were significant improvements in education and sanitation in the country. There was also a shift occurring vis-à-vis social control through the professionalisation of the police forces and the establishment of a modern penitentiary in 1909. This led to an increased crackdown on indigent individuals and prostitutes etc. who were considered subversive.<sup>564</sup> In 1913, direct voting was established which continued the trend that was making the country's political system more representative. At this stage however, there was substantial accusations of electoral fraud by opposition parties.<sup>565</sup> In spite of increasing democratisation, the country reverted to authoritarianism with the establishment of the Tinoco regime.

### **The Tinoco Dictatorship (1917-1919)**

In January 1917, the Minister of War Federico Tinoco and his brother Joaquín deposed President Alfredo González Flores (1914-1917) via a military coup and established a dictatorship. The Tinoco regime posed the greatest threat to the continued development of representative democracy in Costa Rica. The regime's position towards democracy was demonstrated in the government's attitude towards the military and education. Under Tinoco, military spending increased dramatically from 20% in 1916 to 42% of the national budget in 1918.<sup>566</sup> There was a simultaneous decrease in education spending which declined to 5% in 1918 from 15% in 1915. Tinoco's cuts to education spending undermined Costa Rica's image as a country with 'more teachers than soldiers.' This move put the

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<sup>562</sup> Óscar Aguilar Bulgarelli, *Huelga de los Tútiles - 1887-1889: Un Capítulo de Nuestra Historia Social* (San José: Editorial Universidad Estatal a Distancia, 2015).

<sup>563</sup> Eugene Miller, *A Holy Alliance? The Church and the Left in Costa Rica, 1932-1948* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1996), 24.

<sup>564</sup> Iván Molina, *Costa Rica Por Dicha: Identidad Nacional y Cambio Cultural en Costa Rica Durante los Siglos XIX y XX* (San José: Editorial UCR, 2015), 29.

<sup>565</sup> Fabrice Lehoucq and Iván Molina, *Stuffing the Ballot Box: Fraud, Electoral Reform, and Democratization in Costa Rica* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 97-98.

<sup>566</sup> Cited in Mahoney, *The Legacies of Liberalism*, 156.

country somewhat more in line with the other Central American republics with regards to underfunded educational institutions.<sup>567</sup>

Although relatively mild by Central American standards, the Tinoco regime was clearly authoritarian and often brutal, as demonstrated by the documented instances of repression it employed against the general population. In February 1918, the US Chargé d'affaires Stewart Johnson reported on the human rights abuses of the Tinoco regime:

For the last two weeks, since official full investigation discovered some of revolutionary government plans, reign of terror has existed. Suspects in great numbers in every part of country have been thrown into jail and mildest punishment has been lashes on the back to extract confessions. Several of rural guards imprisoned have been tortured to death; one while undergoing torture called Tinoco a traitor and was instantly shot by Joaquin himself.<sup>568</sup>

Joaquín Tinoco was both the brother of Federico and the Minister of the War and Navy. He is one of the major reasons why State Department documents from this era mention the numerous arrests and torture of Costa Rican civilians.<sup>569</sup> For instance, Ricardo Fernández Guardia was placed under house arrest after he met with the Acting Secretary of State to the Consul in San José.<sup>570</sup> Despite its concern for the Costa Rican people, it was most likely the attacks on US citizens that led the Wilson Administration to act.

In November 1918, relations between the US and Costa Rican governments reached their lowest point since the beginning of the Tinoco era. On November 13th, the Costa Rican police were called out to suppress an anti-government demonstration and celebration of an Allied Victory in World War I outside the US legation. The police arrived and began using sabres against the demonstrators, including at least one US citizen.<sup>571</sup> Johnson's speech at the demonstration highlighting the virtues of democracy was viewed by high-ranking government officials to be a veiled criticism of Costa Rican domestic policy. According to Johnson, Joaquin Tinoco "threatened [his] life in case of action on the part of

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<sup>567</sup> For instance, in comparison, the Salvadoran government never allocated more than 5% of its national budget to education during the 1800s; Ibid., 155.

<sup>568</sup> Stewart Johnson, 'The Chargé in Costa Rica (Johnson) to the Secretary of State: Document 239 – San José, February 26, 1918,' in Tyler Dennet (Ed.) *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1918* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1930), 241.

<sup>569</sup> Ibid.

<sup>570</sup> Benjamin Chase, 'The Consul at San José (Chase) to the Acting Secretary of State: Document 821 – San José, May 26, 1919,' in Tyler Dennet (Ed.) *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1919: Volume I* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1934), 824.

<sup>571</sup> Stewart Johnson, 'The Chargé in Costa Rica (Johnson) to the Secretary of State: No. 294 – San José, November 13, 1918,' in Tyler Dennet (Ed.) *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1918* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1930), 272.



the United States.”<sup>572</sup> In response to the threat, Secretary of State Robert Lansing ordered the closure of the US Legation on November 26<sup>th</sup> in order to protect the Charge d’affaires and other US government officials.

It is clear from the internal documentary record that the Wilson Administration wanted Tinoco’s regime to collapse. On November 16<sup>th</sup>, 1918, the US consul Benjamin Chase wrote: “[US] Americans are in actual danger now and they, together with most of the other people, would welcome any action that would end conditions, no matter how drastic.”<sup>573</sup> However, there were some elements in the US business community that were sympathetic to President Tinoco. In a 1918 letter to the Secretary of State, the Plenipotentiary Minister of Costa Rica claimed that Tinoco’s rule was “aided and abetted by American capital.”<sup>574</sup> The Minister was most likely referring to the UFC which displayed support for Tinoco’s regime. On June 7<sup>th</sup>, 1919, Minor Keith wrote to Eugene Ong, the second vice president of United Fruit apprising him of the situation. Keith was concerned with the unrest in the country which had caused “serious detriment to the Fruit Company, as it [took] away the laborers from the farms” and created a “large loss to all interests in Costa Rica.”<sup>575</sup> He conveyed to Ong his desire that the US government intervene in order protect Tinoco from a popular uprising. He emphatically stated that it was “very much to the interest of the United Fruit Company, as well as other interests, that this invasion should be suppressed and that the United States Government should take some action to prevent Nicaragua from aiding this revolution.”<sup>576</sup> Whilst it was possible that there some Nicaraguan involvement, there was a large domestic opposition to what was widely considered to be an illegitimate government.

In order to give the regime greater legitimacy, some members of the regime such as Carlos Lara, the Costa Rican Agent to the Acting Secretary of State, campaigned for US recognition of Tinoco’s presidency. When Lara was the Secretary of State for Foreign

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<sup>572</sup> Stewart Johnson, ‘The Chargé in Costa Rica (Johnson) to the Secretary of State: No. 298, November 18, 1918,’ in Tyler Dennet (Ed.) *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1918* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1930), 274.

<sup>573</sup> Chase also stated, “There will neither be peace nor security for life or property in Costa Rica until the whole party now running affairs are ousted by whatever means necessary;” Benjamin Chase, ‘The Consul at Costa Rica (Chase) to the Secretary of State: Document 297 – San José, November 16th, 1918,’ in Tyler Dennet (Ed.) *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1918* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1930), 274.

<sup>574</sup> Manuel Castro Quesada, ‘The Costa Rican Minister (Quesada) to the Secretary of State: Document 254 – New York, March 28, 1918,’ in Tyler Dennet (Ed.) *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1918* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1930), 249.

<sup>575</sup> Minor Keith, ‘Letter from First Vice President of the United Fruit Company to C. Hazelton, Esq.,’ *Federico Tinoco Coleccion - No. 76*, San José, ANCR, 1919, 6.

<sup>576</sup> Ibid.

Affairs, he suggested to the Minister in Costa Rica Edward Hale via Minor Keith, that a policy of recognition by the US government would be in its best interests of the United States vis-à-vis the war against Germany. Lara wrote in April 1917 that the Costa Rican government “not only is disposed to observe towards the United States a benevolent neutrality but also to prevent development upon its territory of any hostility against them.”<sup>577</sup> Part of the Tinoco regime’s strategy to acquire US recognition was a public relations campaign. As Lara put it, they were “trying to prepare public opinion” with regards to establishing the Tinoco government’s case in the US and Costa Rican press.<sup>578</sup> To Wilson’s credit, the President never recognised Tinoco as the legitimate leader of the country. In this case, President Wilson acted in accordance with the principle of ‘making the world safe for democracy’ by refusing to recognise the Tinoco regime.

The position of President Wilson also reflected changing views with regards to technology and the dissemination of political information. As previously mentioned, after the CPI was founded in 1917, it began to export propaganda technique to other countries including Costa Rica. In May 1918, the military intelligence branch of the US War Department produced an illuminating report on the political situation in the country.<sup>579</sup> Under the first section which is called ‘Objectives,’ the report opens with the following colourful analogy: “Costa Rica is the egg nearest decomposition in a basket where the explosion of one would set off four other bad eggs. Any stench raised in Central America would divert slightly our military resources but might seriously cloud the political horizon.”<sup>580</sup> Part II of the report is titled ‘Controlling Factors’ and is completely censored but Part III, ‘Propaganda Status’ remains intact. Part III deals specifically with countering pro-German propaganda in Costa Rica.

Part IV, titled the ‘American Program,’ contains an assessment of the political problems in Costa Rica which is “now the key to Central America.”<sup>581</sup> The report notes the “*need* for American use of psychologic [sic] influence is indicated by the political situation and is emphasized by the very active pro-German propaganda existent there.” The opportunity stemmed from friendly relations with the US as well as the country’s high

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<sup>577</sup> Quoted in Edward Hale, ‘The Minister in Costa Rica (Hale) to the Secretary of State: Document 311 – San José, April 3, 1917,’ in Tyler Dennet (Ed.) *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1917, Supplement 1, The World War* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1931), 243.

<sup>578</sup> Carlos Lara, ‘Letter from Carlos Lara to Don Federico Tinoco, Junio 5<sup>th</sup>, 1919,’ *Federico Tinoco Coleccion - No. 76*, San José, ANCR, 1919, 2.

<sup>579</sup> Department of War, ‘Report Prepared in the Military Intelligence Branch.’

<sup>580</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>581</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

literacy rates.<sup>582</sup> There are no similar reports on the other Central American republics that are known to exist. This section of the report also revealed immediate plans for the future which involved the dissemination of “news dispatches but later there can be added special articles for the papers and magazines, pamphlets, moving pictures and the active aid of Americans resident in San José, etc.”<sup>583</sup> The section notes that “billboards, pamphlets and handbills are extensively used to influence public opinion” in the country. It also contains a list of points to emphasise such as the United States’ “changing attitude toward labor and new curb on corporations which exploited workers in the United States just as in Latin American countries.”<sup>584</sup> The report concludes with the observation that US “Americans living in Costa Rica could easily be utilized for psychologic [sic] influence of the most penetrating kind by an agent sent directly to them.”<sup>585</sup> The report is significant because it indicates that the US government was monitoring public opinion in Costa Rica as early as the Tinoco era.

In August 1919, Tinoco’s regime collapsed after his brother was murdered. Given the level of US power in Central America, it is reasonable to suggest that the lack of US recognition helped prevent the consolidation of the Tinoco dictatorship. After representative democracy was restored, education spending increased from 5% in 1919 to 20% in 1921, with a further expansion to 25% in 1928.<sup>586</sup> Simultaneously, the power of military decreased once again to 20% in 1921, with a further decrease to 10% in 1928. Costa Rica’s police force was also not particularly strong. In 1923, for instance, there were only 61 police officers in all of Guanacaste which had a population of over 50 thousand.<sup>587</sup> Between 1915 and 1940, the number of police officers in the country fluctuated between 695 and 947 members.<sup>588</sup> The fact that Tinoco government was last authoritarian regime in Costa Rica is a major point of difference with the other Central American republics.

The collapse of the Tinoco dictatorship was a watershed in Costa Rica history as it represented the shift away from violence as the dominant technique of control consistent with that of a liberal state. The change in terms of a greater amount of reliance on education

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<sup>582</sup> Ibid., emphasis in original.

<sup>583</sup> Ibid., 50, 53, emphasis in original.

<sup>584</sup> Another suggestion concerned the sensitivity with language such as saying the ‘United States’ as opposed to ‘America’ given that “Latin Americans resent describing the United States as the whole of America;” Ibid., 54-55.

<sup>585</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>586</sup> Mahoney, *The Legacies of Liberalism*, 156.

<sup>587</sup> Marc Edelman, *The Logic of the Latifundio: Large Estates of Northwestern Costa Rica Since the Nineteenth Century* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 120.

<sup>588</sup> Yashar, *Demanding Democracy*, 51.

as opposed to violence was revealed at the time in the province of Limón. In 1919, the Consul General of Costa Rica in Nicaragua Eduardo Beeche wrote a letter to the Mayor of Limón celebrating recent political developments in the province:

I have had the pleasure of receiving your attentive letter yesterday, which gives me information about the propaganda work that is carried out in that province, to direct which you have been designated. I give to you the most expressive thanks for the news that I am communicating and I celebrate, above all, that the old divisions of a political nature have disappeared that in some way hampered the development of that rich and important section of the Republic.<sup>589</sup>

Propaganda most likely had a limited effect on the Indigenous population of Talamanca given their limited knowledge of Spanish before the reforms beginning in the late 1970s which changed any location names from English such as Old Harbour to Puerto Viejo and introduced Spanish classes for Indigenous children.

Visitors from the United States witnessed the country's uniqueness at the time compared to other parts of Central America. For instance, after visiting the country for the US State Department, Dana Munro observed in 1918:

The political development of this compact community of white peasants has necessarily been very different from that of the neighboring countries, where a small upper class of Spanish descent ruled and exploited many times its number of ignorant Indians and half-breeds. In Costa Rica, the fact that nearly all the inhabitants were of the same stock and had inherited the same civilization has always made the country more democratic and has forced the class that controlled the government to take into account, in a certain way, the wishes and interests of the masses.<sup>590</sup>

Biological determinist claims aside, it is true that the political price of ignoring the interests of the Costa Rican masses certainly would have been much higher than in other parts of Central America where there was a larger divide between the elites and the disadvantaged sectors of society. In comparison to Costa Rica, Munro observed that the Guatemalan government "firmly maintains its authority through a large standing army and police force, and promptly and mercilessly checks the slightest manifestation of popular dissatisfaction."<sup>591</sup> Although Tinoco's government was authoritarian, it was certainly not the most brutal regime in Central America due to Costa Rica's more liberal political culture.

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<sup>589</sup> Eduardo Beeche, *Federico Tinoco Coleccion - No. 94*, ANCR, 1919, 88.

<sup>590</sup> Munro, *The Five Republics of Central America*, 143.

<sup>591</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

The end of the Tinoco era marked a further divergence between Costa Rica and the rest of Central America. Relations also improved with the United States after Tinoco was ejected from office. This improvement was demonstrated with the 1921 Coto War with Panama which began after Costa Rica forces entered Coto which it argued was part of its territory. This territorial claim was based on a 1914 arbitration decision by Chief Justice of the United States Edward Douglass White who had granted Costa Rica rights to the Coto region.<sup>592</sup> Although it appeared that Panama would win militarily, the US stationed its navy off the coast of the border after concerns that United Fruit's operations could be affected in the border region of Bocas del Toro. Panama soon complied with the White decision and Coto was annexed to Costa Rica. Since that time, Costa Rica has become the most pro-US country in Central America both in terms of its leaders and its general populace.

## **Conclusion**

The liberal reform period is one of the most significant critical junctures because further strengthened Costa Rica as the exception within the region. It was during this era, when the country's structural advantages produced comparatively greater economic development than the other Central American republics. The major exception was Limón where colonisation was delayed due to successful Indigenous resistance in Talamanca. This affected the development of the banana industry in Limón which, unlike the coffee industry, was heavily influenced by foreign powers. Afro-Costa Rican workers subsequently played an important role in developing the national character of Central America's democratic exception despite being excluded from official political participation. In general, however, the triumph of liberal policies such as the introduction of universal popular education certainly had positive effects in terms of extending civil rights in the country. After the Tinoco era ended, there were definite limitations on the ability of the political class to coerce the population. Due to the introduction of a liberal political programme, Costa Rica's political development was similar to liberal democracies such as the United States. The major aberration was the dictatorship of Federico Tinoco whose removal from power in 1919 improved US-Costa Rican relations. Although the 1920s was a decade of relative

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<sup>592</sup> Edward Douglass White, *In the Matter of the Arbitration of the Boundary Dispute Between the Republics of Costa Rica and Panama Provided for by the Convention Between Costa Rica and Panama of March 17, 1910*: 'Opinion and Decision of Edward Douglass White, Chief Justice of the United States, Acting in the Capacity of Arbitrator as Provided in the Treaty Aforesaid, Washington, September 12, 1914' (London: Forgotten Books, 2015).

stability for both countries, the old liberal orders in both countries would be challenged after the Great Depression and the increasing popularity of social liberal ideas. That is the subject of the next chapter to which we now turn.

## **Chapter 6 - The 1948 Civil War: Its Background and Aftermath (1929-1955)**

**Costa Rica's democratic characteristics have made possible a truly genuine friendship with the United States. It is our policy to cultivate this friendship as a means of strengthening that country and the example it provides of what may be achieved through the democratic system. To this end, we support a full cultural and information program, including an educational mission and a Cultural Institute. We also support the exchange of professors and provide grants for the specialized training of Costa Ricans in the United States.**

US State Department, *Policy Statement Prepared in the Department of State - Costa Rica*, 1951.<sup>593</sup>

After the Tinoco dictatorship collapsed, workers in the country's unions began increasing cooperation amongst themselves. In 1920, workers held their first general strike which was an indication of this increased cooperation. Three years later, unions gathered together to form the *Federación Costarricense de Trabajadores* (Costa Rican Federation of Workers). The economic distress that developed after the Great Depression led to several strikes including the 1934 banana workers strike in Limón. Union pressure during the 1930s helped convince President Rafael Calderón (1940-1944) to create several social liberal institutions which formed the basis of the country's welfare state. Although it may appear that less became less libertarian with the development of the welfare state, the historical record does bear out such a conclusion. In fact, positive liberty increased after Costa Rica adopted a social liberal development model as healthcare, education and social welfare expanded. Moreover, the country's democratic institutions only strengthened, and the military was proscribed in 1949. This chapter argues that Costa Rica's transition to a more socially liberal system was a continuation of the country's liberal and democratic tradition. It also contends that its adoption of a welfare state did not put the country on a path towards socialism but instead one that allowed it to maintain its strong relationship with the United States. The chapter will outline the nature of the union movement, the origins of the

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<sup>593</sup> Department of State, 'Document 756: Policy Statement Prepared in the Department of State - Costa Rica, Washington, March 3, 1951,' 1316-1317.

country's welfare state, the 1948 civil war as well as the US government's educational and cultural influence in the country during the late 1940s and 50s.

### **The Costa Rican Union Movement During the 1930s**

In the early twentieth century, there were poor working conditions and low salaries for the Afro-Costa Rican workers on the banana plantations in Limón. These conditions were largely the result of the policies of private banana companies as opposed to those of the Costa Rican government. As historian Aviva Chomsky observed, given the weakness of the Costa Rican state, workers were subject to the authority of private power. At that time, the largest manifestation of private power in Limón was the UFC.<sup>594</sup> This company was not only backed by the US government but also the British government which attempted to assert its authority over the Afro-Costa Rican workers:

You and all British Subjects here are under the authority of the PRESIDENT OF COSTA RICA, and the Officials named by him, and I hereby order you to obey such authorities absolutely. The laws of this Country oblige all men to work; and for those who refuse, the Vagrancy Acts are in force, and such men are liable to be arrested and taken to any part of the Country, and there forced to work.<sup>595</sup>

Chomsky noted, it is no wonder that many workers did not perceive much of a difference between 'free labour' and slavery.<sup>596</sup> It is clear that wage labour varies depending on whether it is being conducted under authoritarian conditions.

As the poorest province in the country, it is not surprising that Limón was the region with the most popular dissent. Competition and conflict developed amongst workers because the UFC preferred to hire the English-speaking Jamaican emigres whom they could pay at a lower rate. This stimulated anger amongst certain sections of Costa Rica's working class. This anger sometimes manifested itself in racist vitriol, especially during the early 1930s when the Great Depression left many workers unemployed. For instance, one Costa Rican worker wrote an anonymous letter to Congress in 1932 stating that the arrival of "Blacks, Chinese, Polacks, Coolies, and all manner of undesirable scum ... has worsened

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<sup>594</sup> Aviva Chomsky, 'Laborers and Smallholders in Costa Rica's Mining Communities, 1900-1940,' in Aviva Chomsky and A. Lauria-Santiago (Eds.), *Identity and Struggle at the Margins of the Nation-State: The Laboring Peoples of Central America and the Hispanic Caribbean* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 171.

<sup>595</sup> Cited in Aviva Chomsky, 'Afro-Jamaican Traditions and Labor Organizing on United Fruit Company Plantations in Costa Rica, 1910,' *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 28, No. 4, 1995, 841.

<sup>596</sup> Ibid.



the agonizing situation of workers like us.”<sup>597</sup> Although this kind of language promotes racial prejudice, it was arguably the more ‘scientific racism’ that was most serious in terms of legitimating racist attitudes towards Afro-*Ticos*. Costa Rican microbiologist Clodomiro Picado, for example, wrote that a “century ago, our formula had all the characteristics of the European race with more or less 25 percent of the Indoamerican” but now “our blood is blackening.”<sup>598</sup> This was an exaggeration given that at the time there was a policy of limited segregation until 1949 which meant that Afro-Costa Ricans were not legally permitted to enter the Central Valley from Limón.

Talamanca was the place where the spread of radical political movements in the 1930s gained the most ground. After the prices of coffee and bananas fell due to the 1929 Wall Street crash, union activism amongst workers increased considerably. In 1931, the Costa Rican Communist Party or PCCR (*Partido Comunista de Costa Rica*) was co-founded by the author Carmen Lyra and future leader of the party, Manuel Mora. The PCCR pushed the country’s labour movement in an authoritarian direction. Out of all the critics of Costa Rica’s prevailing order at that time, perhaps the most famous was the Costa Rica author Carlos Luis Fallas. He famously wrote a book called *Mamita Yunai* (a local term for the UFC) about his experiences on the banana plantations in Limón.<sup>599</sup> Luis Fallas was also a communist who wrote a pamphlet entitled *The Danger of Dictatorship* wherein he characterised the state as the “machine of repression of the capitalists against the workers.”<sup>600</sup> In contrast to the anarchists who believe in direct action, Costa Rica’s communists believed in participation in the political system and advocated the creation of authoritarian-run institutions to achieve their goals. This belief was rooted in Leninist doctrine which preaches top-down approach to decision-making. The creation of a communist political party in the country alerted the United States which had amassed considerable power in relation to Central America by the 1930s.<sup>601</sup>

Internal US State Department documents from the time reveal the concerns of US government officials with communists and the unemployed, two groups which were both

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<sup>597</sup> Anonymous, ‘Everyday Racism, 1932,’ in Steven Palmer and Iván Molina Jiménez (Eds.), *The Costa Rica Reader: History, Culture, Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 246.

<sup>598</sup> Clodomiro Picado, ‘Our Blood is Blackening,’ in Steven Palmer and Iván Molina Jiménez (Eds.), *The Costa Rica Reader: History, Culture, Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 244.

<sup>599</sup> Carlos Fallas, *Mamita Yunai* (San José: Editorial Costa Rica, 2013).

<sup>600</sup> Carlos Fallas, ‘El Peligro de la Dictadura: Las Elecciones y la Organización Sindical (Limón: Comité Central de la Federación de Trabajadores del Atlántico, 1935), 6.

<sup>601</sup> As US Undersecretary of State Robert Olds explained in 1927: “we do control the destinies of Central America, and we do so for the simple reason that the national interest dictates such a course;” Cited in Tom Barry and Deb Preusch, *The Central American Factbook* (New York: Grove Press, 1986), 4.

considered by authorities to be a problem in Costa Rica. As a 1932 State Department report observed: “The best protection here against subversive doctrines consists in the facts that land is unusually equitably distributed and that unemployment, while existing, is not serious.”<sup>602</sup> There were reports however, which claimed that communists were involved in several labour-dominated demonstrations and acts of violence. For instance, in 1932, a bomb exploded in a church located in Mercedes, San José. After the incident, the State Department observed: “The communists are being blamed for this outrage although no one has been able to trace the author of the explosion. As no political group would think of doing such a thing, and communists are known to be against all religions, they are naturally suspected.”<sup>603</sup> Although communists were surveilled, their ability to form political parties was not prohibited as in the other parts of Central America at that time.

Costa Rica especially stood out as Central America’s democratic exception during 1930s when some of the region’s most notorious dictators came to power. El Salvador was ruled by Maximiliano Hernández Martínez (1931-1944), Guatemala by Jorge Ubico (1931-1944), Honduras by Tiburcio Carías Andino (1933-1949) and finally Nicaragua which was led by Anastasio Somoza García (1936-1956). Although communists were targeted in Costa Rica, the situation was not like what occurred with the ‘*matanza*’ (slaughter) of 1932 in El Salvador. A US Congress report estimated the number of deaths attributable to the Salvadoran military within a range of 20 000 to 25 000 people.<sup>604</sup> President Carías Andino banned the Communist Party of Honduras and maintained control through his security forces and secret police. Despite Somoza’s authoritarian and violent policies, Eisenhower’s Secretary of State Dean Acheson described his regime in 1952 as democratic: “While the Nicaraguan government is democratic and republican in form, President Somoza has run it largely as a one man show.”<sup>605</sup> Finally, Guatemalan President

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<sup>602</sup> Legation of the United States of America, ‘Communist Activities in Costa Rica,’ Biblioteca Carlos Meléndez, Department of State, 06-01-1932, 5.

<sup>603</sup> Legation of the United States of America, ‘Propaganda of Foreign Origin,’ Biblioteca Carlos Meléndez, Department of State, 04-22-1932, 1.

<sup>604</sup> Carolyn Forché and Leonel Gómez, ‘Appendix 6: Article Carolyn Forché and Leonel Gómez for the El Salvador Working Paper of the Institute for Global Education,’ *U.S. Policy in El Salvador: Hearings Before the Subcommittees on Human Rights and International Organizations and on Western Hemisphere Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives, Ninety-eighth Congress, First Session – Third Presidential Certification on El Salvador, February 4, 28; March 7, 17, 1983* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1983), 624.

<sup>605</sup> Dean Acheson, ‘Memorandum by the Secretary of State to the President: Document 597, Washington, May 1, 1952,’ in William Slany, N. Stephen Kane, William F. Sanford Jr., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952–1954, The American Republics, Volume IV* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1983), 1369.

Jorge Ubico used his security forces to destroy his political opponents including repressing labour unionists.

As was the case in the United States, the Great Depression increased the strength of the union movement which contained communist elements who pressured Central American governments for industrial relations reforms. 1934 was an especially important time for the Costa Rican union movement due to three major strikes which occurred in that year. In response to a pay cut of 10% in January 1934, the *zapaterias* (shoemakers) in San José launched a strike and won a 7% pay rise shortly after.<sup>606</sup> In May of that same year, the sugar workers in Turrialba won a pay rise of 14% which was not honoured. The pay rate was eventually scaled back when the national minimum wage laws were subsequently introduced. In August 1934, the labour movement recorded its greatest achievement up until that stage. The banana workers and the Communist Party in Limón launched a major strike against the United Fruit Company which was the largest proprietor in the country (if one excludes public land).

Ricardo Jiménez's government responded with a variety of strategies to end the strike, the first of which was to send in police forces. President Jiménez stated that the "police must maintain order at any cost ... The government has no other way open to them, than that of vigorously suppressing violence directed against person or property and it will pursue this course to the end."<sup>607</sup> Another strategy to quell the strike was to force workers to bear the cost of any damage caused by those engaging in strikes. Legislation was enacted which stated that "all societies, unions, syndicates of laborers or workers will be civilly responsible for the damages and actions of their affiliates in the work place and, in the case of a strike remain obligated to give just reparations."<sup>608</sup> There was also an apparent attempt at using psychological warfare to help terminate the strike. A group calling itself the West Indian Committee put up a poster criticising the actions of the unions and urged workers not to participate in the strike. The poster read: "Remember for years for we have been working in harmony with the Co. and they have always treated us right ... Awake to your own interest. This is not a strike, but a dangerous movement to destroy the Banana industry of Costa Rica."<sup>609</sup> It is not known exactly who wrote the flyer, but it seems unlikely that it was written by a group of West-Indian workers considering its core message. One major

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<sup>606</sup> Miller, *A Holy Alliance*, 35.

<sup>607</sup> Cited in Chomsky, *West Indian Workers and the United Fruit Company in Costa Rica*, 159.

<sup>608</sup> Cited in *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>609</sup> West Indian Committee, 'Notice to West Indian Farmers!' *Biblioteca Carlos Meléndez*, Department of State, 08-10-1934, 6.

consequence of the strike was it led the Jiménez government to expropriate a quarter of million acres of the United Fruit's property in 1935.

### **Rafael Calderón and the Welfare State**

During the 1930s, there was several critiques of the country's prevailing order written by national authors. Perhaps the most famous of which was Mario Sancho's 1935 book entitled *Costa Rica: Suiza Centroamericana* (*Costa Rica: Central American Switzerland*), which was an ironically titled denunciation of dominant Costa Rican society.<sup>610</sup> In the book Sancho asked, "Can someone, without being crazy or interested in lying, speak here of public opinion?" He argued that in "countries like ours, such an opinion is not organised," and even if it could be, then it would lead to *caciquismo* (chieftaincy) as the only feasible type of political system.<sup>611</sup> Sancho's criticism of this central tenet of representative democracy is common but he underestimates the extent to which public opinion actually was organised in his country. This is understandable given that many people would not have been aware of the efforts to influence popular opinion in Costa Rica since at least the early twentieth century. As mentioned earlier, recently released documents revealed the United States' role in monitoring public opinion in the country. US influence in Costa Rica largely took the form of promoting anti-communist sentiment as opposed to the military training that was promoted in the rest of Central America. Compared to the rest of Central America, the Costa Rican public appears to have been relatively supportive of traditional liberalism prior to the Great Depression and the union activism of the early 1930s. These developments led to the creation of the country's welfare state in the following decade.

In 1940, the leader of the conservative National Republican Party Rafael Calderón Guardia was elected with more than 80% of the vote. The members of the political class who supported his election campaign presumed that Calderón would govern in the traditional manner, yet this turned out be false. President Calderón immediately sought to transform the country through the creation of a variety of new political intuitions. For example, in 1940, the Calderón government established the University of Costa Rica which is today the country's most prestigious university. In the following year, the Calderón

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<sup>610</sup> Mario Sancho, *Costa Rica: Suiza Centroamericana* (II Edición) (San José: Editorial Costa Rica, 1982).

<sup>611</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

government implemented the country's social security system known as the Costa Rican Social Security Fund (*Caja Costarricense de Seguro Social*). The President's policies led elite sectors such as the *cafetaleros* to portray him as a socialist. In reality, it was Christian social justice, rather than the principles of socialism that drove Calderón's political programme. The President made his position clear in a 1942 pamphlet in which he argued that socialism deifies the state in an obvious criticism of a Bolshevik-style regime.<sup>612</sup> Although he did not create a socialist system, Calderón laid the basis for Costa Rica's welfare state.

In 1943, President Calderón continued to implement his social liberal programme by amending the constitution to include a Labour Code that included an 8-hour workday, the right to strike and unionise, a minimum wage, the right to workplace safety, health clinics, free school shoes and lunch program as well as low-cost housing. Calderón explained to Congress that these 'social guarantees' were "indispensable in order to equalise the relations between employers and wage earners."<sup>613</sup> They were also designed to give Costa Rican households a 'just family wage' as well as "harmonise the conflictive interests of capital and labor by working to establish as a base of relations the eternal principles of justice and Christian solidarity."<sup>614</sup> Although neoliberal advocates describe these policies as 'socialist,' there is very little to distinguish the latter with social liberalism which gained popularity through the work of social liberals such as Thomas Hill Green in the nineteenth century.<sup>615</sup> In essence, social liberal ideas were largely an extension of the classical liberal idea of the right to live. Furthermore, despite the country's shift to social liberalism, Costa Rican society continued to be rather socially conservative which was most likely due to its Catholic tradition.

One of the reasons why Calderón was charged with being a socialist was his alliance with the PCCR in order to pass his political programme in Congress. This unusual coalition also included the Catholic Church, a topic which has been explored in detail by historian Eugene Miller in his book *A Holy Alliance?*<sup>616</sup> In 1943, the PCCR changed its name to the Popular Vanguard Party (PVP), a move which made the alliance for the Catholic Church and the government slightly more palatable. After the enactment of the 1943 Labour Code,

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<sup>612</sup> Rafael Ángel Calderón Guardia, *El Gobernante y el Hombre Frente Al Problema Social Costarricense* (San José, n.p, 1942), 2.

<sup>613</sup> Miller, *A Holy Alliance?*, 89.

<sup>614</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>615</sup> Hill Green, *Lectures on the Principles of Political Obligation and Other Writings*.

<sup>616</sup> Miller, *A Holy Alliance?*

Archbishop Sanabria, the Secretary of the PVP (Manuel Mora) and President Calderón drove through the streets together of San José in celebration. It appeared that the alliance was paying dividends for the Church and the PVP. For instance, Calderón's government restored religious instructional teaching in schools which had been abolished as part of the liberal laws introduced in the 1880s under the governments of Próspero Fernández and Bernardo Soto. In a move supported by the PVP, Calderón planned a minor land reform, which was not actually implemented until after the Alliance for Progress was launched in 1961.

Although Calderón was apparently motivated by his Christian beliefs, his alliance with the PVP opened to him up to charges of being, at the very least, 'soft on communism.' The President Calderón's language during his term in office did not help to dispel this image. In his message to Congress on the 1<sup>st</sup> of May, 1944, Calderón spoke about the need for a "more just distribution of wealth."<sup>617</sup> Calderón also introduced a reform which promoted 'cooperative' companies which he argued are "based on human solidarity, on free association and mutual benefit, guaranteeing equality of effort."<sup>618</sup> It was inevitable that this kind of rhetoric would inevitably bring his country in conflict with the United States at the end of the decade. Regardless of his motivations, the moral authority of Calderón's government was weakened by its association with the overtly Leninist PVP.

During his time in power, President Calderón attempted to maintain Costa Rica's friendly relationship with the United States. This friendship was displayed the day after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour. Costa Rica declared war on Germany on December 8<sup>th</sup>, 1941, only one day after the surprise attack had occurred and two days before the United States made the same declaration. The Costa Rican government also seized the assets of first and second-generation German emigres, who were the largest immigrant group out of the axis countries living in Costa Rica. In his study of public opinion in Costa Rica, Irvin Child noted the great influence of the United States on the country.<sup>619</sup> After living in the country in the early 1940s, Child heard *Ticos* make comments such as "Nowadays we are all Yankees" and "Costa Ricans are really almost more American than the Americans by now."<sup>620</sup> Child also described the country as unusually dominated by individuals of Spanish

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<sup>617</sup> Rafael Ángel Calderón Guardia, *Mensaje del Señor Presidente de la República Doctor don R. A. Calderón Guardia*, El 1 de Mayo de 1944, *Congreso* - No. 20 848, ANCR, 1944, 7, 12.

<sup>618</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>619</sup> Irvin Child, 'The Background of Public Opinion in Costa Rica,' *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 1943.

<sup>620</sup> *Ibid.*, 256.

ancestry who regularly stress the economic implications of events as well as promote the theme of democracy in their civic celebrations.<sup>621</sup>

In the 1944 Presidential elections, the National Republican Party's candidate Teodoro Picado was elected to office. The party won 65% of Congressional seats which was a relatively high percentage of the vote total.<sup>622</sup> The opposition charged that some votes for their side were not included in the official tally. The evidence indicates that was some electoral fraud in this regard on the part of the government. However, as historians Fabrice Lehouq and Iván Molina note in the major work on this topic, "it is clear that even had all the accusations of fraud been proven [Picado] still would have won the election without those votes" on account of his huge electoral lead.<sup>623</sup> Picado went on to introduce more social liberal policies such as the introduction of price controls in 1944. However, he did not implement any radical policies and even suppressed unions to a certain extent. For example, the strike against the British-owned Northern Railroad in 1945-46 was declared illegal by the Picado government.

### **The Presidential Elections and Civil War of 1948**

The 1948 Presidential elections proved to be the most controversial in the country's history. Rafael Calderón ran for president once again up against Otilio Ulate from the centre-right National Union Party. Once again there were charges of electoral fraud, but this time they came from the government's side. The parties in government claimed that citizens in the provinces of Limón and Puntarenas were denied their legal right to vote. In what was a highly controversial move, the Costa Rica legislature annulled the results of the election. Costa Rican historians and outside observers usually state that Ulate won the 1948 election. For instance, in a 1956 US State Department report, the Operations Coordinating Board wrote: "In 1948, Rafael Ángel Calderón Guardia who controlled the outgoing Picado administration, attempted to regain the presidency despite the evidence that his opponent, Otilio Ulate, had received a clear majority in the presidential elections."<sup>624</sup> Two US

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<sup>621</sup> Ibid., 244, 250.

<sup>622</sup> Lehouq and Molina, *Stuffing the Ballot Box*, 199.

<sup>623</sup> Cited in Molina and Palmer, *The History of Costa Rica*, 108.

<sup>624</sup> Operations Coordinating Board, 'Paper Prepared by the Operations Coordinating Board: Analysis of Internal Security Situation in Costa Rica and Recommended Action, *Washington, August 15, 1956*,' in John Glennon, Edith James, Stephen Kane, Robert McMahon and Delia Pitts (Eds.), *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Volume VII – American Republics: Central and South America* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1987), 27.

journalists David Wise and Thomas Ross drew a similar conclusion in 1964: “Ulate had won the election, but a right-wing government (with Communist support) and a packed legislature had refused to recognize him.”<sup>625</sup> The notion that Ulate clearly won the election is often repeated with little credence given to the Picado government’s claims of electoral fraud.

Far from receiving a ‘clear majority,’ new evidence suggests that many voters in heavily working-class areas were in fact prevented from voting for the party which had established Costa Rica’s welfare state in the early 1940s. As the British Ambassador to Costa Rica reported in February 1948:

On February 19<sup>th</sup> the [National Tribunal] had only scrutinized the votes of the two smallest provinces of the country (Limón and Puntarenas), and the results seemed to bear out the claim of the government parties, that thousands of voters were unable ... to go to the polls. That this should have happened in two provinces in which the electorate would undoubtedly have given the Government parties a large majority – a fact which admitted by the opposition – seems to lend strength and reason to the claims of the vanquished parties.<sup>626</sup>

Voter suppression would help account for the decrease in participation from 91% in the 1944 presidential elections to a mere 63% in 1948.<sup>627</sup> Those who argue that Ulate was the victor do not explain why more than a third of eligible voters decided not to cast their vote for president. Electoral fraud also helps to explain why a party which had brought in well received social reforms could experience such a strong turn around in its popularity after only two terms in office.

After Congress annulled the election results, José Figueres Ferrer and his National Liberation Army launched an uprising against the *Calderónistas* on March 12<sup>th</sup>. Figueres was from a wealthy family in San Ramón whose parents had moved to Costa Rica from Catalonia. He once bitterly denounced President Calderón on the radio which resulted in police storming the radio station and issuing his arrest. Figueres was subsequently driven into exile in 1942 due to his opposition to the government. The other parties that supported the National Liberation Army were the *Ulatistas* along with foreign support from the United States and the Arévalo government in Guatemala which provided weapons to the rebels. On the government’s side were the PVP and Nicaraguan dictator Anastasio Somoza.

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<sup>625</sup> David Wise and Thomas Ross, *The Invisible Government* (New York: Bantam Books, 1964), 127.

<sup>626</sup> F.G. Coultras, ‘Costa Rican Presidential Elections,’ Public Records Office, London, AN 0922 (21 February 1948) cited in Molina and Palmer, *The History of Costa Rica*, 113.

<sup>627</sup> Lehouq and Molina, *Stuffing the Ballot Box*, 220.



Costa Rica's national army had fewer than 300 soldiers who were supported by a militia comprising of *Calderónistas* and those sympathetic to the PVP.<sup>628</sup> Unlike Figueres, the Picado government found it difficult to obtain arms from Nicaragua and Mexico whose governments were under pressure from the United States to pursue a policy of non-intervention. On April 13th, the Costa Rican ambassador Francisco Gutiérrez informed the Chief of the Division of Central America and Panama Affairs Robert Newbegin that "Picado represented the best democratic tradition and now he found himself through the action of the U.S. unable to obtain arms for his government."<sup>629</sup> Despite the backing from the virulent anti-communist Somoza, there was little in the way of material support that Nicaragua actually gave to the Costa Rican government during the civil war. This same could be said of the United States, despite that country playing a greater role than any other foreign actors.

There is considerable disagreement regarding the exact nature of US involvement during the 1948 civil war. Some historians have either downplayed or denied the idea of US intervention during the conflict. Historian Marcia Olander for example, has questioned whether the US role was significant enough to have any serious bearing on the outcome of the war. Olander argued that US actions during the civil war could more accurately be described as inaction or non-intervention.<sup>630</sup> What Olander failed to realise is that although the United States did not technically 'intervene,' its influence over Central America meant that its selective inactions constituted a significant form of interference. On the other side of the debate is historian Kyle Longley who contends that US policy during the war should indeed be classified as an intervention. Longley contends that Costa Rica was the first example of containment in Latin America during the Cold War and not the 1954 CIA coup in Guatemala. This position centres on the argument that the Truman administration pressured neighbouring Latin American countries not to provide arms to a government which had enlisted the support of the PVP.<sup>631</sup>

President Picado resigned on April 19<sup>th</sup>, leaving his Vice President Santos León Herrera as interim president to finish out the presidential term. On the following day, the

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<sup>628</sup> Kyle Longley, 'Peaceful Costa Rica, the First Battleground: The United States and the Costa Rican Revolution of 1948, *The Americas*, Vol. 50, No. 2, 1993, 163.

<sup>629</sup> As relayed by Robert Newbegin, 'Memorandum of Conversation, by the Chief of the Division of Central America and Panama Affairs (Newbegin): Document 361 – Washington, April 13, 1948,' in Almon Wright, Velma Hastings and David Stauffer (Eds.), *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1948: Volume IX – The Western Hemisphere* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1972), 508.

<sup>630</sup> Marcia Olander, 'Costa Rica in 1948: Cold War or Local War?' *The Americas*, Vol. 52, No. 4, 1996.

<sup>631</sup> Longley, 'Peaceful Costa Rica, the First Battleground.'

United States government stationed troops in the Panama Canal on standby in case a US invasion was deemed necessary.<sup>632</sup> This example of gunboat diplomacy was arguably the closest the United States ever came to intervening militarily in Costa Rica. On April 21st, Calderón, Picado and Manuel Mora absconded which effectively ended the armed resistance against the National Liberation Army. President Picado wrote to Calderón that “inseparable forces are absolutely determined to have us lose this contest.”<sup>633</sup> The fighting officially ended on April 24<sup>th</sup>, after having lasted 44 days. Approximately 2000 *Ticos* died during the conflict.

## The Second Republic

In May 1948, José Figueres began leading a junta called the Founding Board of the Second Republic (*Junta Fundadora de Segunda República*), which ruled the country for 18 months. On December 1st, 1948, Figueres abolished and proscribed Costa Rica’s military. The occasion was marked by a ceremony in which Figueres took a hammer to a section of the Bellavista Barracks which had been erected in 1917 in the heart of San José. In Figueres’ words, “some blows were struck on a wall of the Bellavista barracks, thus symbolising the elimination of the vestige of the military spirit of Costa Rica in another time.”<sup>634</sup> The building was then turned over the Ministry of Education in order to create what became the National Museum of Costa Rica. This famous decision would prove to be quite beneficial to the Costa Rican population in various ways including the freeing of funds for education and healthcare. However, some have speculated that the decision to abolish the army was partly taken in order to prevent a coup d’état which could destroy the Second Republic.<sup>635</sup>

In May of the following year, the junta established the Civil Guard (*Guardia Civil*) as the national police force. The Civil Guard was supported by the Frontier Guard (*Guardia Fronteriza*) which handled border security operations. Under article 12 of the 1949 constitution the army was proscribed as a “permanent institution.”<sup>636</sup> Also enshrined in the

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<sup>632</sup> Fernández Guardia, *Cartilla Historica de Costa Rica*, 163.

<sup>633</sup> Cited in Longley, ‘Peaceful Costa Rica, the First Battleground,’ 172.

<sup>634</sup> José Figueres, *Don Pepe Figueres – Obras Completas: Tomo Uno (El Espíritu del 48)* (Cartago: Editorial Tecnología de Costa Rica, 2020), 326.

<sup>635</sup> See, for instance, Kirk Bowman, *Militarization, Democracy, and Development: The Perils of Praetorianism in Latin America* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), 109-111.

<sup>636</sup> *Constitución Política de la República de Costa Rica* (Presentada y Actualizada por Gustavo Rivera Sibaja) San José: Editec Editores S. A., 2011), 12.

constitution was the Supreme Electoral Court of Costa Rica or TSE (*Tribunal Supremo de Elecciones*). The TSE was established to ensure that the election process would be non-partisan and prevent conflicts like that which occurred after the 1948 presidential elections. The Founding Board also granted Afro-Costa Ricans the right to travel to the Central Valley. These policies included the establishment of the country's telecommunications and electricity provider *Instituto Costarricense de Electricidad* (ICE), a 10% inheritance tax as well as the nationalisation of the country's banking system.<sup>637</sup>

Despite their progressive policies, the new leaders stressed that the Second Republic was anti-communist. Figueres made clear that one of the missions of the new regime was "social progress without communism" or "social justice with liberty."<sup>638</sup> Figueres sought to strengthen and extend Costa Rica's social liberal system with policies which were not that different from the political programmes of both President Calderón and Picado. In this context, the 1948 civil war certainly did not have the kind of political implications of the Latin American conflicts which led to the seizing of state power by either fascists or communists. In Costa Rica's case the war led to the replacement of one liberal democrat by another liberal democrat.

The major difference between Figueres and his predecessors was his willingness to expunge the government of any communist influence. This commitment was made clear when the junta banned the PVP in 1949. In January of that year, Figueres warned the National Assembly: "When humanitarian feelings intervene in something, the system takes on a certain patriarchal aspect. In that state of affairs, communism makes easy prey for needy, discontented, intellectuals, and constitutes an excellent ally for opportunist politicians."<sup>639</sup> In order to combat this situation, he sought to create a republic with all the civil liberties found in a liberal democracy combined with the social protections of a welfare state. As Figueres put it, "a new order that guarantees institutional life and civil liberties."<sup>640</sup> Along with being based on representative democratic principles, the Figueres government also took into consideration the traditional Catholic heritage of the country. In similar language used by President Calderón, Figueres declared that "the Christian spirit of love of neighbor that humanity has accepted as the best norm of moral conduct" also coincides

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<sup>637</sup> Figueres, *Don Pepe Figueres – Obras Completas*, 337-339.

<sup>638</sup> *Ibid.*, 334.

<sup>639</sup> José Figueres, *Mensaje Presidencial presentado a Asamblea Nacional Constituyente de la Segunda República de Costa Rica por Don José Figueres Ferrer*, El 16 de Enero de 1949, *Congreso* - No. 20 853, ANCR, 1949, 16.

<sup>640</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

with the “democratic spirit of stimulating dignity, which is considered as the best norm of civic behavior.”<sup>641</sup> Figueres wanted to create a system based on the idea of social responsibility and that this “responsibility be shared by public opinion, which is who really rules in Costa Rica.”<sup>642</sup> To this end, the Founding Board of the Second Republic extended suffrage rights to women and Afro-Ticos in 1949 which was the point when the country became a true representative democracy.

Since the nineteenth century, Costa Rican elites have long been advocates of freedom of speech despite the limitations in this area. This is reflected in the existence of propaganda which is an inevitable part of a country which respects free speech. In Costa Rica, there are a few exceptions in this regard such as minor legal restrictions on religious propaganda. As it states in Article 28 of the 1949 Constitution:

No one can be disturbed or persecuted for the expression of their opinions or for any act that does not break the law. Private actions that do not harm public morals or order, or that do not harm a third party, are outside the action of the law. However, no political propaganda may be carried out by clerics or laymen invoking motives of religion or using religious beliefs as a means.<sup>643</sup>

Thus, freedom of expression is generally guaranteed in Costa Rica and is similar to other representative democracies except for the United States where free speech is especially protected by the First Amendment of the US Constitution.

Relations between the United States and Costa Rica returned to normal after the civil war. This was aided by Figueres’ decision in 1949 to ban the PVP as well as the creation of any new communist party. The US Department of State helped to consolidate the legitimacy of the Founding Board of the Second Republic. According to a press release disseminated by Truman’s State Department on October 2th, 1949: “The United States Government shares with the Figueres administration and the people of Costa Rica profound satisfaction over Costa Rican success in solving her serious political and constitutional questions in a democratic manner fully consistent with the country’s long traditions of liberty and devotion to the principles of representative government.”<sup>644</sup> On November 8th the junta peacefully handed over power to Otilio Ulate to fulfill his term in office. Ulate upheld the general political framework that the Founding Board of the Second Republic

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<sup>641</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>642</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>643</sup> *Constitución Política de la República de Costa Rica*, 17.

<sup>644</sup> Department of State, ‘Press Release, October 24, 1949’ *Relaciones Exteriores* - No. 27025, ANCR, 1949.

had established. In 1951, Figueres established the centre-left National Liberation Party or PLN (*Partido Liberación Nacional*). Although Figueres was not democratically elected until 1953, the state was generally run in a non-authoritarian manner towards the general population during the Second Republic period.<sup>645</sup>

### **The First Figueres Administration (1953-1958)**

During his first term in office, Figueres was seen by some in the Eisenhower Administration as a ‘troublemaker.’<sup>646</sup> Despite outlawing the PVP, Figueres did implement some policies which were not exactly welcomed in Washington such as nationalising banks and increasing the tax on United Fruit profits to 15%.<sup>647</sup> In September 1953, the Under Secretary of State Walter Smith informed UFC executives that although the government did not support these policies, the “difficulty of effective counter action” was an issue.<sup>648</sup> In December 1953, US Ambassador Robert Hill explained that “Figueres has profited propagandawise” at the UFC’s expense, “but at this point I believe it more important” that he gain his “confidence and [we] allow him a little propaganda.” In February of the next year, Ambassador Hill noted that President Figueres had “softened considerably” regarding his view of the UFC and was “altering his attitude in order to conform to the realities of U.S. policies.”<sup>649</sup> Unlike some Central American leaders such as Guatemalan President Jacobo Árbenz (1951-1954), Figueres was generally viewed by the United States government to be pro-US.

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<sup>645</sup> One notable exception to this was the killings of six members of the PVP in December 1948 at the ‘Codo Del Diablo’ (Devil’s Elbow) in Siquirres, Limón. The soldiers who committed the murders fled the country before they started serving their 30 year prison sentences; Silvia Elena Molina Vargas, ‘Los asesinatos del Codo del Diablo (1949-1951),’ en Iván Molina y David Díaz (Eds.), *El Verdadero Anticomunismo, Política, Género y Guerra Fría en Costa Rica (1948-1973)* (San José: Editorial de la Universidad Estatal a Distancia, 2017).

<sup>646</sup> Figueres was described as a ‘troublemaker’ by US Ambassador to Nicaragua John Wheeler; Cited in Charles Ameringer, *Don Pepe: A Political Biography of José Figueres of Costa Rica* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1978), 124.

<sup>647</sup> Carmelo Mesa-Lago, *Market, Socialist, and Mixed Economies: Comparative Policy and Performance - Chile, Cuba, and Costa Rica* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2000), 411.

<sup>648</sup> Charles Burrows, ‘Memorandum of Conversation, by the Director of the Office of Middle American Affairs (Burrows): Document 298 – Washington, September 4, 1953,’ in John Glennon, Edith James, Stephen Kane, Robert McMahon and Delia Pitts (Eds.), *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Volume VII – American Republics: Central and South America* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1987), 830.

<sup>649</sup> Robert Hill, The Ambassador in Costa Rica (Hill) to the Department of State: Document 304 - San José, February 9, 1954’ in Stephen Kane and William Sanford Jr. (Eds.), *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954: Volume IV – American Republics* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1983), 835-836.

Now that his country was without a military, Figueres sought to secure a strong relationship with the United States. Costa Rica still had police forces, but these were charged with securing the internal safety of the country. The Secretary of State awarded scholarships to two members of the Civil Guard to study at the newly created School of Americas in Fort Benning, Georgia.<sup>650</sup> The Eisenhower Administration also sold weapons to the Costa Rican government. In 1954, President Figueres purchased 3500 M1 rifles, 500 Thompson submachine guns along with ammunition and a small amount of machine guns, mortars and rocket launchers.<sup>651</sup> These purchases were justified by the Figueres government because the country was now vulnerable to external aggression.

The country's vulnerability was demonstrated on January 7<sup>th</sup>, 1955, when a group of anti-Figueres rebels entered the northern border of Costa Rica. By January 12<sup>th</sup>, the insurrectionists had occupied the city of Quesada. This rebel force was partially comprised of Calderón and Picado loyalists who received material and financial support from the Nicaraguan and Venezuelan governments respectively. On January 15<sup>th</sup>, Figueres bought four F-51 fighter jets for the token price of \$1US a piece from the United States. According to political scientist Kirk Bowman, this act helped "turn the tide" of the war.<sup>652</sup> Apart from the military hardware, what perhaps helped the most was the indication that the US government was supporting the Costa Rican government. The Figueres Administration also appealed to the Organisation of American states which confirmed Nicaragua's complicity in the invasion. The insurrection ended when Somoza regime's withdrew support for the rebels.

Some have claimed that the attempted overthrow of the Costa Rican government was actually backed by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).<sup>653</sup> Even Figueres himself conveyed this belief to his biographer Charles Ameringer in the late 1970s.<sup>654</sup> Whilst it is conceivable that the CIA worked to overthrow Figueres, there is no direct available evidence to warrant such a conclusion. One may question this claim given that the United States sold Figueres the fighters jets and ostensibly supported the Costa Rican government.

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<sup>650</sup> Jorge Hazera, 'Carta de Jorge Hazera (Encargado de Negocios) a Ricardo Toledo (Subsecretario Encargado del Despacho de Relaciones Exteriores),' *Relaciones Exteriores - No. 27025*, ANCR, 1949.

<sup>651</sup> Operations Coordinating Board, 'Analysis of Internal Security Situation in Costa Rica and Recommended Action,' 23.

<sup>652</sup> Kirk Bowman, 'Democracy on the Brink: The First Figueres Presidency,' in Palmer, Steven and Molina Jiménez, Iván, (Eds.), *The Costa Rica Reader: History, Culture, Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 180.

<sup>653</sup> Wise and Ross, *The Invisible Government*, 127-128; William Blum, *Killing Hope: U.S. Military and C.I.A. Interventions Since World War II* (Monroe: Common Courage Press, 2004), 83-84.

<sup>654</sup> Ameringer, *Don Pepe*, 124-125.

However, it is possible the certain elements within the State Department were supporting Figueres whilst simultaneously the CIA was working with the rebels in Nicaragua. Without access to the agency's files, the claims of CIA interference cannot be substantiated.

One area of slight concern for the US government was the ideological leanings of President Figueres. In April 1955, US Ambassador Robert Woodward wrote that "Figueres made himself suspect when he continued to support the Arbenz regime in Guatemala long after it was dominated by communists."<sup>655</sup> Nevertheless, Figueres' anti-communist stance was strong enough that he could implement social liberal policies without major opposition from the US government. In 1955, his government built on earlier policies by renegotiating its contract with United Fruit and winning an increase in wages for its Costa Rican workers. The new contract also involved the transferring the entirety of the company's medical facilities, schools and housing projects to the Costa Rican government.<sup>656</sup> However, this did not prompt the negative reaction by the United States that was seen with some progressive Latin American governments during the Cold War. Noam Chomsky has argued that the "US has been willing to tolerate social reform—as in Costa Rica, for example—*only* when the rights of labor are suppressed and the climate for foreign investment is preserved. Because the Costa Rican government has always respected these two crucial imperatives, it's been allowed to play around with its reforms."<sup>657</sup> In other words, Figueres' reforms were not radical enough to have spurred serious intervention by the United States government. US officials from this era were also relatively pleased with the popularity of anti-communist sentiment of the Costa Rican public.

In 1953, the Eisenhower Administration established the United States Information Agency's (USIA), known as the US Information Service (USIS) outside of the United States. In Costa Rica, the USIA established a "small but active *U.S. information program*" that would "utiliz[e] all local media outlets."<sup>658</sup> The 1956 USIA budget for the country was \$76,600 with an estimated budget of \$113,800 for the following year. The vehicles which disseminated these programmes were ten radio stations and five newspapers. Their principal targets were members of the political class including businessmen, political,

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<sup>655</sup> Robert Woodward, 'Despatch From the Ambassador in Costa Rica (Woodward) to the Department of State: No. 607 – San José, April 26, 1955,' in John Glennon, Edith James, Stephen Kane, Robert McMahon and Delia Pitts (Eds.) *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Volume VII – American Republics: Central and South America* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1987), 4.

<sup>656</sup> Mesa-Lago, *Market, Socialist, and Mixed Economies*, 411.

<sup>657</sup> Noam Chomsky, *How the World Works* (Berkeley: Soft Skull Press, 2011), 19.

<sup>658</sup> Operations Coordinating Board, 'Analysis of Internal Security Situation in Costa Rica and Recommended Action,' 26, emphasis in original.

labour and religious leaders, students, teachers and newspaper and radio commentators. Among other things, the objectives of the 'information programs' included the encouragement of free enterprise and support for U.S. foreign policy.<sup>659</sup> Ambassador Woodward noted that the USIA was "doing an excellent job of presenting anti-communist material to the Costa Rican public."<sup>660</sup> He explained that the majority of *Ticos* are "unsympathetic to the use of force by the authorities, and unless conditioned to it by a strong propaganda campaign would react vigorously against it."<sup>661</sup> Thus, although most Costa Ricans supported more socially liberal policies than in the US during the Cold War, they nevertheless shared an aversion to communism and abhorred authoritarian tactics to defeat that ideology in their country.

In an August 1956 internal security assessment of Costa Rica, the Operations Coordinating Board of the US State Department conducted a preliminary survey on the country's internal security forces. The Board issued the following assessment:

While the present government of Costa Rica has been anti-communist and pro-U.S. in its international actions, there have been occasions when its representatives have followed neutralist tendencies because of conviction, a lack of control or discipline, or as an assertion of independence... Costa Ricans are very proud of their democratic traditions and civil liberties. The majority of the people are opposed to anything with a militaristic taint, and efforts to increase armed power would be most controversial. The government and the people would oppose measures tending to curtail freedom. In order to assure government and popular support for anti-communist moves, it would be necessary that any program in this connection be carried out gradually and unobtrusively. It is believed that the present government would accept U.S. assistance on this basis.<sup>662</sup>

The Operations Coordinating Board assessed the potential need for more weapons and police training in the United States. The final recommendation of the board was the continuation of the management of public attitudes with regards to the attitude of both the government and the general public. The report concluded: "In order to increase public support for anti-communist measures, continue present U.S. programs aimed at alerting the public to the communist menace."<sup>663</sup> This task was ongoing and was assigned to both the State Department as well as the USIA.

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<sup>659</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>660</sup> Woodward, 'Despatch From the Ambassador in Costa Rica (Woodward) to the Department of State,' 8.

<sup>661</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>662</sup> Operations Coordinating Board, 'Analysis of Internal Security Situation in Costa Rica and Recommended Action,' 28-29.

<sup>663</sup> Ibid., 30.



## **Conclusion**

This chapter has argued that the development of the country's welfare state continued Costa Rica's pattern of comparative freedom in Central America. Although their history has often been overlooked, the Afro-Costa Ricans in Limón played a major role in the development of the union movement in the 1930s. The 1934 banana strike in particular, put pressure on governments to adopt more social liberal policies. Although these policies were sometimes described as 'socialism,' both Calderón Guardia's and Figueres' motivations appeared to have come from their Christian values as opposed to socialist beliefs. Costa Rica's adoption of social liberalism whilst simultaneously avoiding a socialist state guaranteed that the country would continue to foster its strong relationship with the United States.

After the 1948 civil war, José Figueres' victory and subsequent banning of the PVP allayed fears in Washington of a communist take-over of the country. The Figueres' government subsequent abolition of the military was also an intelligent strategic move. Although it opened up the country to the 1955 invasion, Costa Rica's security ties with United States helped the country prevent further military actions into its territory. However, it would be the United States' cultural influences that would have the greatest effect on the country in the following decades. This influence, along with Costa Rica's expansion of health and education spending, helped offset the dangers and effects of Central America's traditional agro-export model that became clearer after World War II. This topic which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

**Chapter 7 – The Alliance for Progress and the Origins of the Central American  
Crisis (1961-1977)**

**As long as we continue to insist upon the premise to the administration's policy that the principal threat to the region is an external one, we will never come to terms with the internal causes of the revolutionary ferment in Central America... I subscribe to a domino theory. I think it is accurate to suggest that we could find not only El Salvador but Mexico and other countries coming under so-called Marxist regimes... But if that occurs, it will not happen primarily because of the inflow of external arms into the region but because of the unemployment and socioeconomic misery of the region.**

Howard Wolpe, United States House of Representatives, 1983.<sup>664</sup>

Specialising in the export of a few agricultural products left Central America's economies vulnerable to unpredictable price fluctuations in global commodity markets. This vulnerability was most clearly demonstrated during the Great Depression which caused the prices of coffee and bananas to fall dramatically. The dangers of over-specialisation formed the impetus of Central American governments to diversify their exports and make the transition to a non-traditional agro-export model. The initial phase of this new model increased cotton and beef production after World War II. When the Alliance for Progress period began in 1961, non-traditional export increased dramatically. Whilst this increase promoted GDP growth, it also led to a decrease in domestic food production which in turn increased poverty and violence. This process culminated in what is called the Central American crisis late of the 1970s and 80s which was a period of major economic, social and political upheaval in the region. This chapter contends that as Central America's democratic exception, Costa Rica largely avoided the effects of the new agro-export model. The chapter will outline the contours of Cold War US foreign policy towards Central America during the 1960s and 1970s. It will also explain why Costa Rica's democratic exceptionalism was dramatically displayed during the Central American crisis more than in any other period of the country's history.

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<sup>664</sup> Howard Wolpe, 'Concerning U.S. Military and Paramilitary Operations in Nicaragua, Monday, June 6, 1983,' Markup Before the Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives, Ninety-eighth Congress, first session, on H.R. 2760 (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1983), 31.

## Central America's Post War Agro-Export Boom

Agricultural production was the central driver of Central America's economies from the sixteenth century until the 1990s. Up until the early nineteenth century, the exportation of agricultural products only accounted for a small amount of Central America's economies.<sup>665</sup> By the 1950s, the burgeoning fast-food industry in the US necessitated a substantial increase in demand for beef. Given its influence and relatively close proximity to the United States, Central America was an ideal location in which to supply the goods for the fast-expanding US clothing and fast-food industries. Unlike in neighbouring Nicaragua, Costa Rica did not in fact experience major boom in cotton. Nevertheless, in 1954, the majority of employed *Ticos* worked in the agricultural sector.<sup>666</sup> In the same year, US foreign policy transformed from a 'trade not aid' into a 'trade and aid' approach after the Eisenhower Administration realised that poverty had caused instability in the region, particularly.<sup>667</sup> President Eisenhower also enacted the Agricultural Trade Development and Assistance Act commonly known as P.L. 480. This act was designed primarily to promote trade with the United States, also designated some surplus agricultural commodities for sale to developing countries in the form of food aid.

Leaders in Central America and the US realised that the export booms were reducing basic grain production. In 1955, the Costa Rican Minister of Agriculture Bruce Masis proposed draft legislation for a land reform bill. Masis warned at the time that if no land reform was introduced, this would have deleterious consequences for the country including increased violence as a result of conflict between squatters and large landowners.<sup>668</sup> In the following year, the US Inter-Agency Committee on Surplus Disposal refused the sale of surplus crops to Nicaragua on the following grounds:

A number of the committee members felt that a primary reason for the possible necessity of the special aid was the unlimited expansion in Nicaraguan cotton production under the umbrella of U.S. price support. *The money-making cotton production had displaced corn and bean crops.* It was felt that P.L. 480 aid would probably slow Nicaraguan re-conversion to its normal self-sufficient status in corn

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<sup>665</sup> Lindo Fuentes, 'The Economy of Central America,' 16.

<sup>666</sup> Frank Thomas, 'Some Notes on Agriculture in Costa Rica,' *Journal of Geography*, Vol. 53, No. 3, 1954, 97.

<sup>667</sup> Holden, *Armies Without Nations*, 234.

<sup>668</sup> Cited in James Rowles, *Law and Agrarian Reform in Costa Rica* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1985), 171.

and bean crops. They did not feel that there could be any assurances that Nicaragua would take steps to control cotton production even if P.L. 480 sales were allowed.<sup>669</sup>

The US government spent over one third of its 1956 budget for Costa Rica towards the goal of diversifying agriculture to reduce the country's dependence on bananas and coffee.<sup>670</sup> Despite the concerns of some US and Central American policy makers, agro-export production in Central America continued to expand.

By the early years of the 1960s, Nicaragua had more land devoted to export agriculture than to domestic food production. The same phenomenon occurred a decade later in Costa Rica.<sup>671</sup> Non-traditional agro-export production expanded when the Central American Common Market (CACM) was established in December 1960. The CACM was an initiative primarily led by the US government that led to a massive expansion of trade in the region as well as trade between Central America and the United States. The organisation helped increase interregional trade in the region from 8% in the early 1960s to 28% by the end of the decade.<sup>672</sup> Although the Eisenhower Administration took some tentative steps in this direction, it was not until the election of John F. Kennedy that US policy towards the region made its most serious turn since World War II.

### **The Alliance for Progress**

After President Kennedy entered office, he described Latin America as the “most dangerous area in the world” and therefore felt that it required urgent attention,<sup>673</sup> In 1961, The Kennedy Administration announced the commencement of the Alliance for Progress which was envisaged as a 10-year \$20 billion comprehensive aid programme for the region. The Alliance for Progress is often characterised as a kind of ‘Latin American Marshall

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<sup>669</sup> Park Wollam, ‘Memorandum from Park F. Wollam of the Office of Middle American Affairs to the Assistant Secretary for Inter-American Affairs (Holland): No. 95 – Washington, April 27, 1956.’ in John Glennon, Edith James, Stephen Kane, Robert McMahon and Delia Pitts (Eds.) *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957: Volume VII – American Republics: Central and South America* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1987), 201, emphasis in original.

<sup>670</sup> Operations Coordinating Board, ‘Analysis of Internal Security Situation in Costa Rica and Recommended Action,’ 25.

<sup>671</sup> Brockett, *Land, Power and Poverty*, 54.

<sup>672</sup> Edward Martin, *Kennedy and Latin America* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1994), 116. This was a larger increase than the Latin American Free Trade Association which only increased between 9% and 12.5% during the same period; *Ibid.*, 177.

<sup>673</sup> Stephen Rabe, *The Most Dangerous Area in the World: John F. Kennedy Confronts Communist Revolution in Latin America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

Plan.’<sup>674</sup> The programme had the goal of improving the positions of Latin American countries with regards to education, health and nutrition levels etc. through the promotion of democracy and economic development. Kennedy proclaimed the 1960s as the ‘decade of development,’ a notion that was subsequently adopted by the United Nations. USAID was established in 1961 in order to facilitate the economic aid programme. The Kennedy Administration publicly stressed the need for increasing food aid through P.L. 480 which soon came to be known as ‘Food for Peace.’ This title would later produce an unintended irony in Central America a couple of decades later.

The Alliance for Progress was initiated largely in response to the triumph of the Cuban Revolution in 1959. US foreign policy makers were determined to prevent ‘another Cuba.’ Members of the Kennedy Administration believed that promoting political reforms and economic development would result in political stability which would in turn reduce the likelihood of communism. The major problem for the Kennedy Administration was that there were plenty of authoritarian regimes in Latin America which were disliked by their general populations. As President Kennedy’s Assistant Special Counsel Richard Goodwin explained in 1961, “Our problem in Latin America is not ‘unfriendly’ governments; it is unfriendly people in friendly countries—an almost impossible situation for official and overt propaganda agencies.”<sup>675</sup> In Costa Rica, the general population was comparatively friendly towards the United States as demonstrated by President Kennedy’s warm reception when he visited the country two years later.

There were various strategies by the Liberals in the Kennedy Administration to combat anti-US sentiment in Latin America. As a solution to the problem he outlined, Goodwin offered the following recommendation:

I believe that the answer to this problem lies in dissemination of the means of propaganda, rather than the direct dissemination of propaganda. We must place in the hands of effective democratic groups in each country—political parties, labor organizations, church groups, etc.—the instruments of propaganda. This can range from the donation of radio transmitters to making available leaflets, paperback

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<sup>674</sup> This characterisation is not exactly an accurate comparison given the difference in the amount of funds available to Latin Americans and those in Western Europe. For instance, Dutch citizens were given an average of US\$109 in aid, whereas Latin Americans were given only US\$4 per person between 1961 and 1968; Ibid., 155. Senator Robert Kennedy did actually propose in May 1966 that US aid towards Latin America should increase to roughly the levels of the Marshall Plan; Cited in Herbert May, *Problems and Prospects of the Alliance for Progress: A Critical Examination* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger Publishers, 1968), 21.

<sup>675</sup> Richard Goodwin, ‘Memorandum From the President’s Assistant Special Counsel (Goodwin) to President Kennedy: Document 49 – Washington, September 5, 1961’ in Kristin Ahlberg, Charles Hawley and Adam Howard (Eds.), *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1917-1972 – Volume VI: Public Diplomacy, 1961-1963* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 2017), 137.

books; and technical assistance in programming, movie making, etc. The mileage we would get from our propaganda dollar in this way would be, I am convinced, far greater than anything we have hitherto achieved.<sup>676</sup>

A similar view was later expressed by President Richard Nixon who explained that he “prefer[red] the emphasis on the elite groups—people who will lead the country—intellectuals, business etc. —The mass approach is too costly—and generally not productive.”<sup>677</sup> This position stands in contrast with authoritarian or totalitarian regimes which tend to direct propaganda primarily against the general population in an attempt to offset the reduced popular support that typically accompanies state violence.<sup>678</sup>

Another issue facing the Kennedy’s Administration in Latin America was the so-called ‘agrarian problem.’ In October 1962, the State Department assessed the situation in Central America’s democratic exception as follows: “While the agrarian problem is a pressing one, it is not as serious in Costa Rica as elsewhere in Latin America. There exists, however, a squatter problem, principally in the province of Guanacaste in which the squatters are encouraged ... to use force and disregard legal action.”<sup>679</sup> The idea that squatters were encouraged to violate the law is unlikely. However, the State Department perhaps meant that they were encouraged in the sense that they were not removed via force from private lands by security forces. Given that Costa Rica had no military, it never produced anything like the notorious Central American paramilitary ‘death squads’ such as the *Mano Blanca* (White Hand) in Guatemala. A paramilitary group called the Free Costa Rica Movement or MCRL (*Movimiento Costa Rica Libre*) did form in 1961, but it could hardly be described as a death squad. According to a US government security assessment in October the following year, the MCRL was “initiated primarily by ultra-conservative Costa Rican businessmen among whom are a number of persons of German antecedents,

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<sup>676</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>677</sup> Richard Nixon cited in Henry Kissinger, ‘Memorandum From the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon, Washington, February 25, 1970,’ in Kristin Ahlberg and Adam Howard (Eds.), *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1917-1972 – Volume VIII: Public Diplomacy, 1969-1972* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 2018), 162. This view was also shared by Ralph Harris, the General Director of the Institute of Economic Affairs. In 1978, he argued against the view that “all effort should be concentrated on simple propaganda aimed ‘at the man in the street.’” Harris instead advocated that propaganda should primarily be directed towards intellectuals, an approach which he likened to bombing an enemy position in war prior to sending in the ground infantry; Cited in Carey, *Taking the Risk Out of Democracy*, 91.

<sup>678</sup> For instance, Adolf Hitler’s position was that propaganda “must be addressed always and exclusively to the masses;” Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (London: Pimlico, 1992), 163.

<sup>679</sup> United States Embassy in Costa Rica, ‘Communism in Costa Rica,’ October 15, 1962, *Papers of President Kennedy - National Security Files: Ralph A. Dungan, Costa Rica, General 8/62 - 10/62, Box 392A, JFK Library*, 8.

most of whom were pro-Nazi during World War II.”<sup>680</sup> An internal Costa Rican government assessment estimated that there were only about 245 MCRL members at the end of the Kennedy era.<sup>681</sup>

Costa Rica also benefitted from the adoption of a modest land reform. This was one of the primary pillars of the Alliance for Progress because the Kennedy Administration viewed land reform as necessary for achieving increased agricultural production. President Kennedy told Congress in March 1961: “It is clear that when land ownership is so heavily concentrated, efforts to increase agricultural productivity benefit will only a very small percentage of the population.”<sup>682</sup> In October of that year, just seven months after the Alliance for Progress was announced, Costa Rica’s Legislative Assembly passed land reform legislation entitled *The Law of Lands and Land Settlement*. The Institute of Lands and Colonization or ITCO (*Instituto de Tierras y Colonización*) was created in November 1962 in order to facilitate the law’s implementation. This legislation would reinforce the country’s comparatively more egalitarian land distribution by facilitating the sale of previously owned UFC lands etc. which allowed *campesinos* greater access to farmland. Although the impetus of the law was largely coming from domestic sources, the timing of the law’s passing was surely not a coincidence. There were two earlier drafts of a similar bill in both 1955 and 1960 that failed to pass by the Congress. It is possible that the law may not have been passed, at least in its final form, had it not been for the Alliance for Progress.

It is clear that the US government’s embargo on Cuba also yielded benefits for the Costa Rican economy. After the Sugar Act was revised in 1961, Costa Rica’s sugar quota increase substantially to 3 674 tons with an additional one-time purchase of 26 500 tons. This deal was suspended in the following year, much to the disappointment of the Costa Rican government and members of the sugar industry.<sup>683</sup> This windfall was insufficient to solve the economic problems the country was having at the time. In the early 1960s, the value of Costa Rican exports such as bananas, cacao dropped significantly due to the price depreciation of these products in international commodity markets. Nevertheless, because

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<sup>680</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>681</sup> Gobierno de Costa Rica, *Presidencia - No. 5710*, ANCR, 1966.

<sup>682</sup> John Kennedy, ‘Special Message to the Congress Requesting Appropriations for the Inter-American Fund for Social Progress and for Reconstruction in Chile, March 14, 1961, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States - John F. Kennedy: Containing the Public Messages, Speeches, and Statements of the President, January 20 to December 31, 1961* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1962), 178.

<sup>683</sup> Department of State, ‘Reply to Letter of Mayor Robert L. Searle of Coral Gables, Florida concerning Economic Conditions of Costa Rica,’ March 23, 1962,’ *Papers of President Kennedy - National Security Files: Ralph A. Dungan, Box 392, Costa Rica: General 3/62 –4/62*, JFK Library, 2.

of Costa Rica's relatively egalitarian land distribution, the country did not experience the violence that was increasing in other Latin American countries such as Guatemala.

Not every Latin American government was as welcoming to social reform as those of Costa Rica. In a response to his critics, President Kennedy stated in 1962, "Those who make peaceful revolution impossible will make violent revolution inevitable."<sup>684</sup> Despite this rhetoric, the Kennedy Administration quietly increased military aid and training in Central America.<sup>685</sup> Internal documents emphasise the necessity of 'public safety programs' which included activities such as identification and record keeping, riot control and investigating subversive actions.<sup>686</sup> These programmes were directed towards internal threats as opposed to external ones. Shortly before travelling to San José for a meeting of Central America's heads of state in March 1963, President Kennedy stated that the "big dangers in Latin America are the very difficult and in some cases desperate conditions in the countries themselves" including poor housing and illiteracy.<sup>687</sup> In addition to social programmes, the United States helped the Central American countries organise their military forces on a regional level by establishing the Central American Defense Council (CONDECA) in 1963. Costa Rica was included in CONDECA but with observer status only given that it had no military.

Following President Kennedy's assassination in November 1963, the Johnson Administration scaled back some of the more humanitarian aspects of the Alliance for Progress. In 1964, President Lyndon Johnson appointed Thomas Mann as the Director of the Alliance for Progress who rejected the official rationale of the Alliance in favour of a strategy that came to be known as the Mann Doctrine. Mann held the view that political stability would result in economic development and prevent the ascendancy of communist governments. Related to the Mann Doctrine, was the Johnson Doctrine which abandoned Roosevelt's Good Neighbour policy by allowing the use of US military forces to prevent communist governments from coming to power. The Johnson Administration strengthened

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<sup>684</sup> John Kennedy, 'Address on the First Anniversary of the Alliance for Progress, March 13, 1962,' *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States - John F. Kennedy: Containing the Public Messages, Speeches, and Statements of the President, January 1 to December 31, 1962* (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1963), 223.

<sup>685</sup> In Guatemala, for example, the US provided the government with over four times the amount of military aid (\$4.3 million) that the Eisenhower Administration had provided to the country from 1956 to 1960 (\$950 000); Rabe, *The Most Dangerous Area in the World*, 76.

<sup>686</sup> John Ford, 'Meeting of Chiefs of State at San José, Costa Rica, March 18-20, 1963,' February 16, 1963, *Papers of President Kennedy - National Security Files: Trips and Conferences*, Box 238, President's Trip: San José, 3/63 – Meeting of the Presidents, JFK Library, 8.

<sup>687</sup> Cited in *Ibid.*, 4.



the United States' reliance on military strategy and reduced spending on social spending. When the government renewed P.L. 480 under the 'Food for Peace Act' in 1966, the surplus food distribution aspect of the law was removed from its objectives. President Johnson explained that this was because the surplus food stock had run out by the mid-1960s.<sup>688</sup>

The Johnson Administration also passed legislation to increase agro-export production in the region. In 1968, President Johnson signed National Security Action Memorandum No. 371 which authorised the initiation of the Central American Export Development Program. This programme was developed in order to expand and successfully exploit the export potential of Central America.<sup>689</sup> In Costa Rica, the Center for the Promotion of Exports and Investments or CENPRO (*El Centro para la Promoción de las Exportaciones y las Inversiones*) was created in the same year. By the end of the Alliance for Progress period, the country had more land devoted to export agriculture than domestic food production.<sup>690</sup> Prior to that time, Costa Rica primarily produced agricultural commodities for domestic consumption. In the latter half of the 1960s, the attention of the US government turned away from Latin America towards the Vietnam War along with the social protests which reached their zenith in 1968 in many parts of the world.

### **Agricultural and Security Policies During the 1970s**

The mass protests that exploded in the late 1960s throughout the developed world led some elites to investigate their causes. In 1975, a Trilateral Commission report co-authored by political scientist Samuel Huntington argued that during the 1960s there was a 'crisis of democracy,' which its authors defined as increased public participation in conjunction with a weakening of political authority.<sup>691</sup> The Commission formed in 1973 to foster better cooperation amongst three of the most industrialised regions of the world (the

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<sup>688</sup> Lyndon Johnson, 'Statement by the President Upon Signing the Food for Peace Act of 1966, November 12, 1966,' *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, Lyndon B. Johnson, 1966: Containing the Public Messages, Speeches, and Statements of the President - BOOK II-July 1 to December 31, 1966* (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1967), 1373.

<sup>689</sup> Lyndon Johnson, 'National Security Action No. 371. Washington, October 1968: Document 119 – Washington, October 18, 1968,' in David Geyer and David Hershler (Eds.), *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1964-1968: Volume XXXI – South and Central America; Mexico*. Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 2004), 282.

<sup>690</sup> Brockett, *Land, Power and Poverty*, 54.

<sup>691</sup> Michel Crozier et al., *The Crisis of Democracy: Report on the Governability of Democracies to the Trilateral Commission* (New York: New York University Press, 1975).

United States, Western Europe, and Japan).<sup>692</sup> The author of the section on the US was Huntington who explained that the ‘democratic surge’ of the 1960s was detrimental to democracy due to an abundance of political participation and therefore advocated a “greater degree of moderation in democracy.”<sup>693</sup> Michel Crozier, the author of the Europe section, observed that the situation was somewhat different in Europe to the United States. Despite the persistence of a “strong association between social control and hierarchical values,” the “exposure of government to media publicity [has] made it more and more difficult to maintain social control and to answer the demands of the citizens.”<sup>694</sup> By contrast, Crozier noted, North America has developed “more indirect forms of social control.”<sup>695</sup> Although the report only focuses on the Trilateral Commission regions, its authors astute observations generalise to other representative democracies such as Costa Rica.

The authors of the report noted that during the 1960s, there was an increase in ‘value-oriented intellectuals’ who attempted to challenge and delegitimise authority. This was largely seen to be the fault of schools and universities, among other institutions, which had failed in their “major role in the indoctrination of the young.”<sup>696</sup> During the Alliance for Progress period, USAID sent funds to Costa Rica for the purposes of influencing its educational institutions. For instance, in 1969, USAID purchased 185 000 textbooks in a variety of areas such as Social Studies. The Faculty of Economics at the University of Costa Rica (UCR) also asked for “assistance in securing the services of a visiting technician from a U.S. university.” UCR officials were in conversation with USIS and USAID in order to develop this programme.<sup>697</sup> There were also attempts to standardise teaching techniques and textbooks throughout the isthmus, although this move was resisted in Honduras.<sup>698</sup> This strategy was certainly more successful in Costa Rica where violence would have been particularly unproductive to check the country’s student movement which was at its peak strength during the late 1960s, early 1970s.

Student unions were amongst the most politically active unions in the country. Compared to other parts of the world, Costa Rica’s version of ‘1968’ came two years later.

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<sup>692</sup> Included in its membership were powerful individuals such as Jimmy Carter (who was Governor of Georgia at the time), Zbigniew Brzezinski (who later became President Carter’s National Security Advisor) and David Rockefeller (the chairman of Chase Manhattan Bank).

<sup>693</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>694</sup> Ibid., 46, 21.

<sup>695</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>696</sup> Ibid., 162.

<sup>697</sup> USAID, *Relaciones Exteriores* - No. 8538, ANCR, 1969, Section IV, 2.

<sup>698</sup> Walter LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America* (Second ed.) (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1993), 180.

On April 24<sup>th</sup>, 1970, the government announced it would renew its contract with the Aluminum Company of America (ALCOA) to extract bauxite and aluminium from San Isidro del General. Building on their campaign to avert the serious consequences to the environment and public safety, university students launched a major protest in San José. Some of the protestors threw stones at the legislative assembly and the police were subsequently brought in to subdue them. The protest was declared successful after the government quickly reversed its position on the ALCOA contract. In 1971, the Federation of Students of the University of Costa Rica (FEUCR) placed a plaque in the UCR marking the first anniversary of the demonstration. The plaque reads: “To violate the law of the empire is to defend the rights of the people.”<sup>699</sup> The demonstration represents the greatest victory of the Costa Rican student movement.

José Figueres was elected once again in May 1970 at a time when union activity and protests began to increase in the country. In the early 1970s, there were several events which had important implications for the international system such as the Nixon Administration’s dismantling of the Bretton Woods system in 1971 as well as the OPEC oil shock of 1973. Bretton Woods was replaced a system of fixed exchange rates with a one of ‘floated’ currencies. These changes led to a major increase in currency speculation within the international economic system. The percentage of speculative capital flowing throughout the international economy increased from about 10% at the end of the Bretton Woods era to 95% in 1994. One arguable consequence of this change was that it restricted progressive policy choices for governments for fear of facing the serious economic consequences of currency devaluation and capital flight etc.<sup>700</sup> During the 1970s, there was also high inflation and unemployment (i.e., stagflation) which led to widespread criticism of social liberal policy proscriptions as a means of dealing with these economic problems.

As soon as he began his second term in office, President Figueres attempted to ameliorate the country’s economic problems which included balance of payments concerns that were partially caused by the reduction of coffee and banana prices in international

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<sup>699</sup> Some members of the FEUCR were communists which accounts for the terms used in the plaque’s inscription. In February 1974, the soon to be President Daniel Oduber reportedly told Viron Vaky (the US Ambassador to Costa Rica) that he “feels the only significant Communist threat is at the University of Costa Rica, and he plans to undertake a major effort to isolate and offset them;” Viron Vaky, ‘Telegram 508 From the Embassy in Costa Rica to the Department of State: Document 118 – San José, February 8, 1974,’ in Halbert Jones and Douglas Kraft (Eds.), *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976 – Volume E-11 (Part 1): Documents on Mexico; Central America; and the Caribbean, 1973-1976* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 2015), 363. Unfortunately, Oduber did not elaborate on any of the details of this plan.

<sup>700</sup> Noam Chomsky, *Understanding Power* (Melbourne: Scribe Publications, 2002), 378.

commodity markets. The country's annual economic growth rates also decreased from 7-8% in the latter half of the 1960s to 4-5% in the early 1970s.<sup>701</sup> As part of its economic recovery strategy, the Figueres government developed stronger economic ties with the Soviet Union. Figueres' initial move towards this goal was to establish a Soviet Embassy in San José shortly after his election. His government also sold coffee to the Soviets, much to the irritation of the Nixon Administration. These actions opened the Costa Rican President up to charges that he was 'soft on communism.' A Special National Intelligence Estimate from January 1973 described Figueres' policies as 'controversial' including his "favored treatment for the local Communist Party and promotion of the establishment of a Soviet mission."<sup>702</sup> Although the PVP had gained slightly more influence in the first half of Figueres' second term, this is a curious claim considering that Figueres was the man who had been primarily responsible for banning the communist party since 1949.

Despite strengthening his economic ties with the Soviet Union, the Figueres government sought to increase US investment in his country. During his second term, President Figueres implemented policies which were clearly designed to entice investment from US citizens. For instance, the government passed Law No. 4812 in 1971 which granted retirees importation of their furniture and one vehicle duty free. Along with its reputation for being a safe country, this law helped increased immigration from the United States. In order to maintain Costa Rica's internal security and peaceful image, the Figueres Administration established two law enforcements agencies. In September 1970, President Figueres established the Rural Assistance Guard as a police force which focused on the rural parts of the country. In 1973, the Figueres administration also founded the Judicial Investigation Agency or OIJ (*Organismo de Investigación Judicial*) which falls under the authority of the country's Supreme Court of Justice. The OIJ serves as a federal law enforcement agency that investigates serious crimes such as kidnappings. Apart from the domestic pressure for Costa Rica to maintain its comparatively low crime rates in the region, these institutions also helped promote investment and tourism from individuals in developed countries, especially those in the United States.

Figueres' successor displayed a similar attitude on these issues. In 1974, Daniel Oduber was elected after Figueres stood down as the PLN leader because of the 1969

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<sup>701</sup> Director of National Intelligence, 'Special National Intelligence Estimate 83.4-73: Document 108 – Washington, January 12, 1973,' in Halbert Jones and Douglas Kraft (Eds.) *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976 - Volume E-II (Part 1)*, 343.

<sup>702</sup> *Ibid.*, 344.

constitutional amendment which prohibited the re-election of former presidents. President Oduber continued to promote US investment in Costa Rica. In the mid-1970s, the Monte Galan Jojoba Research Center described Costa Rica as an “investment sanctuary” due to the “privileged position [that] exists for exports to the United States of America and the rest of the world for many products.”<sup>703</sup> This position of privilege was shown for example, by the Oduber government’s passing of Law No. 7617 which exempted companies from territorial and income taxes on fruit trees and timber plantations.<sup>704</sup> Despite the many incentives for US investment, Costa Rica was actually the most protectionist country in Central America in the late 1970s.<sup>705</sup>

Due to the features of its economy along with its social safety net and democratic tradition, the effects of the non-traditional agro-export model were not as detrimental for Central America’s democratic exception. Although not known for its cotton production, the country did witness a major increase in beef production during the 1960s and 70s. Costa Rica’s veal and beef exports to the US increased from 8,719 thousand pounds in 1961 to 63, 221 thousand pounds in 1975.<sup>706</sup> The beef boom contributed to the reduction in basic grain production in a similar way to the cotton boom. The cattle-export industry was even worse than the cotton industry due to its comparatively large land needs and relatively small labour requirements. Whilst the expansion of these industries increased economic growth, it also led to hunger and poverty. As food production was increasingly geared towards the export market, *campesinos* were dispossessed of agricultural land which they had previously used to grow dietary staples such as corn and beans. By the mid 1970s, there was an increase in evictions and arrests of *campesino* leaders by the Rural Guard who had occupied private land for agricultural use.<sup>707</sup> The area of the country in which social conflict and squatter invasions was most serious was between San Carlos and the border with Nicaragua.

The major difference between Costa Rica and the rest of Central America was the non-violent response from the state to the squatter invasions of private property. For example, in the mid-1980s, 15 000 *campesinos* and homeless individuals entered a vacant

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<sup>703</sup> Monte Galan Jojoba Research Center, *The Advantages of Participating in a Professionally Managed Jojoba Plantation in Costa Rica* (San José: Monte Galan Jojoba Research Center, n.d.), 9.

<sup>704</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>705</sup> Alan Rapaport, ‘Effective Protection Rates in Central America,’ in William Cline and Enrique Delgado (Eds.) *Economic integration in Central America: A Study* (Washington: Brooking Institution, 1978), 705.

<sup>706</sup> Robert Williams, *Export Agriculture and the Crisis in Central America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 204.

<sup>707</sup> Ibid., 183.

property in Cartago and created a community called Santa Lucia. Instead of employing force, the Arias government allowed the squatters to remain on the land and even provided them with electricity, water and schools several months later. When author Clifford Krauss interviewed a bricklayer from Santa Lucia named Antonio Alvarez, the man commented that the “government helps us, it doesn’t repress us.”<sup>708</sup> This example stands in stark contrast to the tendency of security forces in the rest of Central America which often brutally crushed *campesinos* who violated private property laws. Costa Rica’s government responses were unique within the region. In contrast with the other Central American republics, Costa Rica also earmarked a great deal of US economic for social programmes instead of counterinsurgency training which was not necessary in the latter’s case.

### **Agricultural Customs in Indigenous Talamancan Communities**

One major issue for Indigenous Talamancans at the beginning of the neoliberal period was agro-export production which had led to major reduction of its rainforests by the late 1970s. The section of the country which retained rainforests to the largest extent was Talamanca because of its protection by the Amerindians. In 1977, a law granting Indigenous peoples rights to their communal lands was passed by the Oduber government. Representatives of the country’s Indigenous communities have publicly expressed their gratitude for the legal protections they have been granted. For instance, twenty years after the law’s passing, Dulcelina Pérez Mayorga thanked “the great man who rests in peace, our leader Daniel Oduber [who] very bravely, put his fists to enact a law that today legally protects us.”<sup>709</sup> However, the original inhabitants of these lands complain that their reservations are sometimes invaded, often by tree loggers. One woman from the Bribri’s Kéköldi reservation in Talamanca stated, “Sometimes we feel sorry for [the intruders], and we tell them they can stay, but they can’t cut any more trees” because “they are endangering all of us.”<sup>710</sup> Thus, the propensity of Indigenous Talamancans to share has continued despite the intrusion of their territories.

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<sup>708</sup> Clifford Krauss, *Inside Central America: Its People, Politics, and History* (New York: Touchstone, 1991), 242-243.

<sup>709</sup> Cited in Asamblea Legislativa de la República de Costa Rica, *Conmemoración del fallecimiento de Pablo Presbere*, 19.

<sup>710</sup> Gloria Mayorga, *Taking Care of Sibö's Gifts: An Environmental Treatise from Costa Rica's Kéköldi Indigenous Reserve* (San José: Kéköldi Asociación de Desarrollo Integral de la Reserva Indígena Cocles, 1993), 71.

Indigenous tribes living in Talamanca are still reluctant to abandon their traditional ways of life. Now that the Teribes live primarily in Panama, the two largest Indigenous groups that live in Talamanca are the Bribri and Cabécar tribes. The Bribri have managed to largely retain their traditional political system which is constructed along matrilineal lines. After completing her anthropological research of the tribe in the mid 1970s, Maria Bozzoli de Wille observed “women are in charge of the continuity of the clan through multiplication of its members.”<sup>711</sup> She also found that “women have considerable freedom in choosing sexual partners.”<sup>712</sup> Given their political culture, there is no evidence indicating that there are form of oppression in which some individuals dominate others. Bozzoli de Wille also learnt that selfishness, particularly the unwillingness to share food, results in punishment in the afterlife according to the Bribri.<sup>713</sup> The hoarding of food would be considered pathological in Bribri society. This equilibrium-maintaining custom constitutes a non-coercive method of control because it promises sanctions to those members who fail to act in accordance with the dominant values of the tribe.

Anthropologists have witnessed similar attitudes towards food distribution amongst the Cabécar tribe. The majority of the Cabécar’s reservations are in Limón except for the one in Chirripo, San José. One day whilst conducting field work in Chirripo Costa Rican anthropologist Rodrigo Salazar observed the entire clan fish together “in a happy communal environment.” After the men had constructed a temporary dam with tree trunks and stones, some of the women joined them by tying them together with wild cane. Other women helped prepare the *chicha* whilst the children helped collect firewood.<sup>714</sup> Lynch Arce witnessed a similar type of operation whilst researching in Talamanca: “I was astonished by the intelligence of the aboriginals. They were engineers; the work requires a deal of patient cooperation from all the community... The men cut stakes, white cane and vines; meanwhile, the women hauled *bijagua* leaves and tied the mats of wild cane; the children would take *chicha* to the elders.”<sup>715</sup> Thus, there was a sharing of duties amongst the clan, but there was no hierarchical division of labour. After witnessing a few young boys fishing, Arce commented that the “aboriginals are so humanitarian that, if a person,

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<sup>711</sup> Maria Bozzoli de Wille, ‘Bribri Roles in Birth and Death,’ in Christine Loveland and Franklin Loveland (Eds.) *Sex Roles and Social Change in Native Lower Central American Societies* (Chicago: University of Illinois, 1982), 146.

<sup>712</sup> Ibid., 144.

<sup>713</sup> Ibid., 145.

<sup>714</sup> Rodrigo Salazar, *El Indígena Costarricense: Una Visión Etnográfica* (Cartago: Editorial Tecnológico de Costa Rica, 2002), 81-83.

<sup>715</sup> Lynch Arce cited in Ibid., 87-89.

for whatever reason caught no fish, the others that did would give him some of theirs.”<sup>716</sup> Despite the ‘contamination’ of their political systems, the fact that the Talamancans have been able to preserve their land and culture to this extent lends supporting evidence to our current understanding of the ways in which tribes lived in pre-Hispanic Costa Rica.

A major difference between Indigenous societies and the modern nation state is the obligation for work as a means of procuring sustenance. As Polanyi observed, “institutional safeguards are provided against fear of hunger as an individual’s motive for action in the economic sphere.”<sup>717</sup> Motivations for work within tribal systems come from maintaining the general welfare of all members of the society. Short of some cataclysmic environmental event, tribes provided safeguards in the form of communal access to food. In this sense, traditional indigenous societies grant individuals the ‘right to live.’ It is the lack of this right has led to or at least exacerbated political violence in much of Central America.

### **The Major Cause of the Central American Crisis**

In 1978, the Sandinista National Liberation Front launched a revolution in Nicaragua which by July 1979, had succeeded in overthrowing the Somoza dictatorship. Nicaragua embraced non-traditional agro-export production to a greater extent than any other country in the region during the 1960s and 70s. Professor of economics Robert Williams pointed out that the Central American “country with the greatest success in expanding cotton and beef exports, and the country with the fastest economic growth rates during the decade of the Alliance for Progress, also broke out into civil war first.”<sup>718</sup> Williams was evidently not including Guatemala which had been experiencing a civil war since 1960. What started out as squatter invasions in the 1970s led to civil wars in Nicaragua and El Salvador and increased violence in Guatemala. Nowhere was violence during the Central American Crisis more gruesome than in the latter country. According to the United Nations Guatemalan Truth Commission, the Guatemalan state committed genocide against the Indigenous Mayan population.<sup>719</sup> In Honduras, there were communist

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<sup>716</sup> Ibid.

<sup>717</sup> Karl Polanyi, *For A New West: Essays, 1919-1958* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014), 49.

<sup>718</sup> Williams, *Export Agriculture and the Crisis in Central America*, 166.

<sup>719</sup> Commission for Historical Clarification, Guatemalan Truth Commission Report, *Memory of Silence: The Guatemalan Truth Commission Report* (Edited by Daniel Rothenberg) (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012). The Guatemalan Truth Commission Report contained the following testimony: “The soldiers gathered many women and children and they locked them up and burned them. Also, they raped the women before killing them. They cut off their breasts, ear and hands;” Ibid., 58.



insurgents who were attempting to foment regime change but there was not a revolution or civil war like with its three neighbours. However, Honduras implemented modest land reforms in 1962 and in the mid-1970s which provide a plausible reason as to why violence was less severe in that country during the 1980s.

There have been two primary explanations put forward as to the causes of the Central American crisis. The dominant view that was popular in the United States during the 1980s was that the crisis was a result of ‘Soviet expansionism.’<sup>720</sup> There were some Soviet and Cuban advisers who provided aid and technical assistance to Nicaragua. However, this hardly constitutes evidence that the Soviet Union or Cuba were responsible for the violent uprisings in the region. In a similar vein, the fact that the CIA-funded Radio Free Europe operated in Eastern Europe, is not evidence that the United States was responsible for the Hungarian Revolution in 1956. Whilst it was clear that the Soviet Union posed a threat to Eastern Europe, it only had limited power to influence political movements in Latin America. Neither the United States nor the Soviet Union had a great amount of power in each other’s sphere of influence during the Cold War.

The second, more plausible explanation is that the post-World War II agro-export booms led to decreased domestic food production and squatter invasions which in turn led to the crisis of 1970s and 80s.<sup>721</sup> Governments in both the Soviet Union and the United States realised that hunger was a cause of political violence. Predictably, the Soviets blamed any political violence on ‘counter-revolutionaries’ and the United States. However, internal documents reveal that the Politburo recognised poverty as its real cause. The Bolshevik leadership also understood that ‘ideological work’ would not be effective if they did not increase living standards and reduce hunger in Poland and Hungary.<sup>722</sup> During his 1983 testimony before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Congressman Howard Wolpe drew a similar conclusion in relation to Central America. Wolpe stressed the “internal causes of the revolutionary ferment in Central America” such as the historic

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<sup>720</sup> See for instance, Gregory Sand, *Soviet Aims in Central America* (New York: Praeger, 1989); Edward Lynch, *The Cold War’s Battlefield: Reagan, the Soviets, and Central America* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011).

<sup>721</sup> See, among others, Williams, *Export Agriculture and the Crisis in Central America*.

<sup>722</sup> In the words of the Politburo, “Ideological work is itself will be of no avail if we do not ensure that living standards rise. It is no accident that the unrest occurred in Hungary and Poland and not in Czechoslovakia. This is because the standard of living in Czechoslovakia is incomparably higher... In our country they also listen to the BBC and Radio Free Europe. But when they have full stomachs, the listening is not so bad;” Communist Party of the Soviet Union, ‘Account of a Meeting at the CPSU CC, 24 October 1956, of the Situation in Poland and Hungary,’ in Csaba Békés, Malcolm Byrne, János M. Rainer (Eds.), *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution: A History in Documents* (New York: Central University Press, 2002), 226.

“unemployment and socioeconomic misery of the region.”<sup>723</sup> This was precisely the concern of President Kennedy when he established the Alliance for Progress. However, by the early 1970s, the programme had petered out and was officially abandoned in 1973.

The Alliance for Progress is now widely considered to be a failure in terms of achieving its stated objectives. However, it was actually rather successful in terms of promoting US investment throughout Latin America. As the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library’s observed:

American business interests continued to be more concerned about the safety of their private investments in Latin America and far less troubled about promoting social and political reform. The Alliance would have to depend primarily on private investments and American business interests did not share the president's contempt for the corrupt elites that controlled the economies and governments of Latin America. And, in fact, Alliance funds were also used to create counterinsurgency programs and to train paramilitary forces to counter the spread of communist influence in Latin America. As a result, many Latin Americans remained deeply skeptical of American motives, although there was also widespread admiration throughout the hemisphere for JFK's energetic championing of the Alliance's goals.<sup>724</sup>

The Alliance for Progress surely would have been more successful if it was fully embraced by presidents Johnson and Nixon who were not enthusiastic supporters of the programme.

Despite its failures, the United States sent substantial economic aid to Central America during the 1960s. US aid to the region during the Alliance of Progress period (1961-1973) totalled \$644 million.<sup>725</sup> With the exception of Costa Rica, it is difficult to make the case that these funds ultimately benefitted the general populations of the region. Between 1962 and 1981, the US government awarded Costa Rica \$158 million in development aid and \$20.5 million in food aid. This was a significant increase from the period before the Alliance for Progress was introduced. Between 1946-1961, US development assistance awarded to Costa Rica was \$21.4 million and food aid was only \$1.1 million.<sup>726</sup> If the other Central American governments had also been representative democracies, they could have directed the funds to more productive ends. Given that the other Central American states all had authoritarian governments, they were less concerned

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<sup>723</sup> Wolpe, ‘Concerning U.S. Military and Paramilitary Operations in Nicaragua,’ 31.

<sup>724</sup> John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, ‘Punta del Este,’ *Alliance for Progress (Alianza de Progreso)* (accessed February 6<sup>th</sup>, 2020).

<sup>725</sup> Thomas Leonard, *Central America and the United States: The Search for Stability* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1991), 148.

<sup>726</sup> Mary Clark, ‘Nontraditional Export Promotion in Costa Rica: Sustaining Export-Led Growth,’ *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, Vol. 37, No. 2, 1995, 188.

with fostering the development of lucrative internal markets than Costa Rica's social liberal government. The importance of representative democracy in promoting human development was once again highlighted by Costa Rica's position as the region's democratic exception.

## **Conclusion**

The post-World War II era was critical to the development of Central American crisis which has had major implications for the region. Given that the United States was the principal trade partner of the Central American republics during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it understandably played a major role in transforming to the non-traditional agro-export model. The requirements of importing agricultural commodities for US markets as well as Cold-War security concerns primarily shaped US policy towards the region. Agro-export promotion increased during the 1960s through US-led initiatives such as the CACM, the Alliance for Progress and the Central American Export Development Program. One of the major effects of US policy was that domestic food consumption declined as food production was increasingly directed towards export markets. However, this does not mean that US foreign policy makers wished to promote this development. On the contrary, they demonstrated concerns since the 1950s about the dangers of overproduction of agro-exports products to the detriment of basic grain production. Costa Rica also experienced the same problem but on a much smaller scale than its neighbours to the north. Given its structural advantages, Costa Rica was also in a better position to deal with the economic problems that occurred during Latin America's 'Lost Decade.'

## **Chapter 8 - Neoliberalism, The Economic Crisis and the ‘Parallel State’ (1978-1998)**

**I have insisted on the functioning of the National Radio and Television System and that it should not be used as an instrument of government propaganda. I believe that the cultural radio, press and television constitute a reinforcement of the popular education work carried out by the people through schools, colleges, universities and other means.<sup>727</sup>**

Jorge Hazera, ‘Letter to the Board of the College of Journalists,’ 1980.

The political violence that existed during the Central America crisis exacerbated the region’s economic problems as it reduced economic activity from trade and investment. Although it essentially avoided the violence, Costa Rica was certainly affected by the debt crisis which hit the region in the early 1980s. The country’s economic crisis began under the presidency of Rodrigo Carazo Odio (1978-1982) who belonged to the new centre right *Coalición Unidad* (Unity Coalition). Much like the rest of the world, Costa Rica was affected by major changes in the international economic system including the OPEC oil shock of 1979 which increased global oil prices. Costa Rica was also hit by the decreased revenue from coffee and banana exports. At that time, the country shifted towards a more neoliberal system in order to deal with its economic problems. This was primarily achieved through the creation of a network of private institutions known as the parallel state which was established with major input from the United States. Despite this transition, many of the country’s social liberal institutions have been maintained including its state-owned banks. This chapter makes the argument that Costa Rica has maintained its traditional position as the most libertarian country due to the methods of control it adopted during the 1980s as a response to the country’s economic crisis. This chapter will outline the ideological transition which led to the neoliberal shift of the late 1970s and 1980s, US public diplomacy efforts in that era as well as some of the effects of neoliberal policies on the country’s traditional social liberal system.

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<sup>727</sup> Jorge Hazera, ‘Carta a la Junta Directiva del Colegio de Periodistas,’ Presidencia - No. 1327 San José, ANCR, 1980, 3.

## The Ideological Background of the Neoliberal Shift

Although the economic crisis of the 1970s and 1980s was the catalyst for the introduction of a neoliberal policy framework, it is important to note that there are domestic interest groups that have been promoting neoliberal ideas in Costa Rica since the mid-twentieth century. The oldest and most prominent of which is the National Association of Economic Promotion or ANFE (*Asociación Nacional de Fomento Económico*). In 1958, the ANFE established itself as the first domestic think tank to promote the neoliberal doctrine in Costa Rica. In 1963, the Association's President Fernando Guier explained that his organization attempts to "guide the opinion of Costa Ricans about the economic destinies of their country."<sup>728</sup> Between 1963 and 1964, the newspaper *La Nación* published a series of articles by the ANFE which the association described as part of their effort to guide the general public.<sup>729</sup> The ANFE had an estimated membership of 300 persons in 1968.<sup>730</sup> Two years later, the ANFE referred to itself as an "apolitical association in the partisan sense."<sup>731</sup> The organisation surely meant that it was not tied to any political party but clearly held strong political views.

Despite increasing opposition from neoliberals, Costa Rica's welfare state expanded between 1970 and 1978 when the PLN was in power. This was the first time since the 1940s that a Costa Rican political party had enjoyed two consecutive terms in office. Shortly after he was re-elected in 1970, President Figueres expanded public health care provisions for the general populace. In order to help fund the new system, the government slightly adjusted the payroll tax so that employers paid a greater share. The Figueres Administration also initiated a programme which granted free meals to pre-school and primary school children, along with their mothers. By 1976, largely as a result of this initiative, deaths from malnutrition had decreased by 70%.<sup>732</sup>

Another example of social liberal ideology on display was President Figueres' establishment of the Costa Rican Development Corporation or CODESA (*Corporación Costarricense de Desarrollo*) halfway through his second term in office. This state-owned corporation was designed to inject public funds into development projects that would be

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<sup>728</sup> Cited in ANFE, *Liberalismo: 25 Años de ANFE* (San José: Trejos Hnos, 1984), 21.

<sup>729</sup> ANFE, *El Pensamiento Vivo de ANFE* (San José: Trejos Hnos, 1966).

<sup>730</sup> Charles Denton, *Patterns of Costa Rican Politics* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1971), 46.

<sup>731</sup> ANFE, *Tendencias Ideológicas* (San José: Imprenta Metropolitana, 1970), 13.

<sup>732</sup> Mavis Biesanz et al., *The Ticos: Culture and Social Change in Costa Rica* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1999), 150.

sold to the private sector once they had become financially solvent. However, the country's captains of industry were concerned about the state's intrusion into areas that were previously the sole domain of the private sector. The industrialist Walter Kissling also complained, "Instead of fomenting small-scale businesses," CODESA had "embarked on a disproportionate number of very large ventures."<sup>733</sup> This concern was especially evident after CODESA expanded during the administration of Daniel Oduber. A new ideological direction was signalled by the appointment of industrialist Richard Beck as the new executive president of CODESA who reversed the state's 'incursion' into the private sector.<sup>734</sup> Beck soon refashioned the public corporation in a neoliberal direction by reducing the role of the state and promoting privatisation.

In the late 1970s, neoliberal policies were gaining traction in Costa Rica much like in many other parts of the world. This was partially due to the efforts of the ANFE and other interest groups which promoted neoliberal ideas. Fernando Guier noted that prior to the "doctrinal avalanche in favor of neoliberalism," the Association "intensified its cultural activities, opened its doors wide to Costa Rican workplaces and young people" by importing texts to Costa Rican libraries. These included works by the "most rigorous of modern European thought," including Friedrich von Hayek and Ludwig von Mises etc. As part of its "daily struggle" to promote its ideology, the ANFE "extended to Costa Ricans (or *Ticos*) the panorama of an academically impeccable intellectual horizon."<sup>735</sup> In 1976, the ANFE helped to create the country's first private university called the *Universidad Autónoma de Centro America*. Since the late 1970s, the country has witnessed an increase of private universities including the *Universidad Latina de Costa Rica* (1979) and *Universidad Fidélitas* (1980).

### **The Carazo Administration (1978-1982)**

The shift to neoliberalism in Costa Rica truly began with the Carazo Administration. In 1979, President Carazo introduced the Public Administration Law which restricted the ability of new public sector unions to collectively bargain. In spite of this law, unions won workers an average pay increase of 10.9% in 1980 with banana workers in Limón receiving

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<sup>733</sup> Cited in Molina and Palmer, *The History of Costa Rica*, 143.

<sup>734</sup> Mylena Vega, 'CODESA, Autonomous Institutions, and the Growth of the Public Sector,' in Marc Edelman and Joanne Kenen (Eds.), *The Costa Rica Reader* (New York: Grove Weidenfield, 1989), 143.

<sup>735</sup> Cited in ANFE, *Liberalismo*, 53.

the largest raise (between 18 and 22%).<sup>736</sup> At this stage, agro-export production was still the largest export industry in the country. In September 1980, *Business Latin America* observed that industrial disputes “plagued the Carazo administration.”<sup>737</sup> Between 1972 and 1986, the peak period for labour disputes was 1979 and 1980 which produced a total of 80 strikes.<sup>738</sup>

The election of Ronald Reagan to the White House in November 1980 brought a powerful ally to the advocates of neoliberalism in Costa Rica. Thomas Carothers, a scholar who worked on President Reagan’s ‘democracy enhancement’ programmes in Latin America explained that the Reaganites had a “vaguely unfavourable” view of Costa Rica because, among other things, it “had long pursued a social democratic model of economic development.”<sup>739</sup> Domestic organisations such as ANFE formed part of the criticism of Costa Rica’s economic system along standard neoliberal lines.<sup>740</sup> In 1979 and 1980, the ANFE organized a series of seminars. A seminar that took place in May 1980 concerned the Costa Rica’s economy and was targeted at public relations leaders and journalists. Eduardo Lizano, the esteemed economist and future head of the Central Bank was listed as one of the speakers at the seminar. A letter of invitation was also sent to the Ministry of the Presidency although there is no evidence that President Carazo attended the seminar.<sup>741</sup> The ANFE’s activities have sometimes been described as the promotion of propaganda.<sup>742</sup> However, this is a charge that could be levelled by the opponents of every political organisation.

A common feature of a representative democracy is individuals and groups vying for acceptance of their political ideas and policies. Besides a few minor restrictions, Costa Rica is typical in terms of the freedom of speech and expression that that is characteristic of representative democracies. There are certain legal restrictions however, such as the use of women’s images in advertising. Enforced by the Office of Propaganda Control, Article I of Law No. 5811 states: “All types of commercial propaganda that offend the dignity or

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<sup>736</sup> Ibid.

<sup>737</sup> *Business Latin America*, ‘Business Outlook: Costa Rica,’ *Business Latin America* (September 17, 1980), 301.

<sup>738</sup> Elisa Donato and Manuel Rojas, *Sindicatos, Política y Economía, 1972-1986* (San José: Editorial Alma Mater, 1987), 118.

<sup>739</sup> Thomas Carothers, *In the Name of Democracy: U.S. Policy Toward Latin America in the Reagan Years* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 71.

<sup>740</sup> See for instance, Miguel Ángel Rodríguez Echeverría, *El Mito de la Racionalidad del Socialismo* (San José: Editorial Stvdivm, 1984).

<sup>741</sup> ANFE, Carta de Cecilia Valverde Barrenechea (Delgada Ejecutiva) a Lic. José Rafael Cordero Croccheri (Ministerio de la Presidencia), San José, Abril de 1980, *Presidencia - No. 2169*, ANCR, 1980.

<sup>742</sup> Wilson, ‘When Social Democrats Choose Neoliberal Policies,’ 167 [note 39].

modesty of the family and that utilize the images of women lewdly, in order promote sales, are to be controlled and regulated with restrictive criteria by the Minister of Government.”<sup>743</sup> This law is consistent with the country’s more socially conservative views with regards to issues such as abortion. Unlike in authoritarian regimes, in representative democracies there tends to be strong opposition to state propaganda amongst intellectuals and elites. Indeed, many Costa Ricans are opposed to this form of propaganda as exemplified by businessman Jorge Hazera’s 1980 letter to the Board of Directors of the College of Journalists.<sup>744</sup> Neoliberals are typically among those particularly opposed to government propaganda as a result of their predilection for private enterprise.

In the early 1980s, neoliberal policy advocates were given an opportunity to implement policy changes after Costa Rica plunged into the greatest economic crisis in its history. This crisis gave the government justification for the kind of structural changes proposed by neoliberal economists. In 1982, Milton Friedman observed in the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary preface of his book *Capitalism and Freedom*: “Only a crisis – actual or perceived – produces real change.”<sup>745</sup> This accuracy of this point was demonstrated in the case of Costa Rica during the Latin American debt crisis. The 1980s is known as Latin America’s ‘Lost Decade’ largely because of the debt crisis hit the region in the early 1980s. In 1982, Costa Rica became the first Central American country to default on its loans to the international multinational lending institutions. The International Monetary Fund and the World Bank urged fiscal restraint by implementing austerity measures.

OPEC’s oil price hike in 1979 did not help the employment figures in the country. Unemployment increased from 4.8% to 9.4% between 1979 and 1982 whilst private sector real wages declined by 36.9% during the same period.<sup>746</sup> During that time, wages decreased as the Costa Rica’s currency (*the colón*) dropped in value. *The Miami Herald* reported in 1981 that the “average worker’s 2,000 *colón* monthly salary has dropped in real value from \$232 to \$66,” but that it was a “boon for foreign-based labor-intensive industries” such as the textile industry. For instance, the general manager of the Costa Rican clothing company Hirsch noted, “The situation is very favourably affecting us.”<sup>747</sup> The economic crisis also

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<sup>743</sup> Asamblea Legislativa de la República de Costa Rica, ‘Regula Propaganda que Utilice la Imagen de la Mujer,’ Ley No. 5811, 1975.

<sup>744</sup> Hazera, ‘Carta a la Junta Directiva del Colegio de Periodistas,’ 3.

<sup>745</sup> Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom (Fortieth Anniversary Edition)* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), xiv.

<sup>746</sup> Eduardo Lizano, *Economic Policy Making: Lessons From Costa Rica* (San Francisco: ICS Press), 17-19.

<sup>747</sup> Carolyn Erlick, ‘Dreary Costa Rican Economy Harbors at Least One Bright Spot,’ *The Miami Herald* (Monday, November 9, 1981).



began to reverse the country's major healthcare achievements such as the reduction of infant mortality rates from 61.5% in 1970 to 18.6% by 1983.<sup>748</sup> One indication of this reversal was the instances of the hospitalisation of children suffering from acute malnutrition which doubled between 1981 and 1982.<sup>749</sup>

### **The Monge Administration (1982-1986)**

After President Carazo's term ended, the PLN returned to power under the leadership of Luis Alberto Monge Álvarez. This restored trust in the country economic system which had declined during Carazo's Administration.<sup>750</sup> Despite the PLN's traditional platform, the Monge Administration continued to lead the country in a more neoliberal direction. Costa Rica recovered to a certain extent by the mid-1980s by cutting social spending and reducing tariffs. The country also sought ways to attract more US investment to the country. In 1982, the Costa Rican Coalition of Development Incentives or CINDE (Coalición Costarricense de Iniciativas de Desarrollo) was established in order to promote direct foreign investment in the country. CINDE described itself as "a private, apolitical, non-profit organization."<sup>751</sup> Two years after it was founded, CINDE was classified as being in the 'public interest' by the Costa Rican government much like the ANFE which had been given the same honour in the previous year. During the 1980s, the organisation was heavily financed by the US government through USAID. In 1988 alone, it was given \$282 million *colones* by USAID.<sup>752</sup> The organisation also purchased full page advertisements in *La República* which informed its readers that "private enterprise supports CINDE" and that "Costa Rica has benefitted with CINDE."<sup>753</sup>

Along with promoting US direct foreign investment, there were efforts by the United States government to garner support for US foreign policy in Costa Rica was promoted by the Voice of America (VOA).<sup>754</sup> In July 1982, President Reagan noted that

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<sup>748</sup> Lynn Morgan, 'Health without Wealth? Costa Rica's Health System under Economic Crisis,' *Journal of Public Health Policy*, Vol. 8, No. 1, 1987, 90.

<sup>749</sup> Lynn Morgan, 'Health Effects of the Costa Rican Economic Crisis,' in Marc Edelman and Joanne Kenen (Eds), *The Costa Rica Reader* (New York: Grove Weidenfield, 1989), 214.

<sup>750</sup> Mitchell Seligson and Edward Muller, 'Democratic Stability and Economic Crisis: Costa Rica, 1978-1983,' *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 31, No. 3, 1987, 317.

<sup>751</sup> CINDE, *Investment in Costa Rica* (San José: Impreso en Mundo Grafico, 2001), 1.

<sup>752</sup> *La República*, Viernes 20 de Mayo de 1988, 4.

<sup>753</sup> *La República*, Miércoles 13 de Abril de 1988, 5.

<sup>754</sup> In 1956, not too long after its creation, the general manager of Radio Australia Charles Moses claimed the VOA was a "frankly propaganda service;" Cited in Errol Hodge, *Radio Wars: Truth, Propaganda and the Struggle for Radio Australia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 5.

the “VOA of the International Communication Agency will remain the official broadcasting voice of the US Government.”<sup>755</sup> The VOA relied on funding from USIA to produce its content. By 1991, USIA funding to the country reached an annual level of \$US3.5 million, not including the funds allocated for VOA programmes.<sup>756</sup> This budget was unsurprisingly the largest in Central America given the reliance on military force in the rest of the region. In 1983, the Reagan Administration created the Office of Public Diplomacy for Latin America and the Caribbean, the largest government information agency since the CPI. The endeavours of the Office of Public Diplomacy were often referred to by Reagan Administration officials in internal documents as ‘Project Truth.’<sup>757</sup> A primary focus of its public diplomacy efforts operations was to promote opposition towards the Sandinista government in Nicaragua and create a favourable image of the latter’s primary domestic opponents who were known as the Contras.

In 1984, *Radio Costa Rica* was created partly for the purposes of transmitting VOA programmes. A 1986 CID-Gallup poll report described the station as a “Costa Rican broadcaster,” but one that “includes international components.”<sup>758</sup> With program names such as *State Department News Media Briefing*, it was clear that these ‘international components’ were primarily from the United States. The report found that 13% of the respondents had listened to *Radio Costa Rica* in the last 30 days and the vast majority had a favourable view of the station. In comparison, 12% of *Ticos* who had listened to Nicaraguan radio stations during that same period had unfavourable views of the content of these stations.<sup>759</sup> Along with *Radio Costa Rica*, there was also another seemingly local radio station called *Radio Impacto* that operated in the country during the 1980s. According to former Contra leader Edgar Chamorro, *Radio Impacto* was ostensibly run by a group of Venezuelan investors but was actually being funded by the CIA.<sup>760</sup> However, without further documentation it is impossible to substantiate this claim.

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<sup>755</sup> Ronald Reagan, *United States International Broadcasting*, National Security Decision Directive, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, 1982, 1.

<sup>756</sup> Barry, *Costa Rica*, 58.

<sup>757</sup> See for example, Ronald Reagan, *Management of Public Diplomacy Relative to National Security*, National Security Decision Directive, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, 1983, 2.

<sup>758</sup> CID, ‘Opinion Pública - No. 23, Costa Rica,’ *Presidencia - No. 3469*, ANCR, 1986, 67. The Interdisciplinary Development Consultancy or CID (*Consultoría Interdisciplinaria en Desarrollo*) is an Costa Rican organisation founded in 1977 in order to conduct public opinion research.

<sup>759</sup> Ibid.

<sup>760</sup> Edgar Chamorro, *Packaging the Contras: A Case of CIA Disinformation* (New York: Institute for Media Analysis, 1987), 26.

## The Arias Administration (1986-1990)

In 1986, Óscar Arias Sánchez was elected as president amidst continuing conflict in the region, especially in Nicaragua. President Arias is most well-known for winning the Nobel Peace Prize for successfully negotiating the Central American Peace Accords which helped lead to a significant decrease in violence in the region in comparison to the early 1980s. The US government's favourable treatment of the country continued to be demonstrated by the large influx of economic aid from the United States. Between 1983 and 1988, Costa Rica received just over a billion dollars from the US government.<sup>761</sup> US economic aid continued to flow to Costa Rica even though it decreased in the late 1980s. There is no doubt that this aid mitigated some of the effects of the economic crisis. In 1985 and 1986, Costa Rica was the only Central American country to experience the growth of its economy.<sup>762</sup> Despite its fiscal benefits, it is apparent that economic aid would be conditionally based.

Supporters of social liberalism and the PLN were critical of the United States' interference in Costa Rica's internal affairs during the 1980s. In a 1986 interview, José Figueres criticised the US

effort to undo Costa Rica's social institutions, to turn our whole economy over to the businesspeople, and to do with away with ... the few companies we have that are too large to be in private hands. The United States trying to force us to sell them to so-called private enterprise, which means turning the move to the local oligarchy or to US or European companies. We're fighting back as best we can."<sup>763</sup>

Under particular pressure were the nationalised banking, healthcare and telecommunications systems. Part of problem as Figueres saw it was that the "oligarchy owns the newspapers and the radio stations, by which it has heavily influenced public opinion in Costa Rica."<sup>764</sup> In an interview with the same author, Daniel Oduber agreed that the country's social liberal political institutions were under attack by US-funded institutions and their allies in Costa Rica. Whilst he noted that he welcomed other states' help in

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<sup>761</sup> Wilson, *Costa Rica*, 120.

<sup>762</sup> Edelberto Torres Rivas, *History and Society in Central America* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), 124.

<sup>763</sup> Andrew Reding et al., 'Voices from Costa Rica,' *World Policy Journal*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 1986, 321.

<sup>764</sup> Ibid., 319. Figueres' analysis is consistent with Chomsky and Herman's central thesis in *Manufacturing Consent*, in which the authors identify several filters in their 'propaganda model' which ensure that the US mass media serve the interests of state and corporate power; Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988).

rebuilding the country, he said that “Costa Ricans should be allowed to decide for themselves what kind of society they want to have, rather than have model dictated from outside.”<sup>765</sup> Oduber felt that the US government was attaching strings to aid for the purpose of replacing Costa Rica’s social liberal model with one favoured by Washington.

Throughout the 1980s, there was definite sectors of resistance to the parallel state from unions, members of the general public as well as from elite sectors. However, opinion polls reveal a mixture of support for the economic aid and its primary source, i.e., USAID. The 1986 CID Gallup poll cited earlier found that 73% percentage of *Ticos* with a university-level education felt that economic aid from the United States ‘creates dependency’ compared to the 25% who believed that ‘there is no danger’ from accepting said aid.<sup>766</sup> Another CID-Gallup poll from 1988 found that 55% of *Ticos* thought that US economic aid primarily helped Costa Rican elites (those who had contacts with USAID and the government (26%), “politicians and their families” (21%) and “people with resources” (8%).<sup>767</sup> Thus, many *Ticos* were critical of domestic concentrations of power during the late 1980s, especially institutions that were heavily funded by foreign countries such as the United States.

Since the 1980s, there has been concern in some intellectual circles about the ‘Central Americanisation’ of the country. At the end of the decade, there was much discussion in Costa Rica about a group of private institutions established by USAID. President Arias’ advisor John Biehl dubbed these institutions the ‘parallel state.’ Biehl argued the parallel state was designed to circumvent the country’s political institutions in an effort to remake Costa Rica in a neoliberal fashion. In a 1988 article in the newspaper *La República*, Biehl attempted to persuade *Ticos* that

the existence of a parallel structure of bureaucratic organizations to drive Costa Rican development is a fact. U.S. economic aid has been conditioned upon the creation of several institutions and upon the modification of the laws of Costa Rica, all to facilitate a particular model of development. .... It is possible – and I make no judgement here – that these entities are good for the country. But I do contend that they are financed with public funds. I contend that they are not subject to control by the National Assembly, nor by the Executive Branch, nor by the Comptroller of the Republic, and that is probably not good.<sup>768</sup>

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<sup>765</sup> Reding et al., ‘Voices from Costa Rica,’ 326.

<sup>766</sup> CID, ‘Opinion Pública - No. 23,’ 44.

<sup>767</sup> CID, ‘Opinion Pública - No. 28, Costa Rica,’ *Presidencia - No. 3872*, ANCR, 1988, 51.

<sup>768</sup> John Biehl, ‘No Me Senti Extranjero en Costa Rica,’ *La República*, Miercoles 6 de Junio de 1988.

Despite tempering his words somewhat, Biehl concluded emphatically that *Ticos* “must be alert against foreigners and their internal accomplices who wish to design Costa Rican development behind the back of its democracy.”<sup>769</sup> Biehl was subsequently removed from the Arias government’s cabinet for his public statement. Richard Rosenberg, who was USAID’s head of Costa Rica’s private-sector programmes, later acknowledged that “Biehl was dead right.” He added that the parallel state was necessary given “that it is was impossible to do this kind of work within the structure” of Costa Rica’s political system.<sup>770</sup> In other words, the parallel state was needed to make major structural changes to the country’s social liberal system, at least in the short term.

In addition to restructuring the Costa Rican economy, there is some evidence that there were attempts to undermine the country’s union movement whose strength was related to the viability of its social liberal political institutions. Organisations that were reportedly involved in anti-union measures included the Costa Rican Association of Development Organisations or ACORDE (*Asociación Costarricense para Organizaciones de Desarrollo*) which was established as a private-run alternative to CODESA. According to author Tom Barry, USAID helped undermined unions by funnelling money through CINDE and ACORDE to fund training courses on the principles and benefits of *solidarismo*.<sup>771</sup> The *solidarista* system promised financial security and a harmony of interests between workers and employers. To its critics however, *solidarismo* was designed to placate workers and dissuade them from joining a union. In 1954, one coffee entrepreneur explained that the “basic reason behind my adoption of the [*solidarista*] system is that I want to get richer.”<sup>772</sup> This appears to have been the motivation behind the promotion of *solidarismo* which did not attract a large percentage of workers until the 1980s. Despite the union busting measures, Costa Rica still had the highest wages in Central America.

Privatisation also arguably weakened the union movement by undermining the public sector whose unions have been some of the strongest in the country. Moreover, although Costa Rican workers have the right to form unions, only private sector unions have the right to strike under Article 61 of the 1949 Constitution.<sup>773</sup> At the end of the 1980s,

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<sup>769</sup> Ibid.

<sup>770</sup> Cited in Honey, *Hostile Acts*, 75.

<sup>771</sup> Barry, *Costa Rica*, 50.

<sup>772</sup> Cited in Molina and Palmer, *The History of Costa Rica*, 164.

<sup>773</sup> *Constitución Política de la República de Costa Rica*, 22-23.

a mere 6% of private-sector workers were unionised.<sup>774</sup> During the 1980s, union membership remained steady at approximately 15% of the workforce. However, by the end of the 1980s, the *solidarismo* movement had won a slightly greater percentage of the workforce (16%) than the trade unions.<sup>775</sup> Unlike in the rest of the region, unions and dissenters did not face violence when organising and protesting during the 1980s. As Carlos Morales from the UCR's newspaper *Semanario Universidad* put it, "We don't have repression with bullets, we have control by the news."<sup>776</sup> Although the argument regarding social control via indoctrination is commonly made and evidence for propaganda campaigns is relatively easy to discover, proving the efficacy of such campaigns is notoriously difficult.

### **The Post-Cold War Period (1991-1998)**

The difference between the methods of control in Costa Rica and that of policy makers from the counterinsurgency strategists in other Central America during the 1980s is demonstrated by the following strategy reflections from 1991 regarding the 1980s by Eduardo Lizano and the former Guatemalan military general Héctor Gramajo. In a 1991 paper on lessons from economic policies in his country, Lizano explained that it was important to ensure that particular "elements of economic policy" should not be released to the populace given that they "would be harmful if they were published in full, specific detail." Part of the problem is that if such information was released, it "would prove counterproductive to the community and interfere with the implementation of economic policy."<sup>777</sup> By contrast, Gramajo concluded that his government's old strategy of killing 100% of their enemies was flawed. After 1982, the government initiated a civil affairs program "which provide[d] development for 70 percent of the population while we kill[ed] 30 percent."<sup>778</sup> Gramajo explained that this was a "more humanitarian, less costly strategy" that was designed to be "more compatible with the democratic system."<sup>779</sup> Although the Guatemalan genocide is the most extreme case in Central America, these types of violent

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<sup>774</sup> Barry, *Costa Rica*, 46.

<sup>775</sup> Ibid.

<sup>776</sup> Cited in Ibid., 58.

<sup>777</sup> Lizano, *Economic Policy Making*, 29.

<sup>778</sup> Jennifer Schirmer and Héctor Gramajo, 'The Guatemalan Military Project: An Interview with Gen. Héctor Gramajo,' *Harvard International Review*, Vol. 13, No. 3, 1991, 11.

<sup>779</sup> Ibid.

techniques of control were employed in various parts of the region, especially during the early phase of the Central American crisis.

Given that during the crisis, minor forms of dissent were not generally accepted in the Northern Triangle and Nicaragua, dissidents tended to engage in more extreme political acts such as insurrection. According to Americas Watch, both the security forces and paramilitary 'death squads' perpetrated various human rights violations including murder and rape in Nicaragua and the Northern Triangle countries.<sup>780</sup> Between 1979 and 1991 the total killed or 'disappeared' in Central America is estimated as follows: Guatemala (75 000), El Salvador (75 000), Nicaragua (40 000), and 10 000 in Honduras.<sup>781</sup> In Costa Rica, dissent and protests were relatively common during the 1980s but generally did not lead to any major interventions by the police. The Central American Crisis largely ended in the early 1990s apart from the Guatemalan civil war which lasted until 1996. Nicaragua ended its war between the Contras and the Sandinistas when the latter lost in the 1990 general elections to Violetta Chamorro. The country could not accurately be described as a representative democracy until that point. In El Salvador, the civil war between the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front and government military forces ended in 1992 after more than twelve years of conflict.

During the 1990s, there was a noticeable decline in support of Costa Rica's political system.<sup>782</sup> Although this phenomenon started in the late 1970s, this was understandable given the economic crisis. The origins of this decline appear to have really started with the presidency of Rafael Calderón Fournier (1990-1994) who was the son of Rafael Calderón Guardia. Calderón Jr. ended up discrediting his own Social Christian Unity Party or PUSC (*Partido Unidad Social Cristiana*). This was the result of a major corruption scandal involving President Calderón's granting of contracts to the Finnish company Instrumentarium which garnered him several years of prison time. His replacement was José María Figueres (1994-1998) who was the son of Calderón's Sr.'s main rival, i.e., José Figueres Ferrer. Figueres Jr.'s government implemented several neoliberal reforms and eliminated certain government institutions such as the National Railway System which was

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<sup>780</sup> See, for example, Americas Watch, *Human Rights in Nicaragua, 1986* (New York: The Americas Watch Committee, 1987); Americas Watch, *Honduras: Without the Will* (New York: The Americas Watch Committee, 1989); Americas Watch, *Messengers of Death: Human Rights in Guatemala* (New York: The Americas Watch Committee, 1990). Americas Watch, *El Salvador and Human Rights: The Challenge of Reform* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1991).

<sup>781</sup> LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 362.

<sup>782</sup> Seligson, 'Trouble in Paradise?'

later reopened. Figueres was also accused of accepting illegal funds from a foreign company, but unlike his predecessor, was not convicted of any crime.

By the mid 1990's, all of the Central American republics had become representative democracies. Despite the shift to representative democracy across the region, only Costa Rica maintained social control methods similar to those in developed countries. Although it still does not have a military, Costa Rica maintained professional police forces that have continued to be crucial to the maintenance of order in the country. In 1996, Costa Rica's police forces (the Civil, Rural and Frontier Guards) were consolidated into the *Fuerza Publica* (Public Force). In order to transfer from an authoritarian state to a representative democracy, there evidently needs to be a significant reduction in the ability of the state to control its citizens by force. Whilst this occurred to a certain extent, the 'Northern Triangle' continued to be one of the most violent regions in the world. Although all the region's civil wars had ended by 1996, Central America still contained some of the poorest countries in the Western Hemisphere.

The stability that developed after the Central American crisis opened up new opportunities for economic growth in the region. Costa Rica had now lost its 'comparative advantage' as North American textile companies moved north in search of cheaper labour. The region has experienced a significant decrease in the level of agricultural production since the 1980s. Coffee and bananas were the primary Central American export commodities in the mid-1980s but had reduced in importance considerably by the twenty-first century. In 1985, these products constituted 52% of the entire exports from the region, a figure that had dropped to just 15% in 2010. Furthermore, in the latter year, agricultural production only made up 7% of Costa Rica's GDP.<sup>783</sup> There has been a general trend to move away from agriculture which is the least lucrative of the productive enterprises. Rousseau observed that agriculture was the least lucrative enterprise "because its products, being the most indispensable for all men, must fetch a price in proportion to the reach of the poorest."<sup>784</sup> Even though the rest of Central America has still retained relatively large agricultural and manufacturing sectors, Costa Rica has moved away from these industries to more lucrative types of export-led productive enterprises such as Information and Communications Technology (ICT). Movement in this direction had been considered by

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<sup>783</sup> Salvador Puig and Diego Sánchez-Ancochea, 'Introduction: Central America's Triple Transition and the Persistent Power of the Elite,' in Salvador Puig and Diego Sánchez-Ancochea (Eds.), *Handbook of Central American Governance* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 13.

<sup>784</sup> Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*, 151.



Costa Rican governments since the mid-1980s. This was demonstrated by CINDE's 1985 marketing plan which stated that one of its objectives was to "promote investment opportunities in Costa Rica to the high technology industry" in Silicon Valley.<sup>785</sup>

The most prominent example of the transition to more lucrative industries such as ICT was the campaign by CINDE and Figueres Jr.'s government to attract the US corporation Intel to the country. This campaign succeeded in 1997 when the company built a chip manufacturing plant in Heredia. A 1998 World Bank report on the establishment of the INTEL plant included a section on 'opinion management' in which it stated that the government and CINDE were cautious about giving "unduly favourable" concessions to INTEL. The reason given for this was the Costa Rican people's "sensitivity to foreign domination, due to the legacy of banana republics and a general concern about U.S. economic hegemony."<sup>786</sup> Despite this sensitivity, INTEL was awarded several incentives including a complete exemption on local sales and export taxes on the repatriation of its profits. Out of INTEL's net profit of US\$1.5 billion for 1999, only US\$200 million of it remained in Costa Rican hands.<sup>787</sup> The report also noted that Costa Rica was ultimately chosen instead because it had a more favourable business climate including "not just a low wage labor pool, but a very well educated low wage labor pool."<sup>788</sup> Costa Rica was seen as a suitable host country for a high technology industry, but not for the textile industry given that Costa Rican workers received higher wages and had greater political rights.

Although the country has adopted a more neoliberal framework in the last several decades, this process has sometimes been exaggerated by some critics of neoliberalism. US sociologist Michelle Christian for instance, has claimed that the "fall of the country's heralded 'tropical welfare state' took full form in 1981." She went on to claim that ever since the civil war of 1948, "Costa Rican politics was dominated by the centrist, left-leaning Social Democratic National Liberation Party (PLN), and the more conservative Social Christian Unity Party (PUSC)." Christian added, "Regardless of the party in power, however, neoliberal thought and practice shaped governance."<sup>789</sup> Actually, the PUSC was not formed until 1983 and Costa Rica could not seriously be considered neoliberal in nature

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<sup>785</sup> CINDE, 'Marketing Plan 1985 – Investment Promotion Program for Costa Rica, San Francisco California,' April 1985, *Presidencia - No. 2707*, ANCR, 1985, 1, 3.

<sup>786</sup> Debora Spar, *Attracting High Technology Investment: Intel's Costa Rican Plant* (Washington: The World Bank, 1998), 18.

<sup>787</sup> Richard Sandbrook, et al., *Social Democracy in the Global Periphery: Origins, Challenges, Prospects* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007) 116.

<sup>788</sup> *Ibid.*, 27, 14.

<sup>789</sup> Christian, 'Racial Neoliberalism in Costa Rican Tourism,' 160.

prior to the late 1970s. Moreover, the country has maintained much of its social liberal institutions such as ICE, the Caja and its state-run banks (*Banco de Costa Rica* and *Banco Nacional*), which are two of the country's most popular banks. Despite Costa Rica's partial embrace of neoliberalism, social liberal attitudes have continued to be popular in the country. Whilst some neoliberal policies were accepted, there was considerable opposition to privatisation of certain state-owned assets. For instance, in 2000, the proposed privatisation of the state-owned telecommunications and electricity services provider ICE was abandoned after major protests broke out in the capital. What these trends appeared to signify was a reduction in support for the country's traditional two-party system.

### **The Collapse of the Traditional Two-Party System**

Since 1953, the PLN has alternated power with various centre-right parties including the National Unity Party, the National Unification Party, the Unity Coalition and finally the PUSC. In the early 2000s, there were signs that the country's traditional two-party system was under threat. Despite enjoying two consecutive terms in office after the election of Presidents Miguel Ángel Rodríguez (1998-2002) and Abel Pacheco (2002-2006), the PUSC has not won more than 10% of the vote in general elections since 2006. Alternative parties such as the Libertarian Movement Party or PML (*Partido Movimiento Libertario*) started to increase their popularity in the 2000s. In the 2006 general elections, the PML received the third highest number of votes of all the political parties. In second place was the new Citizens' Action Party or PAC (*Partido Acción Ciudadana*) which campaigned on an anti-corruption platform. The winner of the election was the PLN's Óscar Arias who was elected president once again after the 1969 constitutional amendment which banned the re-election of previous presidents was overturned.

Whilst still recovering from President Figueres Jr.'s corruption scandal, the PLN was further discredited after the campaign to ratify the Dominican Republic - Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA-DR) with the United States. Costa Rica was the only Central American country to take the issue of CAFTA-DR ratification to a referendum. Public opinion was divided on this referendum as demonstrated by the relatively equal popularity of the 'YES' and 'NO CAFTA' campaigns. The latter camp organised strikes in the capital and promoted the claim that if ratification was achieved, living standards would decline (especially for Costa Rican workers). The YES campaign was supported by at the highest echelons of the Arias Administration. This fact was

revealed by a July 2007 memo sent from Vice President Kevin Casas and Congressman Fernando Sánchez to President Arias.<sup>790</sup> The memo, which was leaked by *Semanario Universidad* in September, outlined several of the YES camp's strategy points. These strategies outlined the necessity of launching a "massive campaign in the media" and to "stimulate fear" amongst the public in order to achieve ratification. Fear was to be stimulated by claiming that voting against ratification would increase unemployment, undermine democracy as well as weaken the economy. The memo also noted that it is almost certain that such a campaign would "have a considerable impact amongst the simplest people, which is where we have the most serious problems."<sup>791</sup> The referendum was held on October 7<sup>th</sup> 2007 and passed with 51.7% of the votes cast.

The World Bank has produced several reports that have analysed the effect of CAFTA-DR on Costa Rica's society and economy. A 2011 World Bank report pointed out that Costa Rica has "experienced very slow poverty reduction since the late 1990s and even a reversal since 2007." In other words, poverty had increased since CAFTA-DR was ratified in 2007. The report noted that recent economic trends had "affected poor single mothers in a significant, negative way."<sup>792</sup> The World Bank demonstrated that the percentage of the population below the poverty line in Costa Rica increased to 24.2% in 2010 from 21.7% in 2009, the same year that CAFTA-DR took effect.<sup>793</sup> Despite this initial spike in poverty, this number has decreased since that time according to data from the World Bank which shows that it fell to 21.1% in 2018.<sup>794</sup> CAFTA-DR has also resulted in an increase in exports from Costa Rica to the United States. Between 2009 and 2012, products exported to the United States from Costa Rica increased by approximately 50%.<sup>795</sup> The country has also clearly attained the greatest economic benefits out of the Central America and the Dominican Republic as shown in the increase in the value of imports to

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<sup>790</sup> Henry Campos Vargas, 'La Retórica del Miedo: Memorando un Nefasto Memorandum. *Káñina*, Vol. 37, No. 1, 2013, 286.

<sup>791</sup> Ibid.

<sup>792</sup> Maurizio Bussolo, Samuel Freije, Calvin Djiofack and Melissa Rodriguez, 'Trade Liberalization and Welfare Distribution in Central America,' in J. Humberto Lopez and Rashmi Shankar (Eds.), *Getting the Most Out of Free Trade Agreements in Central America* (Washington: The World Bank, 2011), 353-354.

<sup>793</sup> World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2012* (Washington: The World Bank, 2012), 66.

<sup>794</sup> World Bank, 'Poverty Headcount Ratio at National Poverty Lines (% of population) – Costa Rica, 2018.' Costa Rica is among those nations of the Western Hemisphere with high levels of human development. The country is even comparable if not superior to the United States with regards to certain health indicators such as life expectancy. According to the World Bank, this indicator in 2018 was 80.2 for Costa Rica compared to 78.5 the US in the same year; World Bank, 'Life expectancy at birth, total (years) – Costa Rica and the United States, 2018.'

<sup>795</sup> Friederike (Fritzi) Koehler-Geib and Mateo Clavijo, 'The Context of CAFTA-DR in Costa Rica,' in Friederike (Fritzi) Koehler-Geib and Susana M. Sanchez (Eds.) *Costa Rica Five Years After CAFTA-DR: Assessing Early Results* (Washington: The World Bank, 2015), 15-16.

the country from the United States. Compared to these other member countries, Costa Rica's value of US imports increased from roughly US\$4 billion dollars in 2008 to over US\$12 billion dollars in 2012.<sup>796</sup> Thus, the ratification of CAFTA-DR has not produced the deleterious effects that were feared by the NO CAFTA campaign.

Laura Chinchilla (2010-2014), who was one of Óscar Arias's vice presidents, was elected in the 2010 Presidential elections. Once again, PAC's candidate Ottón Solís came second and the PML's candidate Otto Guevara achieved third place with some 20% of the votes. In 2014, the country's traditional two-party political system collapsed. Instead of reverting to the centre-right party in the 2014 general election, a majority of *Ticos* chose PAC's candidate Luis Guillermo Solís who won the second round of voting with some 77% of the national vote against his challenger from the PLN. In the 2018 general elections, PAC's Carlos Alvarado was elected with almost 61% of the vote (in the second voting round), defeating the candidate from the new centre-right National Restoration Party. Despite abandoning its old two-party system, the country has not reversed the trend of recent decades but has largely retained its politico-economic system which is based on representative democracy and social liberalism.

## Conclusion

The beginnings of the neoliberal transition are important for understanding how Costa Rican exceptionalism has manifested in the modern era. Despite the exaggerations by some commentators, there is no doubt that there have been considerable changes to the country's political landscape over the last four decades. This chapter has maintained that throughout the economics of the 1980s, Costa Rica has employed methods of control in accordance with its libertarian and democratic tradition. Since the late 1970s, Costa Rica transitioned to a more neoliberal or right-wing libertarian development model whilst still largely maintaining its social liberal institutions. The transition to neoliberalism that occurred during the 1980s demonstrated the difference between Costa Rica and the other Central American republics. Although Costa Rica's neighbours implemented neoliberal policies during that decade, they were introduced in rather different contexts, namely in authoritarian regimes with little in the way of social programmes.

It is plausible that neoliberal policies have contributed to the decline in system

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<sup>796</sup> Ibid., 16-17.

support in Costa Rica in recent decades. This was especially true after sons of the country's two most important social liberal reformers (i.e., Rafael Calderón Sr. and José Figueres Sr.) somewhat discredited the country's two major parties after major corruption scandals. The 2007 'stimulate fear' memo further discredited the PLN which has implemented many of the country's neoliberal reforms since the Monge Administration. The PLN ended up being associated with neoliberal reforms, even more than the PUSC. Whilst Costa Rica benefitted from large amounts of US economic aid during the 1980s, influence from the United States proved to be somewhat controversial. DR-CAFTA was also controversial at the time of its ratification but has proven to be economically beneficial for the country. Despite fears that the Central American exception might lose its status, Costa Rica continues to demonstrate its traditional position as the most libertarian country in the region.

## **General Conclusion**

By tracing political development and social control in Costa Rica, this study has demonstrated that since the sixteenth century, the country's inhabitants have experienced more individual freedom than their neighbours. Costa Rica has been both the freest region since European explorers landed in the area in 1502 as well as Central America's democratic exception between 1919 and the 1990s. Contrary to dispositional arguments, this thesis has shown that it was geographical and structural factors which explain why *Ticos* have had less authoritarianism political institutions than their counterparts on the isthmus. This evidently affected how social control functioned in Costa Rica in comparison to the other Central American republics. The most obvious difference has been the comparative lack of violence used to control the general population, a pattern that has been evident since the pre-Hispanic period. The country continued to experience less violence throughout the colonial and post-Independence eras and into the present day. Costa Rica's comparatively liberal and democratic political system helped give the country the highest levels of economic and human development in Central America.

All of the critical junctures contributed to the development of the country's comparatively liberal and democratic political system. The geographical location and pre-Hispanic political organisation of Amerindians societies meant that the conquest and early colonial era were different in Costa Rica in comparison its neighbours. The resistance of the Indigenous population in in eighteenth century Talamanca checked further Spanish colonisation in the region. Although the cause and effect relationship is evident between all the critical junctures covered in this thesis, the implications of this epoch were not truly demonstrated until the liberal reform era when Jamaican workers were brought to the region in the 1870s. The role of Afro-*Ticos* in the banana industry affected the development of the union movement in the country which was instrumental in causing the country's shift towards social liberalism in the 1940s.

It is clear from the historical record that Costa Rica's political liberalisation in the nineteenth century was a major causal factor for the country's position as Central America's democratic exception for most of the twentieth century. Costa Rica's early liberalisation after 1821 laid the basis for liberal democratic state that began to develop in the late nineteenth century. During the liberal reform era, the country witnessed major economic growth which strengthened its exceptional position within the region. The authoritarianism at the end of the liberal reform period led to the creation of the country's welfare state and

the 1948 civil war. The subsequent abolition of the military and refinement of the country's politico-economic system helped the country largely avoid the brutal violence that was characteristic of the Central American crisis. This also meant the country was in a better financial situation when the whole region transitioned to a more neoliberal development model in the 1980s along with the majority of the world.

### **Correcting the Historical Record**

As this study has argued, the roots of Costa Rican democratic exceptionalism are to be found in the pre-Hispanic era. Whilst the proponents of the rural democracy thesis recognised the significance of this period, this was only in relation to the country's small Indigenous population. They correctly observed that this led to more egalitarian land tenure patterns in Costa Rica, despite exaggerating its egalitarian nature during the colonial era. However, there are many other elements of Costa Rican exceptionalism that can be traced back to the pre-Columbian period. My unique theoretical and methodological approach has revealed several insights that were unavailable to traditional historians. These insights stemmed from relatively recent archaeological work which, contrary to previous research on pre-Hispanic Lower Central America, concluded that there were greater number of tribes than chiefdoms in the region. This research highlighted the importance of Costa Rica's location which led to the more detailed geographical determinist analysis of the present study.

There are a number of geographical factors which have produced structural advantages for the inhabitants of Costa Rica. One of the most important of these factors was its location in the hinterland between the Aztec and Incan civilisations. Greater Talamanca was especially unique in terms of its geographical location as it was on the outer edge of a region that is in itself a backwater. Costa Rica's location would have major, long-lasting consequences as it meant that the region was situated outside trading systems in South America as well as the 'Mesoamerican World System.' It also meant that when the Spanish colonised the territory, they found the Indigenous population so dispersed and obdurate that Costa Rica would be colonised some 40 years later than the other Central American provinces. Although it is a paradox, it was in fact the least centralised political units that were better at resisting Spanish colonisation. More centralised political units are generally superior at conquering less organised foreign enemies. However, the reason why the Costa Rican case is different is that its Indigenous groups were never centralised enough

to be organised into an elite that the *conquistadores* could simply replace with a new hierarchy which served Spanish imperial interests.

The superposition of the Indigenous tribes by the Spanish in the sixteenth century dramatically altered the nature of social control in Costa Rica. It also drastically changed the nature of its political organisation which was relatively more egalitarian and democratic. Most of the Indigenous groups that lived in the region lived under tribes which institutionalised certain types of behaviour including food sharing. When institutional safeguards such as food access are guaranteed, mutual feelings of sympathy are promoted. This is not however, a reiteration of the so-called 'noble savage' position. It is not that Indigenous peoples living under tribal systems are morally superior to those who live in modern nation-states. This case study contributes to the line of thought which holds that authority systems can have a corrupting influence on individuals, especially the so-called 'superiors' within a social hierarchy. An Indigenous person is equally capable of being corrupted like any other human being.

The Costa Rican case further undermines the Hobbesian conception of human nature which should be rejected because it is untenable and also has provided justifications for the maintenance of authoritarian institutions. Historical interpretations of the Black Legend should likewise be rejected as part of the tendency to condemn one's enemies as uniquely evil. The classical liberal view of human nature has helped to undermine authoritarian institutions by explaining their deleterious effects on human development. Many previous accounts of Indigenous political systems in Lower Central America and other less organised areas have tended to present an image of more violent and centralised societies than the historical record indicates. This is one of the major benefits of a libertarian perspective which seeks to find a middle-ground position between the extremes of unfair criticism of Amerindian societies and exaggerated condemnations of Spain's colonial policies in accordance with the Black Legend. This perspective can be employed by historians to correct the overestimation of the degree of political centralisation of Indigenous groups in Latin America and elsewhere. The classical liberal position is strengthened by research from social psychology which gives it more of an empirical basis.

### **Social Psychology and the Conquest**

This study is the first to apply insights from social psychology to Costa Rica in the context of the Spanish conquest. Social psychological research has helped explain why the



Indigenous peoples in Cariay were initially friendly and hospitable to Columbus and his entourage. This initial affability was exhibited between the Talamancans and Columbus's men through gift exchanges and generally peaceful interrelations (with the clear exception of Columbus' temporary kidnapping of the two Indigenous guides). Later on, the indignities and atrocities committed by the Spanish against their native hosts promoted negative, sometimes violent reactions from the latter. The resource extraction process that characterised the European colonisation of the Americas necessitated the establishment of several systems of authority under the umbrella of the state. In classical liberal terms, these political institutions led to the corruption of the natural sentiments of the Amerindian population in Costa Rica. Under these circumstances, it is not difficult to see how the stabilising function of empathy could be undermined.

Psychologists have identified two primary ways in which an individual's ability to demonstrate empathy can be diminished. The first way this phenomenon can occur is through conditioning under authority systems and the second is through psychological trauma. Milgram argued that once humans enter the agentic state, there is a diffusion of responsibility which limits one's sense of guilt. His obedience to authority experiments explained how individuals operating under this state can be led relatively easily to commit heinous crimes by a malevolent authority. The fact that most of the Amerindians in ancient Costa Rica were living in tribes meant they were unaccustomed to being conditioned to obey authority. Although he recognised the benefits of authority structures and technology in terms of providing greater organisation and efficiency, Milgram also warned some of their dangers. For example, he saw the increased potential of human rights abuses, especially through advancements in bombing technology which allow for the remote destruction of enemies in war. Milgram found that increasing the distance between the subject and the 'victim' in his experiments further limited one's ability to demonstrate empathy.

The ability to feel sympathy has been shown to be particularly impaired amongst psychopaths who represent one extreme end of the empathy spectrum. On the other end of the spectrum, it is plausible that the Amerindians living under tribal systems in Costa Rica simply retained a great deal of their natural sympathy before the Conquest. It is evident that the Amerindians in Costa Rica experienced an alteration of their psychological states when the Spanish imposed authority systems on them. Once they began operating under the agentic state, their ability to demonstrate empathy may have been impaired due to the trauma associated with being colonised. As the anonymous Guatuso Amerindian from San

Ramón noted in his 1867 poem, “What shame and what pain” people feel when they live in modern society “without respect.” This explanation can help account for the considerable success of the Amerindians in Talamanca, a region which Spanish officials believed in the sixteenth century would be easy to conquer due to the apparent docility of its Indigenous population.

Psychologists have postulated that empathy helps prevent destructive tendencies amongst members of a society. Even though it allows for smoother social intercourse, there are examples such as war where sympathy is not a beneficial emotional response. In fact, members of a military force would find it difficult to function inside that institution if they demonstrated too much empathy. In short, empathy may be detrimental for the chances of survival in some circumstances. Consistent with the theory of natural selection it is plausible that empathy diminishes in individuals as part of the process of adaption to a more violent social environment. Contrary to the notion that some individuals are born with an ‘authoritarian personality,’ this case study supports the view that variations between human beings in terms of displaying aggression can best be explained by their experiences within authority systems. This case study is a contribution to the discussion, but the topic deserves continuing research given its importance to debates on the reasons why some individuals and countries have more advantages than others.

### **The Structural Advantages of Costa Rica**

Analysis of Costa Rica’s geography reveals a set of unique features including the lowest average temperatures as well as the highest precipitation and UV rates in all of Central America. These environmental conditions affected the behaviour, customs and appearance of the Indigenous population which influenced the conquistadores’ perceptions of the region and its inhabitants. Geographical factors also had major effects on the ways in which Spanish colonisation occurred in Costa Rica in terms of its speed, difficulty and the extent of territory covered. On the eve of the Conquest, the country was inhabited by a variety of Indigenous groups which were primarily organised into tribes along with several chiefdoms. The region’s tribes were mostly located in Greater Talamanca whereas its chiefdoms were largely situated in the territory’s central lowlands. Out of all the Huetare chiefdoms in the Central Valley in the early 1560s, the Guarco chiefdom appears to have been the most complex as well as the first area in Costa Rica to be conquered. After founding Cartago in its place, Juan Vasquez de Coronado had greater problems defeating

the less centralised Garabito chiefdom. The point about level of centralisation and the comparative difficulty of conquest is strengthened by a comparison of the Central Valley with Greater Talamanca which represents the most centralised and egalitarian areas of pre-Hispanic Costa Rica respectively.

Carneiro's circumscription theory helps explain why more centralised political systems developed in the Central Valley but not in Talamanca. Whilst the Central Valley is circumscribed by mountains, the Talamancan region is largely mountainous throughout and thus is not conducive for creating centralised political units with large populations. The primary accounts from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries describe Indigenous Talamancan societies in which there are no chiefs, no government and no militaries. Instead, they appeared to live with considerable freedom and an abundance of food. The documentary record also reveals that although there were respected elders, shamans and other leaders of these societies, the tribes of Talamanca only appeared to exercise charismatic authority as opposed to political authority. This is the first study to really emphasise this image from the under-utilised documents for this region. This is especially true with regards to the period stretching from the Great Uprising of 1709 to the last significant rebellion in Greater Talamanca in 1788. The image presented by archaeologists of ancient Central America as a kinder, gentler place to live was also portrayed in the first European explorers' accounts of their 1502 meeting with the Amerindians in Cariay.

Out of all the descriptions of the Indigenous peoples from Columbus' travels to Central America, those from Costa Rica are evidently the most positive. The first written accounts of region describe its inhabitants as "people of very good disposition" who were "very clever" (Diego de Porras). Ferdinand Columbus wrote that Cariay was the "best country" with the best and "most intelligent" Amerindians he and his father's entourage had met before. Although their friendliness helps explain initial positive European attitudes towards Indigenous Costa Ricans, it does not account for it completely. This is why discussion of their appearance is so significant. Lighter skin pigmentation amongst some of Costa Rica's Indigenous population, may partially account for the comparatively favourable character assessments. The advanced intelligence claim is the strongest indicator of this possibility given that European intellectuals had been touting the supposed superiority of the 'white race' centuries before they attempted to seriously prove it with the scientific racism of the nineteenth century. Spanish prejudice against non-white peoples extends back at least to the sixteenth century as do racist tropes such as the supposed laziness of Native Americans. Due to a structural environment of institutionalised racism,

individuals and their descendants from Africa as well as darkly pigmented Amerindians were generally treated in a comparatively harsh manner.

The difference in the tone regarding the positive assessments directed towards the inhabitants of Costa Rica are sharply contrasted with the negative statements that have been typically directed towards the inhabitants of neighbouring Nicaragua. Unlike their counterparts in Costa Rica, Indigenous groups in Nicaragua were sometimes often by the Spanish as brutal cannibals. They were also described as “ugly in aspect” (Ferdinand Columbus) and even the “most evil people in the world” (Francisco de Casteñada). The main criticism Spanish administrators had with Costa Rica was the country’s poverty during the colonial era, however this was a structural issue as opposed to a fundamental attack on the inhabitants of the region. Whether it was conscious or not, their skin colour may have affected how civilised Indigenous Costa Ricans were deemed to have been by European explorers, *conquistadores* and Spanish colonists. A lighter complexion helps explain why an Indigenous slave trade developed in Nicaragua but not in Costa Rica. Although the *conquistadores* and Spanish colonists indeed committed atrocities against the Indigenous peoples of Costa Rica, the historical record does not reveal as much brutality as it does in the rest of the isthmus. This point supports the notion in social psychology that humans are more likely to commit atrocities against individuals who have been dehumanised. In comparison to the majority of *Ticos*, individuals in Central American countries who were not codified as white were generally treated with a greater degree of force and brutality by Spain and other imperial powers.

This case study has collated the known references to ‘*Indios blancos*’ in Costa Rica since the sixteenth century. The evidence is too weak to conclude that the Chorotegas were “whiter than parrots” as Oviedo observed in 1529. A possible explanation for Oviedo’s description was that these individuals were albinos. It is less clear whether the Guatuso Amerindians had light enough skin to be considered white. In 1783, the Bishop of Nicaragua and Costa Rica Esteban Lorenzo de Tristán wrote that he observed “three good sized, white, but entirely nude guatuso indians” in San Carlos. Although there have long been rumours of white Amerindians in Guatuso and San Carlos, this appears to be the only reference of white Guatusos during the colonial era.

The strongest evidence of Indigenous people with lighter complexions comes from descriptions of the Talamancan Amerindians. The first direct reference to this Indigenous group as having white skin came from Augustin de Ceballos in 1610 who described them as “people of reason, well-disposed and white.” This observation is reinforced by Hale’s

1825 observation that Indigenous Talamancans inhabited the “highest and coldest places, which is why they are believed to have a light-colored complexion.” Their skin colour, in combination with pseudoscientific racist beliefs, is the strongest explanation for Hale’s claim that the Blancos were “far superior to other Indians in intellectual ability and natural gifts.” Perhaps the most important of these references was Povedano’s 1935 statement that there is “justification in the legend to call those aborigines ‘white Indians.’” His account helps explain the conflicting reports of witnesses through this observation that the darker pigmented Amerindians he met were from lower Telire whereas the ‘*Indios blancos*’ were from that district’s higher mountain regions. The fact that the Spanish gave the Talamancan Amerindians a name that means ‘whites’ in their language is further evidence of their lighter complexion. Thus, there is significant enough evidence to conclude that at some stage, members of the Talamancans had light enough skin to be considered ‘white.’

There is a tendency to dismiss the White Legend entirely on account of its untenable biological determinist iteration. However, the geographical determinist version of this legend is beneficial for a more complete understanding of Costa Rican exceptionalism. Nevertheless, further research should be conducted on the White Legend, especially studies that utilise insights from the natural sciences. Developing this version of the White Legend represents one of the more original contributions of this study. In accordance with the geographical determinist position, it is clear that the advantages experienced by the people of Costa Rica are structural and not biological. Even the issue of skin colour, which is determined at birth, is ultimately caused by the natural selection process and where one’s ancestors lived for millennia.

Contrary to the notions of biological determinists, there is no credible evidence that certain ‘races’ are inherently more intelligent than others. The Talamancans and the Auracans were not advantaged because of their light skin but largely as a result of the mountains and forests which provided them a terrain to which they were more accustomed to traversing compared to the Spanish. The only known biological advantage Indigenous people in southern Chile and Talamanca had over more darkly pigmented individuals was their ability to absorb vitamin D. Lower UV rates in Costa Rica and Panama help account for the reports of certain Indigenous groups having white skin in these countries. This is in addition to the long-observed fact that Costa Rica had a smaller pre-Columbian Indigenous population which led a larger Spanish biological component in Costa Rica’s general populace. Another reason why *Ticos* today generally have a lighter complexion was the province’s colonial poverty which limited the ability of its citizens to purchase of large

number of African slaves, unlike in the more authoritarian and wealthier province of Panama.

A comparative analysis of Costa Rica with Nicaragua also reveals the structural disadvantages that are associated with authoritarianism. This comparison illuminates some of the harmful ways in which Costa Rica's national identity has been constructed. This harm was primarily manifested through the biological determinist version of the White Legend which was often propounded by foreigners in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Our understanding of this topic could evidently be strengthened with further research. One area of comparative historical analysis that deserves further investigation is the differences in Spain's colonisation process not just with the other four states that comprised the United Provinces of Central America but also Panama. Costa Rica's geographical advantages were also found in Panama to a certain extent, but the country's historical trajectory was so different. Political development in Central America's democratic exception appears to have been closer to some South American states such as Chile and Uruguay. Conducting comparative analysis of Central and South American countries may also yield fruitful results in many areas including with regards to the causes of poverty and inequality in Latin America. Although it possible to use some South American states and Costa Rica as a policy guide for the rest of Central America, given their unique histories, these countries' advantages cannot be easily replicated.

Costa Rica's geographical and structural advantages allowed the country to develop in a more libertarian direction which benefitted it socially, economically and politically. Given its comparatively small numbers of Amerindians and chattel slaves, the Spanish developed a smaller state apparatus in order to control the labour force during the colonial era. This meant that less coercive methods of control developed. The province's political development was also aided by operating in an international political environment in which it received a more favourable treatment by powerful states compared to its Central American neighbours. Being viewed as whiter or more civilised in a racist intellectual environment, evidently affected how individuals in Costa Rica were treated by European colonists. Spanish and European colonial institutions in general placed a greater burden and degree of coercion on disadvantaged non-white individuals.

The pattern of foreigners' comparatively positive descriptions and treatment of the country continued in the post-independence era. Although domestic factors were very important, the differences in terms of perception and treatment by foreign powers led to important differences with regards to political development in Central America. Since

1821, Costa Rica has developed with a comparatively small amount of direct outside interference which stands out in comparison to its immediate neighbours (Nicaragua and Panama). After Spanish colonisation ended, Costa Rica soon emerged as the most economically developed country in Central America. It was often argued or at least implied by foreigners who visited Costa Rica in the nineteenth century that the comparative 'whiteness' of *Ticos* was responsible for its advanced economic development. In 1858, Squier claimed that Costa Rica's economic prosperity can be reasonably attributed to its citizens' comparative lack of intermixing with Amerindians and Africans. Since the mid-nineteenth century, foreigners have also praised Costa Ricans for the development of their country's more liberal state structure.

### **Liberalisation of the Costa Rican State**

Costa Rica's unique colonial experience with its less authoritarian political institutions, led to its early adoption of liberalism. Liberal policies greatly benefitted the country both politically and economically. Although the seeds of its status as the Central American democratic exception were sown centuries earlier, Costa Rica did not truly flourish until after the country gained independence. It was not until the establishment of the country's coffee industry in the 1830s that Costa Rica acquired considerable wealth from lucrative domestic and international markets. The country's coffee industry developed earlier than the rest of the region and largely remained in domestic hands. Naturally, the profits derived from this industry primarily benefitted the *cafetaleros* and other elites who could afford to purchase newly privatised land, especially in the newly created capital (San José). After the Central American Union collapsed in 1838, Costa Rica was strongly opposed to any reunification attempts given its continuing divergence with its northern neighbours. As literacy rates increased in the mid-nineteenth century, Costa Rican leaders began demonstrating a greater concern for public opinion. Given that there is a great deal of historical analysis on the National Campaign, the originality of Chapter 4 comes primarily from a greater focus on the doctrinal or educational elements of social control during that time.

Even during the 'conservative era,' Costa Rica was the first country in the region to expand universal public education in accordance with classical liberal principles. This development continued under the regime of Tomás Guardia in the 1870s. Although President Guardia was a *caudillo* whose regime committed human rights abuses, he

introduced several liberal reforms including professionalisation of the military. Also in that decade, the UFC attracted workers from Jamaica who established themselves in Limón in order to develop the banana export industry. Unlike with the coffee industry, the banana was heavily influenced by the United States as demonstrated by the 1883 railroad construction contract that was signed by President Bernardo Soto and Minor Keith. The Soto government also extended popular education for both males and females in the late 1880s which reflected a continuing shift in a liberal political direction. The embrace of liberal policies had profound implications for its historical trajectory towards becoming the region's democratic exception as it paved the way for more democratic political institutions in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The Generation of 1889 helped establish the origins of representative democracy in the country by gradually expanding voting rights. The most authoritarian period since that time occurred during the Tinoco regime which collapsed due to domestic opposition as well as its failure to obtain recognition from the Wilson Administration. Since that time, there have been apparent attempts to influence public opinion in Costa Rica as evidenced by the 1918 intelligence report by US War Department. This topic has previously been analysed but not to the extent of the present study. Due to its liberal policies and institutions, social control in Costa Rica has functioned in a similar manner to other representative democracies which have developed political institutions with respect for civil liberties such as freedom of speech. Since 1919, methods of control employed against its more privileged population have involved much less force than in other parts of Central and South America. Consistent with the transition to representative democracy, there were definite limitations placed on the ability of the political class to coerce the general populace. For these reasons, Costa Rica was largely spared the kind of brutal violence that would come to characterise Central America throughout the Cold War. Significantly for its subsequent political development, a lack of authoritarianism at the end of the liberal reform era allowed the country to develop a considerable welfare state.

During the 1930s and 1940s, the development of Costa Rica's union movement and social liberal institutions would further expand the country's exceptional position within Central America. The country's relative stability during this period was threatened by Congress' decision to annul the 1948 presidential elections which produced a crisis that was only resolved by the subsequent civil war. Concerned with communist influence in the Picado government, the Truman Administration did intervene diplomatically during the war in order to pressure the social liberal country to take a tougher stance on the communist



PVP. After the National Liberation Army's victory, the country stabilised which was aided by José Figueres' decision to abolish the military. The Founding Board of the Second Republic oversaw several major changes which were quite similar to the political programme of both Calderón and Picado. The major difference between the Calderón and Figueres concerned the PVP which was tolerated by the former but outlawed by the latter.

Although the US government blocked the procurement of weapons to the Costa Rican government in 1948, it did provide jet fighters to the Figueres government during Nicaragua's 1955 invasion of the northern part of the country. The Eisenhower Administration's policy in Costa Rica was primarily one of attempting to influence the country's politics through the dissemination of anti-communist information via the USIA. The United States continued its policy of non-intervention with regards to any type of military action in Costa Rica. Since the military was proscribed in the 1949 Constitution, the country has not seen any major political violence. This history is sharply contrasted with the rest of isthmus during the Cold War, especially during the Central American crisis. Although there have been many historical accounts written about the 1948 civil war and the Central American crisis, this study has provided considerable discussion on propaganda and educational elements which have often been overshadowed by the analysis of violence.

A careful examination of the evidence highlights an intersection between increased agro-export production, malnutrition and state repression in Central America during the 1960s and 70s. In Costa Rica, the deleterious effects of agro-export overproduction were present but occurred on a much smaller scale. As a result, the country's inhabitants did not witness the brutal violence which resulted in the deaths of some 200 000 Central Americans during the 'Lost Decade.' The Alliance for Progress is commonly described as a failure in terms of achieving its stated objectives. Although it ultimately had the effect of increasing malnutrition in parts of the region, this was not the intention of Central American and US policy makers. US foreign policy was primarily shaped by the requirements of importing agricultural commodities for US markets as well as Cold-War security concerns. Whilst Central American policy makers were not passive actors, they were restricted by the export-led economic growth strategies available to Central American policy makers during the Cold War period.

The effects of the transition to the non-traditional export model were quite different in Costa Rica. This was partially a result of the response of the state which typically revolved around social reforms as opposed to violent repression. In contrast to the genocide against the Mayans in Guatemala during the 1980s, Indigenous groups in Costa

Rica were afforded rights to their land by the Oduber government's 1977 legislation. Nevertheless, the difference between how the general population has been treated with regards to these two Indigenous groups has existed for over 500 years. In comparison to the authoritarian political system the Mayan peoples were living under, the tribes of Talamanca created an Indigenous democratic system which they have largely managed to maintain in addition to living under an overarching political structure of Costa Rica's democratic state. This comparative example proves that Indigenous peoples can properly feed themselves if they manage to resist colonisation and retain enough of their land. It also demonstrates one of the benefits of conducting long term historical analysis alongside comparisons of Indigenous and representative democracy.

By the mid 1990s, Costa Rica lost its status as the region's democratic exception despite maintaining its traditional position as Central America's most libertarian country. Although there has been increased liberalisation and democratisation in the region since the 1990s, Costa Rica has also achieved further improvements of its society during the same period. Much like the rest of Latin America, the country was seriously affected by the debt crisis of the 1980s. Costa Rican leaders sought to ameliorate the economic crisis with the introduction of a neoliberal policy framework which included the standard policies of privatisation and economic liberalisation. This new model was partially shaped by US public diplomacy efforts and the parallel state which was funded by various organisations that had received funding from USAID, especially CINDE. Some have claimed that the neoliberal model and its associated 'propaganda' campaigns have arguably undermined Costa Rica's unions and social liberal institutions to a certain extent since the 1980s.

There remains a debate between propaganda experts and their critics as to the effectiveness of indoctrination attempts by the political class. On account of its less blatant effects on individuals, propaganda is not commonly placed in the same moral realm as violence. This case study has provided an unprecedented analysis of propaganda in Costa Rica since the sixteenth century, but especially after the post-World War I period when representative democracy triumphed in the country. Since authoritarianism collapsed in 1919, the country's leaders have attempted to win support for their political programmes through persuasion rather than impose their will through brute force. The Costa Rican case confirms the notion that competition in the propaganda arena does not undermine the democratic nature of a state but rather is a common feature of modern representative democracies. Some type of propaganda is employed in every country in the world, with varying degrees of success. As former US Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy

and Public Affairs Richard Stengel explained in 2018: “Basically every country creates their own narrative story ... Propaganda - I’m not against propaganda. Every country does it, and they have to do it to their own population, and I don’t necessarily think it’s that awful.”<sup>797</sup> Evidently, propaganda continues to be an important element of modern society and is essential to understanding social control in the modern era.

The release of the 2007 ‘stimulate fear’ memo, provided a glimpse of the kind of information campaigns that are carried out behind the scenes. Despite the controversy before the referendum on CAFTA-DR ratification, many of the NO camp’s dire predictions have not come to fruition. Within Central America, Costa Rica has benefitted the most economically from CAFTA-DR. *Ticos* continue to demonstrate considerable support for their political system despite major sections of the population rejecting the old two-party system in an apparent reaction to the corruption scandals that have emerged in recent decades. Nevertheless, it is clear that the majority of Costa Ricans are still supportive of policies that promote individual liberty, democracy and human development. However, there is no reason to suggest that *Ticos* are innately more democratic or libertarian in character than their counterparts in Central America. As this thesis has argued, Costa Rica’s exceptionalism can best be explained by its geographical conditions which affected its inhabitants’ historical experiences within authority systems and planted the seeds of the country’s success way back in the mid-sixteenth century when it was first incorporated into the Spanish empire.

## **Final Thoughts**

In the final analysis, it is evident that authoritarianism has been detrimental for the general populations of Central America as evidenced by Costa Rica’s historic position as the region’s democratic exception. The Costa Rican case lends credence to the classic liberal notion that authoritarian political institutions have corrupted humans’ natural sympathy and impeded many people’s ability to develop their creative capacities. Much of Central America’s problems are deeply rooted in its historically authoritarian political structures which have hindered economic, political and human development. Despite the great expansion of representative democracy in the twentieth century, authoritarianism

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<sup>797</sup> Richard Stengel, ‘Political Disruptions: Combating Disinformation and Fake News’ - Council on Foreign Relations Forum, April 20th, 2018.

continues to have negative effects on individuals in parts of Central America. Fortunately for its inhabitants, Costa Rica has had comparatively libertarian political institutions since the sixteenth century which has meant it continues to avoid much of the violence and poverty that have given Central America its reputation. However, as Milton observed, people are typically blamed for their own misfortunes, often by the very individuals and groups that are responsible for creating their afflictions. Just like the Grand Inquisitor, many in positions of authority believe that humans can never be free because they are weak, depraved and mutinous. If this state of affairs continues, then those who have had their eyes put out, will continue to be reproached for their blindness.

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